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# Challenging Patriarchy through Film Form

Věra Chytilová's *Daisies* (1966)

Bachelor's thesis in Film Studies

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## Abstract

Denne bacheloroppgaven undersøker hvordan Věra Chytilová, gjennom sin film *Daisies* (Chytilová 1966), bruker filmens form som et verktøy for opprør mot behandlingen av kvinner i patriarkalske samfunn. Jeg vil i hovedsak ta for meg kinematografi, mise-en-scène og klipp, og har valgt å avgrense analysen til å kun gjelde en håndfull scener gjennom filmen. Dette grepet ble gjort for å kunne gå mer i dybden på disse scenene og deres budskap, heller enn å gi et forsøkt overblikk som potensielt kunne endt opp relativt overfladisk. Oppgaven bruker for det meste empiriske bevis, men bøker av Jonathan L. Owen og Peter Hames, historisk kontekst for 60-tallets Tsjekkoslovakia, samt noe feministisk filmteori er med for å støtte opp under analysen.

This bachelor's thesis studies how Věra Chytilová, through her film *Daisies* (Chytilová 1966), uses film form as a tool for rebellion against the treatment of women in patriarchal societies. The main focus will be on cinematography, mise-en-scène and editing, and I have chosen to limit the analysis to only a handful of scenes throughout the film. This approach was taken in order to delve more deeply into these scenes and their messages, rather than providing a potentially shallow overview. The thesis relies mostly on empirical evidence, but books by Jonathan L. Owen and Peter Hames, historical context for 1960s Czechoslovakia, and some feminist film theory are used to support the analysis.

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## 1.0 Introduction:

### 1.1 Research question:

For this thesis, I have formulated my research question as follows: *How does Věra Chytilová use film form in Daisies (Chytilová 1966) to protest the patriarchal values placed upon women in our society?*

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

Since its release in 1966, both in its home country and through the praise it has gained overseas as years have passed, *Daisies* has been subject to extensive dissection and analysis, often focusing solely on either the film's unique form, or the anti-patriarchal and feminist messaging that occurs throughout. What strikes me however, is how many of these analyses seem to avoid the subject of the two complementing one another. Often times, it seems as though they are discussed as two separate entities: the girl's antics the sole focus of one kind of analysis, and the form another.

Throughout this thesis, I will dive deeper into how the form of *Daisies* informs its themes, and provide my own analysis for an array of the scenes that constitute what can be loosely described as a plot. In order to do this, I will closely analyse specific examples for several formal elements of film — cinematography, mise-en-scène and editing to be exact — rather than provide an overview of their usage through the entire film. In this manner, I will be able to provide a more detailed analysis, so as to avoid glossing over elements that would be apt for further investigation and discussion. My analysis will for the most part be based upon empirical evidence from personal viewings of the film, though some feminist film theory will be applied to support my findings. I also use excerpts from documentaries and interviews with Chytilová, as well as the books *The Czechoslovak New Wave* by Peter Hames, and *Avant Garde to New Wave: Czechoslovak Cinema, Surrealism and the Sixties* by Jonathan L. Owen, in order to inform my own research. Later in the thesis, I will be applying some historical context to further contextualise the film's creation.

### **1.3 Daisies and Chytilová**

*«Daisies was a morality play showing how evil does not necessarily manifest itself in an orgy of destruction caused by war, that its roots may lie concealed in the malicious pranks of everyday life. I chose as my heroines two young girls because it is at this age that one most wants to fulfill oneself and, if left to one's own devices, his or her need to create can easily turn into its very opposite.»*

This quote is lifted from a letter aptly titled *«I want to work»*, written to President Gustav Husák by Věra Chytilová in the fall of 1975. In it, she describes and condemns her inability to find work in the film industry, and laments how her projects are often initially approved, only to be shelved for various inexplicable reasons. In the letter, she details the themes of her films, seemingly as to prove herself politically and ideologically loyal to the socialist and communist cause, or at the very least show that she is not in outright protest of it. The explanation she provides for *Daisies* seems

dubious and insincere at best, and plays more so like an attempted claim to ignorance of the potential underlying messages than a sincere explanation of the film's different themes.

With the above quote in mind, I will be providing my own analysis of the film, and justify a claim as to what its many stylistic idiosyncrasies are attempting to convey in terms of a message. I will also attempt to uncover whether Chytilová's repeated denial of any feminist sentiment in the film can truly be considered well founded, or if there is a feminist aspect to the film, whether intended or not.

