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The Socialist Nude: Marxism and Photographic Theory in the 1960s¹

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Abstract:

After the coup d'état of 1948, the visual representation of the naked female body was banned in socialist Czechoslovakia. According to the authorities, the female nude was intrinsically “bourgeois” and “decadent” and contributed to the exploitation of women. As a result of the “thaw” that began in 1956, the nude was permitted again, first in the fine arts (sculpture, painting and graphics design), and later on in the field of photography. Subsequently, interest in the nude grew to such an extent that depictions of the naked female form became the most common motif in Czechoslovak photographic magazines during the 1960s. This development was accompanied by numerous discussions about how to represent the female body under the conditions

of a socialist society. Contemporary theorists sought to formulate on a Marxist basis a specific, non-exploitative “socialist nude”, which was to be distinguished from the nude emerging in Western capitalist countries. This article will analyse contributions to the period discussion from theorists of photography (Miloslav Kubeš, Ludvík Baran, Ján Šmok and Václav Zykmond), who addressed the concept of the nude on a theoretical and practical level. At the same time, it will place these theoretical concepts within an international context, in respect of both progressive thinking (the Marxist critique of the female nude as an object of market exchange) and conservative, traditional ideas of the nude based on normativity and ideal proportions.

Keywords: nude – female body – Marxism – photograph theory – Ján Šmok

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In April 1969, the film directors Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Henri Roger, along with the cameraman Paul Bourron, travelled to Czechoslovakia on the invitation of Czechoslovak Television to shoot footage. The resulting film was intended to portray the local political situation. However, during the two-week shoot the Czechoslovak side distanced itself from the project. The film *Pravda*, made in 1970, was Godard's critique of the political and economic reforms that had been undertaken in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s. In Godard's opinion, these represented an act of bourgeois revisionism that squandered any revolutionary potential.²

In his film Godard criticised consumerism, the commodification of everyday life, and bourgeois taste based on individualism and bogus sexuality. While the proletariat was making sacrifices, the wives of politicians of the Czechoslovak bureaucratic state were visiting beauty salons and going to cinemas to watch successful films from the West. Reproductions of photographs from *Playboy* were available in local hotels, Czechoslovak commercials promoted Western products, and creative figures collaborated with Western firms (e.g. Miloš Forman with the American film studio Paramount) while the local culture was being westernised. One of Godard's criticisms was aimed at depictions of the female body in connection with commerce, which he illustrated in his film using film posters designed by two Czech artists: Milan Grygar (*Juliet of the Spirits*, 1969, dir. Federico Fellini) and Vladimír Bidlo (*Sweet Bird of Youth*, 1968, dir. Richard Brooks).

The phenomena described by Godard were a symptom of the political liberalisation that characterised the late 1960s in Czechoslovakia. At that time the visuals of film posters were largely based on images of naked women or fragments of their bodies. The female form gradually made its way into the graphic design of advertisements around the same time. Erotic photos from Western magazines became an expression of progress and freedom of expression. For instance, in 1968 the magazine *Fotografie* [Photography] wished its readers a Happy New Year by publishing a photo of the actor Miroslav Horníček asleep in a chair with a copy of *Playboy* lying open on his stomach.³

This approach to the depiction of women and the female body had been preceded in the 1950s and 1960s by a number of discourses that evolved in parallel with the political situation of the time and form the topic of this article. The theoretical texts relating to the female nude and its representation in photography published in the most important photographic magazines of the time comprise the subject of interpretation.⁴ The time frame of my research begins in 1950 (the year the magazine *Nová fotografie* [New Photography] was first published) and ends in the early 1970s. I will focus on the animated debate centred on the nude in the 1960s, which was brought to an end by the cultural policy of "normalisation" at the start of the 1970s. I will avail myself of research conducted

- 2 Cf. Helena BENDOŤÁ – David ČENĚK (eds.), *Jean-Luc Godard. Texty a rozhovory*, Jihlava: JSAF 2005, p. 130; David ČENĚK, "Skupina Dziga Vertov a 70. léta", *Film a doba*, vol. 62, 2016, no. 2, pp. 24–28.
- 3 "Fotografická p. f.", *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 4, p. 46.
- 4 These magazines are: *Nová fotografie. Měsíčník pro ideovou a odbornou výchovu fotografických pracovníků* (1950–1952), *Československá fotografie. Časopis pro ideovou a odbornou výchovu fotografických pracovníků* (1953–1970), *Fotografie. Odborný sborník profesionální fotografie* (1957–1970) and *Výtvarnictvo – fotografie – film. Časopis ľudovej umeleckeje tvorivosti* (1963–1970); they were published by official institutions.

by Vladimír Birgus, Jan Mlčoch and Tomáš Pospěch,⁵ which drew my attention to a wealth of period material and pointed me in the direction of the main texts written on the nude at that time. However, I wish to offer a new perspective on period interpretations of the nude. The authors referred to discuss the topic in purely binary terms that pit a conservative (prudish) viewpoint against a liberal approach to the sexuality of the socialist state during the 1950s and 1960s,⁶ as it was manifest in the art of that time.⁷

My aim is to show that the censorship that was being applied to the visualisation of sexuality was not necessarily based solely on conservative notions regarding the lifestyle of the socialist state, but that the introduction of restrictions on the depiction of the naked female form was also related to a policy of gender equality based on Marxist foundations aimed at preventing the exploitation of women in the visual arts. I shall also describe how Czechoslovak theorists of photography viewed the question of the visualisation of the naked female form, how their opinions shifted in light of political changes, and whether state-backed socialist and Marxist discourses can be compared to the arguments later formulated in the West as part of the criticism levelled against the depiction of the female body from Marxist and feminist positions.

I will examine the historical context, by which I mean the circumstances surrounding the censorship and publication of nudes, as well as the theoretical concepts of the “new socialist man” in the first half of the 1950s and the socialist nude that emerged at the end of that decade, to which the bulk of this text is devoted. I use the term “socialist nude” to describe the theoretical framework surrounding the nude that Czechoslovak theorists attempted to formulate during the post-Stalin era in order to place a distance between themselves and the type of nude emerging in Western liberal democracies. I outline the main topics covered by theorists when conceptualising the socialist nude (i.e. their definition of the term, the relationship of representation to reality, and the role of the nude in market exchange), and I look at how these theoretical endeavours were brought to an end by the political liberalisation of the late 1960s.

Historical context 1950–1970

Just as the state’s gender policy underwent changes during the existence of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, so too did attitudes toward the nude. As in other domains of

- 5 Vladimír BIRGUS – Jan MLČOCH, *Akt v české fotografii*, Praha: Uměleckoprůmyslové muzeum 2000; Tomáš POSPĚCH, “Renesance aktu”, in: *Myslet fotografii. Česká fotografie 1938–2000*, Praha: PositIF 2014, pp. 91–93.
- 6 This interpretation of the politics of the socialist state can also be found in many other research projects. Cf. Adéla GJURIČOVÁ, “Naked Democracy: Eroticism and Nudity in Czech Public Space after 1989”, in: Ondřej DANIEL – Tomáš KAFKA – Jakub MACHEK (eds.), *Popular Culture and Subcultures of Czech Post-Socialism: Listening to the Wind of Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2016, pp. 40–41; Radim KOPÁČ – Josef SCHWARZ (eds.), *Pohlavní sklony v pořádku? Erotika v kultuře, kultura v erotice (v českém kontextu po roce 1989)*, Praha: Artes Liberales 2012.
- 7 An understanding of Stalinism as a conservative lifestyle and artistic practice is a well established mode of interpretation. The puritanism of socialist realism is described, for instance, by Katerina Clark in the Soviet novels of the Stalinist era, in which “the sexual drives... are but another manifestation of the wilful forces of nature that he must transcend”. Cf. Katerina CLARK, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2000, p. 185. See also, for instance, Vít SCHMARC, “Mladí, kteří věří – subjekty ve filmu Zítřka se bude tančit všude”, in: *Země lyr a ocele. Subjekty, ideologie, modely, mýty a rituály v kultuře českého stalinismu*, Praha: Academia 2017, pp. 113–154.