## 2.0 Analysis of *Daisies*

### 2.1 Plot summary

Two young women, Marie I and Marie II respectively, sit in a bathhouse (Chytilová 1966, 2:03). With every bodily motion, their limbs squeak as though they were old puppets, uncared for by whomever placed them there. Their speech bears traces of robotism — taking turns condemning the condition they find themselves in through staccato delivery and uncanny speech patterns. Marie I picks up a trumpet and plays, though the sound is no more delicate than that of a child attending their first music lesson. «I can't even do that» she says. «So what can you do?» asks Marie II, just finished picking her nose. «Nothing, really» Marie I answers. Marie II picks up a flower crown, placing it atop her head. «Panna», she says, meaning virgin, or doll. «I'm a doll.» Suddenly, a realisation strikes the pair. The world, they decide, is spoiled. And if the world is spoiled, what stops them from being spoiled as well?

This is the beginning of the very loose plot of *Daisies* — a seemingly barely related string of events ranging from chaotic dinners with older men, the creation of mosaics using the human body as material, and a barrage of food-related escapades. Along the way, the girls lose track of their identities, questioning who they are, and on a grander scale, if they even exist in the first place. The film culminates in them atoning for their «sins» by being dunked into a lake, returning to clean up their mess, only for a massive explosion to occur due to a falling chandelier.

### 2.2 *Mise-en-scène*

In the plot summary, I mentioned the doll-like traits of the two Maries. Indeed, much of the film seems concerned with our protagonists being physical embodiments of marionettes, whose lifeless bodies, always controlled by some master, have been gifted a conscious, as well as the capacity for speech, and the power of movement. The film's *mise-en-scène* contributes greatly in this regard, through the two lead actresses and their interpretations of the Maries, as well as their costumes and make-up. The duo, Jitka Cerhová (Marie I) and Ivana Karbanová (Marie II), was cast despite their lack of acting experience (Owen 2011, 122). Perhaps their inexperience was a selling point for Chytilová — their minds untainted by the taught practices of acting academies and years spent honing their craft, as would have been a factor when casting professionals. With untrained and imperfect leads, Chytilová was free to mould their performances to her liking, creating over-

the-top, often deliberately overacted mannerisms, and at times surprising, yet strikingly effective choices of intonation.

The two Maries seem to lack a distinct set of characteristics, or even defined personalities. Their lives as dolls — «objects» whose worth is defined by superficial play and outwardly performed beauty, only cared to when deemed worthy of time and attention — mirrors the role projected upon women in a strict patriarchal society. They are given few opportunities to grow outside of their appointed role as housewife, obedient daughter or otherwise, creating what is over time a hollow life consisting of pure performance on behalf of whichever man has the esteemed role of patriarch — and the patriarchally centred society as a whole. With the two girls' marionette-status now broken, they are free to roam the world unhinged and uncontrolled, while still playing to the ideals with which they have always been subjected, as they are the only ideals they know. The overt infantilisation by men suddenly becomes their greatest tool of rebellion, and through Cerhová and Karbanová's performances, the childlike tendency for disobedience that in a patriarchal society is often deemed tantalising or suggestive, is greatly exaggerated, confronting men prowling for younger women with the uncomfortable undertones that foster their sexual proclivities. Their doll-like behaviour is emboldened by their clothing: initially consisting of checkered bikinis and traditionally feminine-coloured and polka-dot dresses, their sense of style gradually shifts towards darker hues of greens and blues.

In one scene, in which the girls march dutifully as though they were to go to war, chanting «We exist!» in a moment of existentialist uncertainty, the greens and blues appear almost military, mirroring their fight for equality (Chytilová 1966, 54:47). This moment, and the entire segment of existential dread, is prompted by several men ignoring them, as though they were at once both invisible and mute. This change comes only after the girls have moved away from traditionally feminine garments and grown bolder with their use of make-up. Suddenly, men are disinterested, as they lack the established ideals of feminine fashion: pinks, purples, light-blues, elegant blacks and pure whites, and make-up so natural its almost indistinguishable, yet never less than enough to cover up any characteristics deemed imperfect. As they become more individual, the male interest fades, and their roles in a patriarchal society is lessened. Standing up against a system which defines worth by appearance, the individual woman is punished for treading outside the confines of the established beauty standards. Throughout their lives though, they have been subject to the idea that women exist to impress men, through looks and otherwise. Therefore, when men suddenly deem them uninteresting, it creates an existential shift for which they were unprepared after years being forced to conform to the ideals of patriarchy. This relates to what is referred to as the «internalised male gaze», based upon film theorist Laura Mulvey's concept of «the male gaze»: the way that women are portrayed through art, often treating them as sexual objects for men to view and enjoy rather than fully fleshed-out characters (Mulvey 1975, 21). The internalised male gaze refers to how many women subconsciously apply to themselves the beauty standards they have been subject to through media, judging their bodies, their actions, and their entire lives as though they solely existed for the purpose of pleasing men. Rebelling against this, the sudden disinterest of men proves hard to stomach, as the idea of men as all-seeing judges of self-worth is so ingrained into the individual. Many women