Czechoslovak cultural life, in the wake of the events of 1948, photographic magazines and the artists associated with them adopted the principles of socialist realism. If we look at magazines relating to artistic production from the early 1950s, their first texts were attempts at outlining a new programme for the art scene that would play its part in the transformation of reality thanks to the creative methods of socialist realism. Part of this formulation involved a re-positioning vis-à-vis the past, both that of Czechoslovakia and that of the capitalist West, the art of which, according to the standards of the time, was characterised by formalism, naturalism, academicism and individualism.⁸ This new programme defined a new way of depicting women, in which they were now to be understood primarily as builders of socialism and fighters for lasting peace. “New photography” was to underscore this role and eradicate such depictions of women that belonged to representations of the old bourgeois society and morality.⁹

The pages of *Nová fotografie* (which from 1953 onwards was called *Československá fotografie* [Czechoslovak Photography]), the only magazine devoted to photography in the early 1950s in Czechoslovakia, featured reproductions from Western magazines (*Vogue*, *Modern Photography*, *U.S. Camera*) that were to serve as object lessons in the negative representation of women. They showed semi-clad women in various poses made up to look more feminine, and beauty queens, all of whom served as illustrations of the decadence of Western culture in the accompanying texts.¹⁰ Aside from these negative examples, nude photography did not feature in Czechoslovak magazines of the early 1950s, nor was it written about, either in positive or negative terms. This might have been due to the character of official discourse during the Stalin era, when lips were kept tightly sealed regarding undesirable facts in an attempt to negate their existence.¹¹ However, it might also have been because the nude, which was to vanish along with capitalism and other remnants of the bourgeois order by means of the socialisation of the means of production, quite simply could no longer be the subject of debate.

At the same time, cultural policy was correcting the production and dissemination of the photographic nude by means other than the supervision of official publications. In the article “Čemu mají sloužit fotoateliéry” [What purpose photographic studios are to serve], the magazine editors wrote that certain photographic organisations had created studios in their clubhouses, which, though they were being used for professional portraiture, could also “serve as a refuge for people who find an excuse in photography to conduct activities that have little to do with photography”.¹² The undesirable photographic nude was included under the heading of such unsuitable activities. The regional trade union councils therefore sought to ensure that such darkrooms were serving the public good, e.g. by creating “portraits of workers”, and closed down several in order to “rehabilitate relations”.

8 Václav JÍCHA, “Na novou cestu”, *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 1, pp. 1–2; František DOLEŽAL, “Za lidovou a socialistickou fotografii”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 1, pp. 1–2.

9 František DOLEŽAL, “Thema, východisko k nové fotografii”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 3, pp. 50–53.

10 František ČIHÁK, “Smysl a účel fotografie v USA”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 2, 1951, no. 4, unpag.; “K uvedeným snímkům”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 6, unpag.; “Uváděné snímky...”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 5, unpag.

11 Dušan ŠLOSAR, “Jazyk totality a jazyk dneška”, in: Jana JANČÁKOVÁ – Miroslav KOMÁREK – Oldřich ULÍČNÝ (eds.), *Spisovná čeština a jazyková kultura 1993*, Praha: FF UK 1995, 111. Cf. Denisa NEČASOVÁ, *Nový socialistický člověk. Československo 1948–1956*, Brno: Host 2018, p. 32.

12 “Čemu mají sloužit fotoateliéry”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 6, unpag.

The official definition of the nude in the early 1950s overlapped with that of pornography, and it was for this reason that shooting a nude was made illegal. The level of repression practised against the creation and dissemination of pornography in the wake of amendments to the Criminal Code enacted in 1950 has still not been researched in detail,¹³ though according to the art historian Jan Mlčoch, pornographic and any other erotic visual material was subject to more severe punishment under socialist law than during the period of the First Republic.¹⁴ Several photographers who had been involved in nude photography went so far as to destroy significant parts of their archives for fear of being accused of creating pornography.¹⁵ Following the events of February 1948, the nationalisation of businesses and the subsequent closure of private professional studios enabled the state to oversee more effectively the activities of Czechoslovak photographers.

In the latter half of the 1950s, a debate sparked by criticism being voiced of the cult of personality opened up in Czechoslovak cultural policy as to just how compulsory socialist realism should be in art. Gradually the sharp edges of “dogmatism” were being worn down. At the inaugural conference of the Union of Czechoslovak Fine Artists in October 1956, approval was given to the establishment of art groups and the level of Union magazines was discussed.¹⁶ In autumn of the same year an entire issue of the journal *Výtvarné umění* [Visual Arts] was devoted to the nude and its rehabilitation in art.¹⁷ The topic of the photographic nude was opened up in spring of that year in the magazine *Československá fotografie*, in which a polemic prompted by readers’ letters ensued as to whether or not nudes should feature in photography.¹⁸ The entire debate was triggered by an article written by František Buriánek¹⁹ about a visit he had paid to the Salon d’Automne and the Louvre, in which he posed the question of why contemporary French art was erotic, in contrast to its Czechoslovak counterpart. In response to the article, the editors published letters from readers criticising the absence of the nude in the photographic practice of that time, though they still refrained from actually recommending photographic nudes.

- 13 The dissemination of pornography was called a “threat to morality” in the Criminal Code of 1950. Anyone who put into circulation, made publicly accessible or produced and held in their possession for such a purpose printed matter, film, images or any other object threatening morality was deemed to have committed this criminal act. The punishment was imprisonment for up to six months, and in the case of a gross misdemeanour or one carried out for financial gain, imprisonment for up to a year (Act 86/1950, the Criminal Code). Cf. Filip SVOBODA, *Trestněprávní aspekty pornografie* [thesis], Právnická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy 2014, pp. 71–73; Barbara HAVELKOVÁ, “Blaming All Women: On Regulation of Prostitution in State Socialist Czechoslovakia”, *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, vol. 36, 2016, no. 1, pp. 165–191.
- 14 The regulation of pornography is associated in general with the emergence of the modern state. For more on the topic of the censorship of pornography in literature during the interwar period in Czechoslovakia: Tomáš PAVLÍČEK, “Zákonem proti braku a pornografii. Pokus o ochranu naivního čtenáře v cenzurním systému liberálního typu”, in: Pavel JANÁČEK – Petr PÍŠA – Petr ŠÁMAL – Michael WÖGERBAUER (eds.), *V obecném zájmu I. Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749–2014*, Praha: Academia 2015, pp. 759–775.
- 15 BIRGUS – MLČOCH, *Akt*, p. 18.
- 16 Jiří KNAPÍK – Martin FRANC et al., *Průvodce kulturním děním a životním stylem v českých zemích 1948–1967*, Praha: Academia 2011, p. 30.
- 17 Editorial, “Místo aktu v našem umění”, *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 7, 1956, no. 8, pp. 340–342; Miloslav HOLÝ, “Smysl aktu v malířství”, *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 7, 1956, no. 8, pp. 343–355; Vladimír DIVIŠ, “Akt v moderní české grafice”, *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 7, 1956, no. 8, pp. 356–365.
- 18 Editorial, “K otázce aktu”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 4, 1956, no. 4, p. 41.
- 19 František BURIÁNEK, “Několik podnětů z Paříže”, *Literární noviny*, vol. 5, 1956, no. 2, p. 8.

Although the photographic nude was not accorded such a positive reception as the nude in sculpture, painting and printmaking, censorship of its publication gradually abated. This practice related primarily to the work of artists between the wars. In 1956, an essay was published on Josef Sudek accompanied by several nudes,²⁰ and three years later *Fotografie 1928–1958* was published, featuring nudes by František Drtikol and Karel Ludwig.²¹ In 1957, the magazine *Fotografie* was founded, which gradually became one of the most important journals promoting the photographic nude.²² At the end of the 1950s, photography magazines began to publish nudes, and the theoretical discourse changed, with the nude now being considered a positive phenomenon. The first texts rehabilitating the nude included “Akt ve fotografii” [The Nude in Photography] by Ludvík Veselý from autumn 1959,²³ and an essay by Miloslav Kubeš entitled “Akt a socialistický realismus aneb několik slov o tom, zda budou ženy krásné i za komunismu” [The Nude and Socialist Realism: or, A Few Words on Whether Women will be Beautiful Even Under Communism] of 1963.²⁴ In both these texts the writers attempted to conceptualise a specific type of nude corresponding to the conditions of socialist society.

As the process of political liberalisation continued, photography magazines, including the Slovak *Výtvarnictvo – fotografia – film* [Visual Arts – Photography – Film], founded in 1963, began publishing more and more nudes by contemporary photographers, the best known of whom included Miloslav Stibor, Leoš Nebor, Jaroslav Vávra, Miro Gregor, František Janiš and Zdeněk Virt. The magazines did not only reproduce nudes by professional photographers, but also those of amateurs belonging to photography clubs, the results of photo competitions, and the efforts of their readers. Interviews were published with artists, along with reviews rehabilitating the work of older photographers and introducing the work of the younger generation.²⁵ As part of their desire to educate, the magazines published articles on the history of the photographic nude, as well as practical and technical advice on how to take nude photographs.²⁶

As well as the artistic nude being published in photography magazines, depictions of the naked female form and sexuality in general appeared more and more often in public space, though censorship continued of erotic visual material. The film historian Lukáš Skupa cites the censorship of the 1960s film *Souhvězdí panny* [Constellation of Virgo] (dir. Zbyněk Brynych, 1965), from which one love scene had to be cut.²⁷ However, guidelines regarding the depiction of sexuality were not simply a feature of socialist countries.

20 Lubomír LINHART, *Josef Sudek*, Praha: SNKLHU 1956.

21 Josef PROŠEK (ed.), *Fotografie 1928–1958*, Praha: SNKLHU 1959. Cf. BIRGUS – MLČOCH, *Akt*, p. 18.

22 For a short time in the 1960s, this large-format journal on good quality paper was also published in Russian and English. Cf. Markéta DLOUHÁ MÁROVÁ, *Časopis Fotograf* [undergraduate dissertation], Opava: Slezská univerzita 2012, p. 6.

23 Ludvík VESELÝ, “Akt ve fotografii”, *Fotografie*, vol. 3, 1959, no. 4, pp. 44–47.

24 Miloslav KUBEŠ, “Akt a socialistický realismus aneb několik slov o tom, zda budou ženy krásné i za komunismu”, *Fotografie*, vol. 7, 1963, no. 1, pp. 24–27.

25 E.g. Ludvík SOUČEK, “Deset minut o aktu s Karlem Ludwigem”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 15, 1964, no. 1, p. 6; Jaroslav BOČEK, “Drtikol a jeho akty”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 15, 1964, no. 8, p. 302; Karel DVOŘÁK, “Akty Mira Gregora”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 18, 1967, no. 6, p. 233.

26 E. g. Rudolf SKOPEC, “Historie fotografického aktu”, *Fotografie*, vol. 10, 1966; Ján ŠMOK, “Akt základní problém”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 15, 1964, no. 4, pp. 228–229.

27 Lukáš SKUPA, *Vadí – nevadí. Česká filmová cenzura v šedesátých letech*, Praha: Národní filmový archiv 2016, pp. 54–55.

Censorship of the visual depiction of sexuality took place in the West too, both via centralised legislation resulting in action taken against specific films, and regulations that private companies applied across the board to their own output (in the USA this would include the network of film and distribution studios).²⁸ Skupa notes tendencies in Czechoslovakia (self-censorship, consultation between filmmakers and representatives of the boards of censors at various stages of production) similar to those in Hollywood.²⁹

Nevertheless, the rules of censorship relaxed somewhat in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s. The frequency with which nudes were published increased to such an extent that by the end of the decade barely a single issue of a photography magazine was published without the naked female form. Nudes featured on covers, as photographic supplements and within their own sections. They also operated as case studies using which various issues were discussed, e.g. technical parameters and composition. The depiction of the naked female form became the visual symbol of the end of the 1960s and the most frequent graphic accompaniment and theme of magazines, film posters and books of that time.³⁰

The transformation in the status of the photographic nude at the end of the 1960s did not relate only to the context and frequency of publication, but also to its form and content. As regards aesthetic form, the nude more than any other photographic subject matter was subject to a host of experimental approaches. Nudes were stylised using studio spotlights, the use of layered compositions with details of various structures, projections of the grid onto the bodies of the models, stroboscopic devices, double exposure, high-key definition, and the application of isohelia and rollage.³¹ At the same time the nude was placed within the context of various thematic and compositional experiments.³²

The biggest change in the depiction of the naked female form at the end of the 1960s was its use in advertising. The first article promoting this trend was “Fotografie v propagaci” [Photography in Promotion] by Vladimír Rýpar of 1968,³³ in which Western commercials promoting individual products using naked women were selected as examples accompanying the text. The author describes the principles of advertising in capitalist countries, in which women played one of the main roles. From 1969 onward a serial was published in *Fotografie* entitled “Commercial photography = technique + craft + taste + ingenuity + direction (but clever) + creative skills + joke”. This was a series of reproductions of advertising photographs from Western magazines (the French *Paris Match* and *Jours de France*, West German *Stern* and *Twen*, US *Life*, Italian *Europeo*, and the Dutch *Avenue*), in which women often figured, along with a commentary introducing the principles of Western advertising, in which the presence of women increased the return on sales.

Reproductions of photographs of women from Western magazines, which in the early 1950s served as negative examples of the way women were depicted, had by the late 1960s become progressive. The situation was similar as regards the depiction of the

28 Cf. Justin WYATT, “The Stigma of X: Adult Cinema and the Institution of the MPAA Ratings System”, in: Matthew BERNSTEIN (ed.), *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 1999, p. 238–263; John LEWIS, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle over Censorship Saved the Modern Film Industry*, New York: New York University Press 2000.

29 SKUPA, *Vadí*, p. 33.

30 E.g. Leoš NEBOR – Pavel ŠOLTĚSZ, *Femina*, Praha: Novinár 1969.

31 BIRGUS – MLČOCH, *Akt*, p. 19.

32 D. M., “Nápaditost (někdy i schválnosti) ve fotografickém aktu”, *Fotografie*, vol. 11, 1967, no. 4, pp. 30–33; Ivan PELEŠKA, “Proč akt a strom”, *Fotografie*, vol. 13, 1969, no. 1, pp. 52–53.

33 Vladimír RÝPAR, “Fotografie v propagaci”, *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 1, pp. 56–57.

naked female form in the advertising industry, though this never took off in Czechoslovakia in quite the way it did in the West.³⁴ This was not simply down to censorship, but the result of the overall economic and institutional situation. Advertising photographers would write articles complaining about the situation in Czechoslovakia, saying they could not compete with the Western advertising industry and had to do the job of many experts single-handedly (e.g. perform the function of psychologist, graphic designer, producer and director). In addition, they had to work without the aid of modelling agencies.³⁵ Whatever the case, the exploitation of the naked female form did not last long in Czechoslovakia. After 1970, the whole way the topic was approached was re-evaluated. In the series referred to on advertising photography, criticism of the way the female body was used to sell goods was already being voiced in autumn 1971.³⁶ Utilisation of the sexualised female body in public space only started up again with the political liberalisation of the latter half of the 1980s.