have been taught throughout life that male attention is both validating and essential, and as such, dismantling that thought through protests that may turn patriarchally centred men away, may prove difficult to bear.

Another important element of the *mise-en-scène* throughout *Daisies* is in its display of food. The two Maries are clearly fond of eating and creating chaos through food, which in society is often considered indelicate and un-ladylike. Through their dismissal of food-related gender norms, they rebel against a society where the concept of staying «petite» is a beauty standard women are expected to uphold. Indulging in feasts represents potential weight-gain, which women are generally expected to avoid at all costs, if they wish to maintain their «worth» in a patriarchal society in which their traditional beauty — or rather their physical smallness, again relating to the infantilisation of women — is of grave importance to how they are perceived. Food is continually present throughout the film, most notably in the dinner dates with older men, the chopping of phallic food in their room, and the banquet that becomes the ultimate target of their destruction at the end of the film.

The dinner dates, seemingly orchestrated as a «sugar daddy» arrangement between the older men and the young girls, highlight the girls' rejection of traditional table manners. They revel in the meals they are able to pry out of their dates, ordering more and more food, loudly exclaiming their love for said food, and passionately feasting, unbothered by the concept of civility. Again, their act of defiance rivals that of a child rebelling against their parents, which in this case makes the age gap between the courtiers and the Maries uncomfortably apparent. Simultaneously, they rebel against society's norms of housewives cooking and providing men with meals, as they are the ones doing most of the eating without any work preceding it. Marie II looks directly into the camera which is positioned seemingly as a POV-shot from the older men, while she joyously shoves desserts into her mouth (Chytilová 1966, 08:38). By extension, she stares into the eyes of the viewer, seemingly as to ask «does this make you uncomfortable?» The men have varied reactions: one of them is appalled almost from the very beginning, another is fine with the childish play until he is confronted with their ages and asked about his wife, and the last man, the distinctly oldest, seems unfazed. He asks them for a kiss on each cheek, seemingly thrilled with the company, appearing almost as an embodiment of the patriarchal privilege that old, powerful men hold — not having to adhere to any norms of maturity or sense of being proper, as their role will not be questioned anyway (Chytilová 1966, 37:37). Jonathan L. Owen points out that the oldest of the three dates bears a resemblance to T.G. Masaryk, the founder of Czechoslovakia's First Republic, and as Owen deems him, «symbolic 'father of the nation'» (Owen 2011, 110). This casting perpetuates the idea that the entire nation is built upon older men prying on younger women, hiding behind the guise of «doing them a favour» through providing material goods. At the end of each meeting, as the gluttony has commenced, the girls rush to the train station to send their elderly courtiers away. In one of these scenes, Marie I and II appear to parody the sad housewives waving their loved-ones goodbye as they go off to war. The older man stands in the window, eyes watering as the train leaves the station, leaving them on the platform in tears — before their mocking laughter breaks the facade.

The scene in which the girls cut phallic food into pieces comes not long after Marie II has visited a man who begs for her hand, though he is obviously mostly interested in her body (Chytilová 1966, 27:10). The walls of his room are filled to the brim with framed butterflies, an insect that according to Peter Hames is closely linked to sex in Czech culture (Hames 2005, 192). Thus, it is natural to conclude that the butterflies serve as a symbol of the man's extensive sexual conquests. Even when she is with him, he never loses his focus on pristinely maintaining his collection of butterflies, seemingly a comment on how men will enter new relationships with women, but stay reluctant to actually end any previous sexual ones. Back in their rooms a few scenes later, the girls, armed with scissors and an extremely long fork, begin cutting into food objects of the phallic variety: sausages, pickles, bananas and — admittedly more testicular than phallic, yet thematically consistent — eggs (Chytilová 1966, 33:14). Simultaneously, the man who attempted to court Marie II needily laments his never-ending love for her over the telephone, but is promptly ignored as they continue their mission of slicing and dicing. It is an anti-patriarchal feast, in which the two girls go on a rampage, attacking the very image of manhood: the «manhood» itself. They are eating men — «eating» being a term often used in protest of societal unjustness, as in the well known phrase «eat the rich». In the end, Marie II accidentally lays her head on the phone, ending the call, and the two are seemingly struck by a moment of sadness for the lack of a yearning voice. This again relates to the idea of the internalised male gaze, and how the sudden disappearance of the lusting male figure which is deemed important by society ultimately creates an inherent longing for validation, even if the initial attention is completely unwanted.