The Nude from the Perspective of Marxist Theory

The building of socialist Czechoslovakia had its ideological foundations in Marxism-Leninism. Czechoslovak gender politics was essentially based on Engel's concept of the emancipation of women, which was in turn based on the principle of the equal status of men and women, the prohibition of private property, and the liberation of women from domestic servitude.³⁷ However, this perspective was to shift over the years in response to changes to the political, social and economic climate. In the 1950s, it entailed the promotion of gender equality on the basis of identity (the emancipation of all socialist citizens), while during the 1960s, equality began to be thought of more in the sense of the different gender roles occupied by men and women, with women now being viewed as a specific social group.³⁸

34 In the "most erotic" Czechoslovak advertisements, women dressed only in their underwear or swimming costume would strike fairly non-erotic poses. Cf. "Reklama na froté ručník Adam (Texlen Trutnov)", *Květy*, vol. 64, 1968, no. 2, p. 35.

35 "Given the complete lack of any conception of business promotion, he [the photographer creating images for export purposes – ed.] improvises on the given theme, during which process examples of capitalist advertising materials are offered him as a model that, in light of its technical and organisational possibilities, not to speak of the print quality, is unattainable. [...] While a Western photographer has a team of trained models at his command, capable of adopting all manner of poses, our photographer has to make do with a few inexperienced amateurs whose remuneration is virtually illegal." Cf. Alena ŠOURKOVÁ, "Jak se co dělá: Petr Zora – reklama", *Československá fotografie*, vol. 20, 1969, no. 7, pp. 269–270.

36 Sylvie DOLEŽALOVÁ, "Reklamní fotografie = technika + řemeslo + vkus...", *Fotografie*, vol. 15, 1971, no. 3, p. 42.

37 Friedrich ENGELS, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000, p. 39. Available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf (accessed 10 June 2021).

38 Cf. Barbara HAVELKOVÁ, "The Three Stages of Gender in Law", in: Hana HAVELKOVÁ – Libora OATES-INDRUCHOVÁ (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture Under State Socialism. An Expropriated Voice*, London – New York: Routledge 2014, pp. 31–56; Alena WAGNEROVÁ, *Žena za socialismu*, Praha: SLON 2017, pp. 31–36; Marianna PLACÁKOVÁ, "Člověk, nebo sexus? Diskuze k českému vydání *Druhého pohledu* Simone de Beauvoir", *Filosofický časopis*, vol. 68, 2020, no. 6, pp. 865–886; Marianna Placáková (ed.), On the Czech Translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, *Contradictions*, vol. 4, 2020, no. 2, pp. 155–186.

The socialist state used the visual arts to promote the new gender order, the interpretation of which helps us today to understand the approaches to the status and role of women in socialist society at that time. As far as Marxist theory was concerned, the theme of the nude in photographic theory was, on the one hand, influenced by a gender policy based on Marxism that promoted a certain approach to the status of women. On the other hand, its conceptualisation was based on the visual theory of that time and rooted in socialist realism. In this article, the absence of a precise definition of this concept, the interpretation of which differed depending on various factors,³⁹ will be demonstrated by highlighting the plurality of theoretical opinions in the post-Stalin period based on Marxist positions (e.g. in the emphasis placed on the influence of the visual on socialist society).

“The new socialist man”

The symbol of the economic, social and political changes taking place at the start of the 1950s was “the new socialist man”, one of the central protagonists of cultural production: “And above all, let us exhibit our new, beautiful, socialist man, in all his magnificence, in his strength and determination, with all his wealth and depth of spiritual life.”⁴⁰ Though women were included in this concept, the “new socialist man”, based on the humanist foundations of European modernity with all their patriarchal character, was understood primarily as being male. The “new socialist woman” was simply one of his specific guises.⁴¹ According to the analysis conducted by the historian Denisa Nečasová of texts dating back to the early 1950s, the embodiment par excellence of the “new socialist woman” was the engaged citizen and worker, with the emphasis on their active role, characterised by initiative, self-confidence and political awareness.⁴² In the sphere of photography, woman was one of the main creative themes:

Woman plays an important role in new photography as the builder of socialism and crusader for lasting peace, who applies herself fully to all parts of modern life, in industry, in agriculture, and in political, social and cultural life. She must be given due consideration, her new role must be emphasised, and models that belong to representatives of the old bourgeois society and morals must be banished.⁴³

The new role of woman involved a new image, which was to define itself in opposition to the old gender order. Cosmetic modifications of the female body and the wearing of jewellery or fur, traditionally used to highlight feminine features, were viewed as problematic, in the same way they had been in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. They were associated with the image of a bourgeois woman within the context of a traditionally passive femininity, and with a luxurious lifestyle deriving from the exploitation of the working

39 On the definition of the concept of socialist realism see: SCHMARC, *Země lyr a ocele*, s. 71–109.

40 “Výtvarní umělci do mírové fronty”, *Výtvarné umění*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 4, p. 145.

41 NEČASOVÁ, *Nový socialistický člověk*, p. 71.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 125–168.

43 DOLEŽAL, “Thema”, p. 53.

class.⁴⁴ The pictures of naked, extravagantly attired women, modified so as to accentuate their femininity, which featured in fashion magazines were criticised in the pages of *Nová fotografie* for their sensationalism⁴⁵ and vacuity,⁴⁶ for the way they portrayed women as “mindless dolls with but a superficial beauty” and “the female body as the subject of formal experiments”.⁴⁷ In contrast, the image was promoted of an active, working woman more closely linked with her public than private role. The depiction of the naked female form, traditionally understood as the object of observation, was deemed highly problematic.⁴⁸

The main criticism was often directed at the work and social function of photographs. The gist of this criticism was that Western photographs lacked any indication of how women were beneficial to the local community. It was said that in capitalist countries photographs of working women did not depict genuine work, but merely a kind of fraudulent game. In *Nová fotografie*, for example, a photograph was published of three smiling women carrying hoes all pointing in the same direction on their shoulders as easily as if they were carrying umbrellas. Such photos were deemed not only undesirable, but positively harmful, since “they obscure reality and its deep class contradictions with a knowing craftiness”.⁴⁹

One of the main requirements of photography at that time was truthfulness⁵⁰ and its relationship to reality, which was problematic in the case of the depiction of the naked female form. It is for this reason that the rehabilitation of the nude after 1956 took slightly longer in photography than in fine art. In 1956, it was still being claimed in relation to photography that the human body was simply the “rare bearer of some thought” and did not therefore conform to the unity of form and content of Marxist aesthetics. Concerned by the possibility of slippage into pornography, the editors of *Československá fotografie* instructed that the nude must be placed within a context that was “natural, tactful and tasteful”. They also recommended sculpture as the medium for depicting the nude, since its essence involved work with material, which encouraged the resolution of an artistic problem from the perspective of plasticity.⁵¹

In the late 1950s, a reassessment of Stalinism began to appear, for instance in the series by Ján Šmok,⁵² who had long been popularising photography and who in the early 1960s had been involved in the creation of a photography department at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU). According to Šmok,

44 Lynne ATTWOOD, “Beauty, Fashion and Femininity”, in: *Creating the New Soviet Woman: Women’s Magazines as Engineers of Female Identity 1922–1953*, London – New York: MacMillan 1999, pp. 66–71.

45 František ČIHÁK, “Žena v pojetí socialistické fotografie”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 6, p. 123.

46 František ČIHÁK, “Súčtovat s úpadkovou buržoasní fotografií”, *Nová fotografie*, vol. 1, 1950, no. 1, pp. 8–9.

47 “K uvedeným snímkům”, unpag.

48 Hence the frequent appearance in 1920s Soviet art of depictions of androgynous women with “masculinised” bodies, which are traditionally associated with acting human beings. Cf. Bettina JÜNGEN, *Kunstpolitik versus Kunst. Leben und Werk der Bildhauerin Vera Muchina (1889–1953)*, Bielefeld: Kerber 2005, p. 67.

49 “K uvedeným snímkům”, unpag.

50 DOLEŽAL, “Za lidovou a socialistickou fotografií”, p. 2.

51 Editorial, “K otázce aktu”, p. 41. Cf. POSPĚCH, “Renesance aktu”, pp. 92–93.

52 Ján ŠMOK, “Je něco nového ve fotografii? I.–IV.”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 9, 1958, no. 1–4, pp. 11, 22–23, 34–35, 46–47.

during the 1960s the attempt to create “new art” had led to the emergence of several basic themes (especially work-related) and “in the case of certain artists and critics one had the impression that an awareness of, and conscious support for, the ideas of socialism was supposed in itself to be a guarantee of aesthetic quality”. It was assumed that “only a new theme creates a new photograph”, rather than the way such a theme is processed.⁵³ Šmok’s articles set out to rehabilitate the importance of the quality of the creative form of a photograph, along with a revival of the tradition of interwar social photography, using which he illustrated this quality.

The series of articles was based on photographs whose effect on the viewer Šmok commented on in his text. The rehabilitation of aesthetic form did not refer to its accentuation in formal experiments (photography continued primarily to be evaluated according to the extent it revealed its relationship to reality), but to a critical observation of examples of new photography. These, though ideologically correct in respect of subject matter, were in danger of achieving the opposite of the intended effect through a clumsy understanding of the problematic depicted, and their effect on society often turned out to be somewhat negative. Šmok gave the example of a photograph of children at work entitled “We are building a school”, in which, he claimed, the artist had unwittingly implied that if children in Czechoslovakia wanted a school, they would have to build it themselves.⁵⁴

In addition to the issue of form, Šmok wrote about the reconceptualisation of subject matter. One example of the changing relation to the visual subject promoted in the early 1950s was the depiction of women in a work environment wearing work gear. However, this approach, based on the negation of the passive role of women to be seen in traditional representations, was over-emphasised. According to Šmok, it was possible to depict a woman “humanely” at her evening toilet at a ball or in any dress anywhere else. The example published in the article was a photograph of a smiling girl in a striped t-shirt, described as a “lively, happy-go-lucky person who is engaged in a sensible activity and with whom one can have an intelligent, good-natured conversation”. For this reason, placing a woman within an intellectually correct context as employee, worker, etc., was not the overriding priority. What was important was “how we look at woman, what we consider her to be, what general relationship we have to the person represented”.⁵⁵

Šmok’s argument is based on the demands voiced at that time for a humanist approach to socialist society, including in the sphere of photography.⁵⁶ This was why when depicting women it was their position as socialist citizens who should be approached as equals, social beings that mutually interact, which was important. A woman should be portrayed as a self-contained person, and not reduced to the role of passive erotic object. For instance, Šmok was critical of interwar avant-garde photography, where the female body often merely provided a certain shape within the composition. He was also critical

53 *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 47.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

55 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

56 The humanist approach was the basic starting point of artistic production at that time. Cf. Miloslav KUBEŠ, “Humanismus ve výtvarné fotografii”, *Fotografie*, vol. 7, 1963, pp. 3–6. In this text I use the term “humanism” to refer to the theoretical approach of that time to the representation of the nude (or a person in general), which was to conceive its subject as a fully equal social being, rather than reducing it to one of its dimensions (e.g. sexuality). It was this approach that supposedly distinguished socialist artistic activities from those of Western liberal democracies.

of the practice of his own time: “After all, even today we know certain men who like to gawp at women as they would the furniture in an apartment.”⁵⁷ Criticism of the nude was not therefore based only on the negative attitudes of that time to the depiction of sexuality,⁵⁸ but was formulated with an awareness of the objectification of the female body and the requirement to depict woman as a self-contained social being.

The socialist nude

At the end of the 1950s, the nude once more began to creep into photography, and it again became necessary to conceptualise its position in socialism. Over the next decade dozens of articles appeared on this topic in the photography magazines already mentioned by theorists, professional and amateur photographers, and the general readership. An international debate was held in the readers’ letters of *Fotografie* on the form of the nude, which was participated in by readers from the Soviet Union as well as Czechs and Slovaks (see below). As well as the readers’ reactions, based on civic engagement and an amateur experience of photography, individual artists entered the discourse whose relationship to the socialist nude was embedded in their professional careers. And so the photographer and philosopher Miloslav Kubeš, who specialised in Marxist philosophy,⁵⁹ turned his attention to the role of the nude in socialist society. Ján Šmok, who formulated his theoretical approach primarily on the basis of his own photographic practice,⁶⁰ took a greater interest in the aesthetic and technical practice of the nude in respect of how it might conform to socialist principles.

In the first texts rehabilitating the nude after 1956, concepts appeared that were based on the universalism of the 1950s, e.g. the “naked human”, the “naked human body”, nudity as an expression of “humanity”.⁶¹ However, during the 1960s, the official discourse changed and the debate around gender shifted in the direction of differentiation.⁶² Even in texts on the nude, its representation was concretised on the basis of gender (the “male body”, the “female body”). Texts on the female nude concerned themselves with the “femininity” that the depiction was to portray (see below). However, this approach was related mainly to an aesthetic based on the visualisation of specific female bodies: it had nothing to do with the formulation of a specific female position and experience (e.g. with female sexuality). The theoretical basis of the nude was based on the humanist requirement that women be depicted as social beings.

57 ŠMOK, “Je něco nového ve fotografii?”, p. 46.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 25; Juraj ŠAJMOVIC, “O láske spievať...”, *Fotografie*, vol. 3, 1959, no. 1, pp. 18–21.

59 Jakub NETOPILÍK – Miloslav KUBEŠ, *Kritika současné buržoazní filofofie*, Praha: Nakladatelství politické literatury 1965; Miloslav KUBEŠ – Ladislav KRÍŽKOVSKÝ, *Člověk, svět a a filosofie: základy marxistické filosofie*, Praha: Nakladatelství politické literatury 1966.

60 See: Ján ŠMOK, *Fotočlánky a zjišťování expositivních poměrů*, Praha: Československý státní film 1954; Ján ŠMOK, *Diapozitiv*, Praha: Orbis 1965; Ján ŠMOK, *K estetice fotografie: Základný fotografický kurz*, Bratislava: Osvetový ústav 1965.

61 Such formulations can primarily be found in the issue of *Výtvarné umění* that rehabilitated the nude. However, leaving aside the universalism of the 1950s, this might also be based on the fact that in their articles, the authors were attempting to generalise the experience of the history of the nude in art and write about examples of both male and female nudes. Cf. Editorial, “Místo aktu”, p. 340–342; HOLÝ, “Smysl aktu v malířství”, pp. 343–355; DIVIŠ, “Akt v moderní české grafice”, pp. 356–365.