The last moment of explicit food-related protest is in the film's final stretch, when the two Maries happen upon a big banquet within a grand, luxurious room (Chytilová 1966, 1:00:18). The building in which they find it seems quite shabby, but as they progress to the upper floors, it gets increasingly more fanciful — as though implying that the bourgeois keep an outward display of simple living, but stay lavish behind the facade. Initially, they approach the food carefully, gazing at the magnitude of the present feast. They sample a little bit of each dish, joyously smacking their mouths in the process. As they proceed, their momentum picks up, and soon they start to mess with the food more so than eat it, before turning it into an all-out food fight. Finally they get up on the table and trample the food, mimicking a fashion runway, before they start swinging in the chandeliers. Suddenly, the girls are thrust into a body of water, punished in a manner similar to that of ducking — an old practice of water-torture to silence outspoken women, and to identify witches (Nash 2014, 47). They have finally strayed too far from what is tolerated in a «civilised» patriarchal society, and as such, they are punished in a manner men have punished women for centuries — mirroring the punishment of Chytilová for her filmmaking. As they yell out for help, exclaiming that they are drowning because they are too spoiled, seemingly critical messages appear written on the screen: «That was the only way for them to end up. Was there any possible way to remedy this destruction? Even if they were given the chance, at best, it would look like this» (Chytilová 1966, 1:10:04).

With those words, the girls appear back at the banquet, intending to remedy the aftermath of their own destruction, restoring order once and for all (Chytilová 1966, 1:11:07). The Maries have regained the roles that the patriarchal society has assigned them, and as they clean up their

mess, their voices are never raised beyond a whisper. They quietly repeat what quickly becomes a mantra, mirroring the ideals of the communist regime they live under: «If we're good and hard working, we shall be happy and everything will be wonderful.» Yet, upon completion of their strenuous cleaning-job, the place looks as broken as before. The plates pieced together as though they were ill-fitting jigsaw puzzles, broken wine glasses placed upside down on a stained tablecloth, and food disgustingly mushed together. They lay down on the table:

«We're both so happy. So say it, that we're happy.»

«Are we pretending?»

«No. After all, we are really happy.»

«But it doesn't matter.»

The chandelier falls down, causing a giant explosion, and their destructive reign has come to a bitter end. Yet, as Peter Hames points out, the explosion comes only after they have reprised their given roles in a patriarchal society, as «good girls» who clean and whisper so as to not be of any disturbance. He writes: «Conformity, if based on apathy and lack of conviction, is ultimately more destructive than any of the girls' stupid excesses.» (Hames 2005, 195) In the end, Chytilová seemingly mocks the country's authoritarian regime with a text appearing on-screen atop images of bombed buildings: «This film is dedicated to all those whose sole source of indignation is a trampled-on trifle» (Chytilová 1966, 1:15:18). This sentiment becomes all the more fitting as the film was banned upon release, with portrayal of food wastage cited as a main offence (Owen 2011, 112).

### **2.3 Cinematography**

In an early scene, Marie I and II appear from behind a red curtain in an upper-class nightclub, closely followed by the night's performers, who promptly begin to dance in an old-fashioned, almost vaudevillian manner (Chytilová 1966, 14:19). This sequence contains some of the more interesting cinematography in *Daisies*, as Chytilová and cinematographer Jaroslav Kučera frame the two girls and their restless upheaval of upper-class nightclub-etiquette inside what seemingly turns into a frame of their own — a classic «frame within a frame» situation. The two initially enjoy the show, but as the scene transpires, our protagonists grow restless and starts demanding the attention of the audience through hijinks and generally rowdy behaviour. Suddenly the colours shift: what originally was a scene of equal footing — the colours of each shot and each «performance» matching one another — shifts into a cavalcade of colourful tints and iridescent bubbles on the girls' part of the room, and a drab, almost black-and-white yet slightly blue tint on the two dancers. When fixed on the girls, the coloured tints shift from a bright red to a bright orange, continuing into a striking green, before their alcoholic drinks seem to take hold, causing an array of different colours to trace their movement. The performers stay slightly blue, a meagre show in comparison.