62 PLACÁKOVÁ, “Člověk, nebo sexus?”

As part of an egalitarian approach to the nude, the expansion of the category was promoted so as to encompass all socialist citizens, namely all gender and age categories.⁶³ There was even talk of child nudity, though this was more a theoretical consideration that was not followed up in practice and did not become part of a wider debate. At the end of the 1970s, a discussion was initiated on the male nude,⁶⁴ which featured, for instance, in the photographs of Clifford Seidling and Jan Saudek. Nevertheless, the main theme of theoretical discussions continued to be the female nude, and examples were published in the pages of magazines taken by female photographers who did not adopt a position different from that of their male colleagues.⁶⁵

The nude outside the framework of market relations

The main endeavour of theorists at that time was to distinguish the socialist nude from that created in capitalist countries. However, socialist societies were not immune to criticism, and were accused by theorists of harbouring prejudices in respect of sexuality. These were associated with the old gender order and influenced by bourgeois and ecclesiastical morality that sought to “suppress the worldly life and corporeality”. “The amateur photographer must conceal his experiments carefully so as not to be publicly declared a person of dubious morals or mentally unstable, while the professional will be forgiven such a photo as long as he does not intend to devote himself exclusively to this sphere of photography.”⁶⁶ The moral confusion aroused by nude photography was captured by Nepřakta’s comic strip “Račte se usmívat” [Deign to Smile], published in *Fotografie*, the subject of which was the shooting of a nude by a bashful photographer.⁶⁷ In contrast to the negative attitudes towards sexuality arising from religious morality and bourgeois prudery, which was also identified with Western social practice, from the late 1950s onwards Czechoslovak theorists promoted the nude on the basis of the healthy relationship to sex and sexuality that supposedly characterised socialist society.⁶⁸

The main advantage the socialist nude allegedly enjoyed over its capitalist counterpart was that it was located outside the framework of market relations. It thus critiqued

63 Valentina KARGANOVÁ, “O aktu ve fotografii”, *Fotografie*, vol. 6, 1962, no. 2, pp. 40–41; VESELÝ, “Akt ve fotografii”, p. 45.

64 Jiří MIKA, “Je mužský akt tabu?”, *Fotografie*, vol. 13, 1969, no. 4, pp. 40–41; Václav ZYKMUND, “Konvence a mužská krása”, *Fotografie*, vol. 14, 1970, no. 2, pp. 42–43.

65 Mention of the gendered positions of authors did appear, but usually in relation to their different status in society rather than their approach to photography. For instance, Olga Michálková complained about her situation as an overworked mother of three children at home, and counselled women to take up photographing the female nude, as she had done, since their husbands would put up no protest at their wives bringing home “beautiful models”. Cf. “Domácnost Olgy Michálkové”, *Fotografie*, vol. 15, 1971, no. 4, pp. 38–39.

66 VESELÝ, “Akt ve fotografii”, pp. 44–47.

67 “Račte se usmívat – Cudný fotograf”, *Fotografie*, vol. 3, 1959, no. 2, unpag.; “Račte se usmívat – Fotografování aktu. Už?”, *Fotografie*, vol. 3, 1959, no. 3, unpag.

68 Cf. Katerina LIŠKOVÁ, *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style: Communist Czechoslovakia and the Science of Desire 1945–1989*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2018. Regarding the problematic background to this publication from the point of view of research ethics, see the text by Barbara Havelková, Libora Oates-Indruchová et al: “Kateřina Lišková’s *Sexual Liberation, Socialist Style*. Notice of Unethical Scholarly Conduct”. It would be fascinating to investigate the conceptualisation of the socialist nude in relation to the expert discourse of the time (sociological, sexuological and psychological): this is not, however, the topic of this article.

the practice of capitalist states in which “feelings, love, and of course erotica, became the object of profit, i.e. goods.”⁶⁹ Erotic and pornographic photography was designated “photographic prostitution” and the outcome of the “capitalisation of a view of woman as an object – an object for sale”.⁷⁰ This criticism was based on classical Marxist and socialist texts that did not deal explicitly with the depiction of women, but with the question of how erotic practice in the form of prostitution was part of market relations in capitalist societies.

Criticism of prostitution can be found in texts by Bebel, Marx, Engels and Lenin, in which it is referred to as a practice that is “a necessary social institution of bourgeois society”,⁷¹ forcibly imposed on an exploited class within an employment relationship.⁷² According to Marx, prostitution was the result of capitalism, in which everything is commodified.⁷³ The profit created through labour was deemed valuable: humanity was not valued in and of itself, but always within the context of the norms of a certain domain. Thus ethics had a different understanding of humanity to that of political economy. The atomised nature of life under capitalism led to a situation in which religion, ethics and economics were seen as disparate spheres despite their interrelatedness, and this, according to Marx, demanded a change, a transformation of society in which human life would be its primary interest.⁷⁴

The Marxist critique of the commodification of sex and interpersonal relationships did not focus only on the issue of prostitution, but, in texts by Engels, on the institution of marriage also. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* Engels located the roots of the exploitation of women in the emergence of private property. In order to retain ownership of this property (i.e. pass it on from generation to generation) there had been a changeover in prehistoric times from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society. In order for paternity to be assigned, women were required to be monogamous, though this fact did not interfere with “man’s hidden polygamy” through his recourse to the services of prostitutes. As Engels saw it, the transfer of the means of production into joint ownership would end prostitution, and monogamy would become binding upon men too. Marriage would no longer be entered into “on the basis of purchase”, but on the basis of nothing other than the “mutual affection” of man and woman.⁷⁵

Engels’ argument is to be found in articles by the photographer and philosopher Milošlav Kubeš and the film critic Ludvík Veselý, who were among the first to attempt to

69 VESELÝ, “Akt ve fotografii”, pp. 44–47.

70 ŠMOK, “Je něco nového ve fotografii?”, p. 46.

71 August BEBEL, *Woman and Socialism*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/bebel/1879/woman-socialism/ch12.htm> (accessed 10 June 2021).

72 Vladimir I. LENIN, *Capitalism and Female Labour*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1913/apr/27.htm> (accessed 10 June 2021); Friedrich ENGELS, *Condition of the Working Class in England*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000, 113. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/condition-working-class-england.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2021).

73 Karl MARX, *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx/Engels Internet Archive (marxists.org) 2000, pp. 42, 51, 52. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2021). Cf. Heather BROWN, *Marx on Gender and the Family: A Critical Study*, Leiden: Brill 2012, p. 37.

74 BROWN, *Marx on Gender*, pp. 35–38.

75 ENGELS, *The Origins of the Family*, pp. 33–44.

rehabilitate the artistic nude, which over the previous few years had been mistakenly confused with pornography, on socialist foundations:

Once we have eliminated financial and commercial relations from the sphere of love and eroticism, and religious prejudices are in decline under the pressure of the new discoveries of the natural sciences and the organisation of society, we cannot insist on the moral code of the past, which, in any case, had little to do with genuine morality.⁷⁶

Veselý is not writing here of the non-existence of prostitution (born of a class society and destined to disappear with it⁷⁷) as of an ideal that must be pursued, but as a situation already attained in socialist society. The question of prostitution in Czechoslovak society only began to be addressed publicly a decade later.⁷⁸

In contrast to Veselý, at the end of the 1950s Ján Šmok had already pointed to the illegal trade in pornography, in which local production often attempted to copy the West, often with disastrous results.⁷⁹ According to texts written at that time, not only did pornography utilise the female body as the object of market exchange, it also reduced a woman to nothing more than a sexual object. “The bourgeoisie as both seller and buyer sees in woman a being suitable only for the stove and their own pleasure. He [the bourgeoisie] viewed sexual arousal as the decisive feature – and often the sole feature – of the nude.”⁸⁰ Miloslav Kubeš divided pornography into two types: a “gross and lewd form” and a “noble form”. The latter, so he claimed, featured in foreign magazines in the form of the “sex bomb”, i.e. photographs that thanks to their technical prowess might appear artistically valuable, but whose shallow sexual effect did not negate their pornographic essence.