Taking full advantage of the film's Academy aspect ratio (1.37:1), Kučera employs the entire screen to frame the girls within the box they have so far stayed at the back of, now emerging to the front to position themselves as the center of attention. From here on out, the camera mostly stays in a wide shot when the girls are on screen, shifting to medium shots of the two dancers who grow increasingly more stressed about losing the audience's attention. The coloured tints of the Maries keeps alternating, the havoc grows increasingly abundant, and eventually they are removed by nightclub security, having seemingly secured some fans in the crowd on the way out.

In this sequence, the two Maries could be interpreted as representations of Chytilová and her co-writer, Ester Krumbachová. As Jonathan L. Owen writes: «*Petra Hanáková informs us that Krumbachová's 'pranks at school' with 'her best friend Marie' are 'sometimes taken as a possible source of inspiration for [Daisies]', and that 'the two Maries have been seen by some as reflections of the blonde Ester and the brunette Chytilová'*» (Owen 2011, 108). Thus it is not unlikely that the scene is meant to represent Krumbachová and Chytilová's experiences working in an entertainment industry mainly focused on one form of (in their eyes) outdated cinema, while they create bold and controversial artistic statements. This also mirrors what Chytilová herself has claimed happened when she enrolled into the famed FAMU film school in Prague: «*[...] I realised I'd said something wrong because they were directors, all of them sitting there. I said I wanted to study because I didn't like their films. I didn't like the predictability, that they seemed so arranged; that they were so boring, simply. Form seemed to have gone rigid.*» (Blažević 2004, 03:13) Later, she claims, she was punished for experimenting, and as a result fell into a deep depression, tried committing suicide, and was almost expelled (Blažević 2004, 14:43).

Through situating the Maries in a screen-like frame, their denial of traditional entertainment mirrors the way *Daisies* defied any expectations of what Czechoslovak cinema was and should be in the preceding decades under strict communist rule. Their antics prove more engaging and eye-catching than the bland, old-fashioned and outright banal performance of the dancers. As a result, the dancers realise their inability to hold the attention of a crowd when their material is challenged, and the Maries are expelled by security. It is also worth mentioning that the two eventually leave the box they were sat in originally, seemingly commenting on how rebellious filmmaking may have real world implications, outside the limits of the silver screen. This mirrors the experience of Chytilová and Krumbachová themselves: two women in opposition to the blandness of contemporary cinema due to an authoritarian regime which dismisses any attempts at artistic expression. They choose to rebel, creating a film that breaks every rule in the book — its expression is unruly, loud and exuberant, and its artistic experimentation is of a kind unseen in the country's extensive cinematic tradition. As a result, the regime feels threatened, and counter with what is initially a shelving of the film, later followed by a six year period during which Chytilová was unable to find work (Hames 2005, 3). Naturally, said events had not yet occurred at the time of filming, but it appears as though Chytilová and Krumbachová are predicting an outcome they deem unavoidable. In a strict patriarchal society, two women taking such giant artistic leaps, which contains many an allusion to political opposition, will undoubtedly be considered a threat.

## 2.4 Editing

*Daisies'* editing is often visually striking in its portrayal of anti-patriarchal revolt. An example is found towards the end of the film, with the two Maries back in their room for the last time (Chytilová 1966, 55:20). Running amuck with a pair of scissors, Marie II starts cutting through the blanket of the bed they lay in, seemingly tracing Marie I's body. When she arrives at the armpit, she opts for going left, cutting through Marie I's blouse, instead of going right and continuing the tracing. «Too much», Marie I says, grabbing her own pair of scissors and snipping at Marie II. Apparently this snip proved fruitful, as the next shot reveals Marie II separated from her arm, which seems to have gained a life of its own. It snips back, and Marie I loses her head. Abruptly, the two embark on a snipping-rampage, and the editing, seemingly eager to join in, creates a chaotic, ever-changing mosaic which pieces fragmented bits of the screen ill-fittingly together. As Peter Hames claims: «*The conclusion to their quest is and will be destruction.*» (Hames 2005, 192)

Perhaps though, it is worth examining this sequence as more than a simple portrayal of how they have caused their own demise through destructive rampages. It is only after the decapitation of the two girls that the scene kicks into full gear — after their bodies have been separated from their minds. The separation seems to comment on how women's minds are often deemed secondary — or even totally irrelevant — compared to their bodies. In a patriarchal society, women, as mentioned earlier, are treated as dolls, whose main purpose is to sit still, stay quiet, look pretty, and be played with when wanted. In separating the body from the mind, there is a realisation of freedom, when the body, considered the sole determining factor of worth, is suddenly not a factor at all. They keep cutting, more greatly furthering themselves from their unavoidably sexualised physicality for each squeeze of the scissor-handle.

Suddenly, we find ourselves in a new scene (Chytilová 1966, 57:40). Their bodies are whole again, as if what we just witnessed never actually transpired. The patriarchy that upholds the beauty standards to which they are slaves will never truly change, despite their best efforts to separate themselves from it. An idealised world of true mind-body dualism, the film seems to think, is a mere distant fantasy. The colours alternate between the two scenes — their rich and colourful room contrasting with the light-blue, high black and white tint of the next scene, creating a comparison between the lively experience of freedom to the drab realisation of reality. The sudden shift to a new sequence that undermines the previous is an example of *Daisies'* disjunctive editing, and the way Chytilová and her editor Miroslav Hájek uses montage throughout the film to juxtapose images of rebellious joy and the callousness of reality. The use of colourful tints, «natural» colours and black/white, as well as the difference between the three, is an efficient way to subtly guide the viewer through a variety of emotional responses to the different scenes and sequences.

## 3.0 Historical context

### 3.1 Women in 1960's Czechoslovakia

*«When we Communist women protested against the disbanding of the women's organization, we were informed that we had equality. That we were equal, happy, joyful, and content, and that, therefore, our problem was solved.» (Wolchik 1979, 1)*

This quote, from the woman delegate to the Prague Conference of District Party Officials in May of 1968, carries a sentiment strikingly similar to that of the Maries at the tail-end of *Daisies*. As they clean their mess, they repeatedly express their immense joy for doing so. There were no longer any problems, they were happy, and they were content. Of course, as the above quote exemplifies, this sentiment isn't one stemming from the women themselves. These are values placed upon them by the society in which they live, and the men within it, who have decided that women's personal feelings of injustice no longer had any basis. Everyone was equal and everything was perfect, and women were free to cook, clean and stay quiet once again.

The 1960's were undoubtedly a period of women's liberation in Czechoslovakia. Women gradually made their way into higher education, with admittance increasing from 22.4 percent in 1950, to 40.7 percent in 1965 (Wolchik 1979, 2). Chytilová herself graduated from FAMU in 1962, promptly becoming the first woman to ever study directing at the now famed film academy (Čulík 2018). Simultaneously, there was an increased number of women in the labor force, from 37.8 percent in 1948 to 44.8 percent by 1965. By 1970, 84.3 percent of women aged 15 to 54 were employed outside the home (Wolchik 1979, 4). The increase was a prime example of the Marxist-Leninist principles the country operated under, which highlighted the importance of work as a main contributor to the emancipation of women. Yet, education and work does not automatically guarantee equality. Women typically studied subjects considered traditionally feminine — humanities, medicine and education — while their position in the workforce found them segregated within certain kinds of occupations, with a significant wage gap to boot (Wolchik 1979, 5).

Another element of women's increased role within education and labor, was the struggle to maintain a solid balance between work and free time — «free time» in this case meaning work within the home. Women were significantly more active within the home than their husbands, and reported a much larger struggle to find a healthy balance between the two worlds:

*«[...] all around us, hundreds of women raced, just as we did, from nurseries to work, from work to nurseries, to shop, to go home, to change into a cook, then change again into a family pedagogue, who corrected the homework of her children, then immediately again into the loving, all-understanding wife of her weary husband.» (Wolchik 1979, 15)*

For this reason, women reported larger hesitation than men to accept more demanding jobs and get engaged in political positions. The responsibility of keeping a home afloat was simply too big to juggle with any ambitious career- and political opportunities. As Sharon L. Wolchik writes: «[...]»

women are prevented from participation in certain types of activities by an ascribed status which implies a particular set of duties and roles. Change in women's status depends, in the final analysis, on a redefinition of these roles» (Wolchik 1979, 18). Bearing this in mind, *Daisies* seems to be a particularly strong example of rebellion. The Maries stern rejection of any and all values prescribed upon them by a patriarchally centred society hiding behind a guise of socialist equality for all, plays almost as a call to arms. If women and girls all over Czechoslovakia deny their imposed roles as good, lawful and traditionally feminine, there might be a genuine change in the end. The rejection and redefinition of the female role in society, or the heightened portrayal of the absurdity of it, could prove fruitful. Of course, as their story's conclusion shows, the road to change is long, and likely marked by dismissal, and ultimately, punishment.