In contrast, socialist society was to regard woman “as an equal member”, and could therefore not adopt a “humiliating relationship that reduced her to simply a biological being or simply an object of sexual satisfaction”.⁸¹ The socialist nude was to understand woman above all as a “social being” circumscribed by certain social and ethical standards. In contrast to the sexualising effect of pornography, it should attempt to “depict the beauty of the female body and human feelings”. It was to seek an aesthetic effect, in which an erotic subtext could be present but must not be elevated to the principle of the photography. It was for this reason, for example, that Kubeš did not call for a naturalistic depiction of the naked form, since this would represent the relationship “to a person as though to an animal species”, but instead drew attention to a certain amount of “modesty and tact” necessary “as an effective aesthetic element that does not have to detract from the overall beauty of the human body”.⁸²

76 VESELÝ, “Akt ve fotografii”, p. 46.

77 KUBEŠ, “Akt a socialistický realismus”, p. 25.

78 JIŘÍ PROKOPEC, “Jak je to u nás s prostitucí?”, *Vlasta*, vol. 22, 14 February 1968, pp. 6–7.

79 ŠMOK, “Je něco nového ve fotografii? IV.”, p. 46.

80 KUBEŠ, “Akt a socialistický realismus”, p. 26.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 27.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

(B) Relationship to reality

Within the context of socialist society, the role of the nude in relation to reality, i.e. what exactly it should express and how it should cope with the different kinds of viewer reception, remained important. As regards the effect of the nude, as far as the photographer Valentina Karganová was concerned “insufficient and poor education” could lead to an incorrect appraisal of the socialist nude by socialist citizens, who might understand it as bourgeois propaganda, or, on the contrary, confuse advertising for a work of art.⁸³ According to Karganová, the more aesthetically sophisticated the viewer, the clearer were the goals that had been set by the artist of the nude. The same argument is to be found in texts by Václav Zykmond⁸⁴ and Miloslav Kubeš: according to the latter, “as far as a primitive person is concerned, even the most artistic nude” will have the same effect as pornography.⁸⁵

In order to solve this problem, restrictions on the nude were proposed in respect of both content and theme. According to Karganová, an artist was only to opt for the genre of the nude if he or she wished to “display the harmony and beauty of the human body”, “express the environment of Man”, “convey feelings and mood”, or “promote sports, dexterity and youth”. Ján Šmok suggested setting the presentation of women within an environment that would offer the photograph “natural” content, notwithstanding its stylised nature. A nude taking a shower would invoke the idea of care for the body, a nude in a living room would depict the morning or evening toilette.⁸⁶ However, the emphasis on “content” in respect of the nude was gradually disappearing, and at the end of the 1960s was already being parodied in *Fotografie*:

If a naked woman is standing beneath the shower in a photo called *Wife in the New Bathroom*, such a work must be received positively, since it emphasises not only the figure of the female body, but the flourishing figures of our housing construction industry. If a nude shows a woman with her back to us at the entrance to a factory, this is a constructivist work, because it is turned in the direction of production. [...] If an image entitled *Editor* shows a naked woman with a briefcase, such a picture must be welcomed, since it informs us that the press hides nothing from the reader.⁸⁷

In the mid-1960s, theorists of photography also discussed the nude from the point of view of its educational potential. According to the literary critic Otakar Chaloupka,⁸⁸ there existed two approaches to the nude: an aesthetic, professional and creative approach; and an erotic one. The first prevailed amongst professional artists, whereas the second characterised the “ordinary viewer”, who lacked a “creative relationship to the subject being depicted”. Chaloupka claimed that the nude could serve as a tool for the

83 KARGANOVÁ, “O aktu ve fotografii”, pp. 40–41.

84 VÁCLAV ZYKMUND, “Erotismus a cudnost a jiné otázky fotografického aktu”, *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 3, pp. 12–13.

85 KUBEŠ, “Akt a socialistický realismus”, p. 26.

86 ŠMOK, “Akt základní problém”, pp. 228–229.

87 “O fotografii aktu jednou jinak”, *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 4, pp. 44–45.

88 OTAKAR CHALOUPKA, “Věčné téma”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 15, 1964, no. 7, pp. 220–221.

aestheticisation and cultivation of a viewer's artistic taste and aesthetic judgement. The logic of this argument, based on Marxism,⁸⁹ was that an artwork "could aestheticise and intensify the perceiver's criteria by translating them into a qualitatively new field". In terms of cultivating the masses, the social role of the nude was also important in that it could reach a wide audience thanks to the subject of the image.

In another article Ján Šmok⁹⁰ identified the artistic practice and perception of the nude by a viewer not only with the cultivation of the viewer's taste and their relationship to society, but directly with the "consummation of love" in the relationship they enjoyed with their partner. He claimed that there was an erotic relationship in the partnership of two people that contained an aesthetic component focused on an evaluation of the form of the naked body. Social conventions meant that a person could only learn this aesthetic, non-erotic practice (the observation and evaluation of nudity) in the sphere of art. However, the depiction of the naked body had long been suppressed in socialist society, which was why when a Czechoslovak viewer looked at an artistic nude, they mostly experienced an erotic and/or moral reaction without any aesthetic experience. In order that viewers possessed the ability to enjoy and appreciate the aesthetic effect of a naked body, not only when confronted by a photographic nude, but before the real-world body of their partner (which for Šmok was the ability that made the consummation of the relationship possible), Šmok proposed educating young people along these lines. Since the viewer reacts to representation on the basis of their own emotional structure as formed by their previous practice, he recommended teaching the artistic depiction of the naked body through the introduction into schools for pre-pubertal children of life drawings of the male and female form, with a simple anatomical interpretation of shape.

One of the main debates around the nude in photography was triggered by a 1962 article by Zdeněk Virt,⁹¹ who wrote of his own experience of the nude from the position of painter and photographer, backing his ideas up with examples of his work. Subsequent issues of *Fotografie* featured readers' letters offering their opinion of the article from the viewpoint of amateur photographers and viewers. This included an exchange of opinions between two female readers, who offered their perspective as women regarding the question of the nude and its effect. According to Mrs Zarubinová, printed photographs of naked women corrupted young people and humiliated women.⁹² In response, Marie Ulychová of Prague defended the magazine, in which she had not found a single nude that might offend her "femininity".

If anything I was proud that it was the beauty of woman that was inspiring the art photographer to create an artistic image. I have two grown-up sons who since birth have looked at the wall on which there are three colour reproductions of nudes. They have in no way been

- 89 "Social progress and the balance of power in human society depend on the overall development of the human personality, i.e. on its intellectual, ethical, aesthetic, etc. development. For this reason also, every photograph that impacts a person is engaged. Engagement is not a non-aesthetic function of photography, but is an essential part of its artistic value. It is an inseparable part of art itself." Cf. Miloslav KUBEŠ, "Člověk a dnešní svět", *Fotografie*, vol. 11, 1967, no. 2, p. 5.
- 90 Ján ŠMOK, "Problematika fotografického aktu a my", *Výtvarníctvo – fotografia – film*, vol. 3, 1965, no. 6, pp. 127–128.
- 91 Zdeněk VIRT, "Malíř-fotograf a akt", *Fotografie*, vol. 6, 1962, no. 1, pp. 46–47.
- 92 "Akt ve fotografii ano či ne?" (Zarubinová), *Fotografie*, vol. 6, 1962, no. 4, p. 18.

corrupted. [...] In addition, I encouraged them not to think that every representation of an unclothed body was pornography.⁹³