### **3.2 Reception of *Daisies***

Initially well received, it seemed as though audiences and critics alike were smitten by the magical feeling of Chytilová's creation. In its home-country, the film was awarded the prestigious Trilobit Award by the Czech Film and Television Union, for Best Czechoslovak Movie of 1966. Western audiences were split on what to make of the experimental nature of the film. American critics such as The New York Times' Bosley Crowther trashed it, calling it a «[...] pretentiously kookie and laboriously overblown mod farce about two playgirls who are thoroughly emptyheaded» (Owen 2021). Some chauvinistically attacked the lead actresses for their looks, with critic John Simon calling them «supremely untalented and reasonably unattractive», and Stanley Eichelbaum deeming the two «unattractive to the point of distress» (Owen 2021). This goes to show that the films denial of traditional feminine beauty standards ultimately ruined the experience for some men, whose comments embody the viewpoint of the typical male gaze.

Other Western critics had more positive views of the film, with The Guardian's Ian Wright lauding its «enlighteningly female view», while Lil Picard of the East Village Otter deemed it «a masterpiece» (Owen 2021) Still, the reception in the West was initially overwhelmingly negative, until its critical reappraisal in later years.

The Czechoslovak government showed little positivity concerning *Daisies* upon its 1966 release. The film was initially shelved for its depiction of food wastage, with officials condemning its offences «at a time when our farmers with great difficulties are trying to overcome the problems of our agricultural production» (Brennan 2018). Simultaneously, as Jonathan L. Owen claims, some films, among them *Daisies*, seem to have been disliked simply for their complex and unclear nature (Owen 2011, 10). Towards the end of the 1960's, many controversial films were banned, and their creators were kept from working. Several New Wave directors went into exile, while some, such as Chytilová, stayed in Czechoslovakia, unable to find work for a six year period due to her previous controversial outings. This period ended only after she wrote the letter to President Husák mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, though it is unclear to what extent the letter actually affected her situation (Hames 2005, 244). Her newer films all contained some

degree of political critique and formal experimentation, but at a much more subdued rate than her 1960's work.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Throughout this process, with each viewing of *Daisies*, my initial idea that the film is distinctly feminist and anti-patriarchal in its messaging was gradually strengthened. Chytilová's claim to innocence regarding its potential for political or social interpretations maintains its dubious truthfulness, and mostly appears as playing to the gallery. At the very least, the film is easily interpreted as feminist, though the patriarchy might not be the sole target of its parodical farce.

Employing film form to its full extent, Chytilová made giant anti-patriarchal strides in Czechoslovak cinema. Through the *mise-en-scène*, particularly the acting, she highlighted the absurdity of traditional gender roles and women's expected obedience, all the while portraying the emptiness that might cloud the joy of freedom, when male interest, which has been heightened to be synonymous with worth in a patriarchal society, is lost. The *mise-en-scène* also uses food as its greatest weapon, Chytilová seemingly being completely aware of how playing with and destroying food, and lack of table manners, induces a primal rage in the viewer.

Through the cinematography, the Maries are shown to represent Chytilová herself and co-writer Krumbachová, as they deal with the tribulations of being rebellious female creatives, standing up against a regime that wants nothing more than to silence its critics. The nightclub scene evokes Chytilová's punishment and subsequent suicide attempt at FAMU, the unfavourable reception of her work, and her denial of traditional entertainment and its simple banality.

The editing exemplifies the hopeless attempts at separating the mind from the inherently sexualised female body, through the film's extreme and disorienting snipping-montage, turning the girls and their environments into an ill-fitting mosaic.

Overall, *Daisies* remains as powerful a patriarchal critique today as it was upon its release in the 1960s, and through the film's experimental form, it perfectly reveals the absurdity of traditional gender roles and their continual impact on women in society.

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