In another letter, Alexandr Podjačev emphasises the didactic function of artistic representation, which in the best-case scenario should encourage the viewer to take direct action: “The viewer sees, for instance, the wonderful figure of a gymnast and would like to be just as physically beautiful. He goes home, studies the literature on physical education, and starts putting its principles into practice. The artist can be satisfied – his work has achieved its goal.”⁹⁴ In the discussion that followed, Zdeněk Virt rejected this claim outright. Taking a reformist approach to the artwork as autonomous object, he replied to the reader as follows: “To what do you think a man should be inspired by gazing upon a perfectly beautiful female nude?”⁹⁵

One of the main concerns of contemporary theorists was that the socialist nude did not function as pornography and provoke merely sexual arousal. At the end of the 1960s, Ján Šmok offered his advice regarding the photographic nude, targeted mainly at amateur photographers, in his book *Akt vo fotografii* [The Nude in Photography]. He urged his male readers to refrain from “vulgarly erotic affect”, and condemned masturbating over photographs as a poor substitute for the real thing and unworthy of a man.⁹⁶ According to him, a “vulgarly erotic relationship” lacking any other emotional content was not only problematic in relation to the depiction of a particular woman, but to women in general. A person should have emotional and social links to their male/female partner, since these were the prerequisite of a healthy family in its capacity as a “solid emotional unit with maximum emotional fulfilment”.⁹⁷

In his book, Šmok was probably alluding to a certain practice in Czechoslovakia at that time. When I started researching this topic, I discovered that large sections of articles on the nude in the National Library in Prague had been cut out of photographic magazines of the 1960s. Having visited several other libraries and noticed the same phenomenon, I realised these magazines had probably been damaged by library visitors fifty years ago. Given the lack of pornography and erotic material being produced in the country or arriving from the West, people had found themselves aroused by photographs that from today’s perspective, and even by the standards of the West at that time, were not deemed erotic (an example would be the scene from the film *Černý Petr* [Black Peter] by Miloš Forman (1963), in which an adolescent boy secretly hides a reproduction of the oil painting *Sleeping Venus* by Giorgione).

(C) *Boundaries of the socialist nude*

Theorists of photography also tried to distinguish the socialist nude from that created in liberal democracies on the basis of parameters other than its relationship to reality and market exchange. The importance of this theme can be seen from their countless attempts to distinguish the socialist nude from kitsch, naturalism, science photography, erotic art

93 “Akt ve fotografii ano či ne? – Ano!” (Marie Ulrychová), *Fotografie*, vol. 7, 1963, no. 2, pp. 12–15.

94 “Akt ve fotografii ano či ne?” (Alexandr Podjačev), p. 17.

95 *Ibid.* (Zdeněk Virt), p. 17.

96 Ján ŠMOK, *Akt vo fotografii*, Martin: Osveta 1969, p. 56.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

and pornography. Determining boundaries was deemed important at that time due to the restrictions placed on problematic practice. In 1963, the photographer and cameraman Ludvík Baran was one of few to declare that “regulations regarding the photographic nude do not exist”.⁹⁸ However, a year later he followed this up by writing that the nude should possess a “certain degree of tact and intimacy”, and therefore recommended it be studied in the privacy of studios rather than in public.⁹⁹

The main attribute of the nude was the humanist requirement that humankind be depicted as a social being (as opposed to naturalistic depictions that conceived of man as simply another animal species). The nude was to belong to the sphere of high art (as opposed to kitsch and Western pornography). Emphasis was to be placed on the poetically expressed beauty of the human body, and any erotic charge was to be suppressed (as opposed to erotic art). At the same time, the goal was not an objective, “scientific” approach to representation, but artistic expression in which the artist was to endeavour to avail himself or herself of the emotional effect of the photograph and avoid a depersonalised, formal composition of lines and surfaces that did not have anything in common with the human body.

The contrast between the portrayal of an active, working woman promoted in the 1950s, and the nude, which depicted woman as a passive, objectified body, was interpreted in such a way that these two representations of women were not mutually exclusive, but reflected two distinct problems: “We are unlikely to depict worthy workers in the nude since their worthiness does not reside in their nudity!”¹⁰⁰ However, this rejection of the exploitative character of the nude by means of a refusal to use it in market relations did not mean the problem of the objectification of women had been definitively resolved. The main theme now became the aesthetics of photography and what visual form the socialist nude should take.

The pages of *Fotografie* often carried readers’ debates regarding the level and appropriateness of individual nudes. For instance, Jurij Jakubovskij criticised a Couturier’s sculpture for its inappropriate approach to its subject: “These deformed arms and legs that look like sticks, the asymmetry of the entire figure, and yet the vulgar, exaggerated and excessively naturalistic presentation of certain parts of the body turn this work into something disgusting and indecent. We feel sorry for the women who modelled for this sculptor.”¹⁰¹ In the debate already referred to, Alexandr Podjačev viewed Zdeněk Vrt’s nudes as the depiction of “stumps of the human body” and criticised them for not celebrating human beauty.¹⁰² Pavel Holobrádek from Lanžhot suggested the editors publish and provide a commentary on both good and bad examples of nudes so that people had the chance to compare. He drew attention to the boom in amateur photography, whose practitioners would not forever be satisfied with “landscape photography” and whose essays in the sphere of the nude should be nudged in the right direction.¹⁰³ Ján Šmok wrote a never-ending stream of articles on this topic, in which he primarily addresses the photographic nude as a stylistic problem.

98 Ludvík BARAN, “Sto let fotografie aktu”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 14, 1963, no. 7, pp. 222, 223.

99 Ludvík BARAN, “O fotografickém aktu”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 15, 1964, no. 7, pp. 222, 227.

100 ŠMOK, “Problematika fotografického aktu”, p. 127.

101 Jurij JAKUBOVSKIJ, “Světlo a stín, barva a akt ve fotografii”, *Fotografie*, vol. 6, 1962, no. 3, p. 44.

102 “Akt ve fotografii ano či ne?” (Alexandr Podjačev), p. 17.

103 “Akt ve fotografii ano či ne? – Ano!” (Pavel Holobrádek), p. 14.

Šmok viewed the creation of a nude as a process of aestheticisation that takes place through a reduction of the direct physical erotic effect. The goal was to achieve a “generally female body” rather than a “reproduction of a certain naked girl as biological object”. At the same time, he warned against a complete generalisation to the “human” level, since the nude in itself must contain a certain degree of “femininity”. The socialist nude could thus not be a photograph of a particular naked woman (making it problematic to depict the face, which could only be generalised with difficulty), but must, as part of the process of stylisation, involve a process of generalisation the outcome of which was an emotionally effective artwork.¹⁰⁴

Among the stylistic resources available, Šmok cited composition, lighting and the selection of a suitable model or suitable part of their body. In his book *Akt vo fotografii* he illustrated his theoretical texts with examples of the photographic processing of the female body, accompanied by charts, graphs and tables containing information regarding the female body and its proportions. Individual body parts (the breasts, posterior and legs) were shot from the same angle and arranged into grids, using which Šmok pointed out their “defects”. Any individual physical abnormalities were deemed aesthetically inappropriate and disruptive, since the aim of photography was to generalise.

Most of the advice in the book was therefore based on the following standards: “An exaggeratedly thin model is worse than a slight corpulence, as long as this does not spill over into a deformation of form and the creation of deep grooves.”¹⁰⁵ The quality of breasts (by which Šmok meant their symmetry and how high they were set) was more important than size. However, if the breasts were especially large or if one of the nipples was in any way deformed, it was better not to work with such a model. Hairs on the belly and thighs of a woman were unbecoming, though pubic hair was acceptable (unlike in Western countries, where it had to be airbrushed out). Any protrusion of the skeletal base (thorax, sharp clavicles, shoulder blades) caused by poor posture was not recommended. A clear complexion was essential, with no traces of injury or operation, and moles and birthmarks were to be avoided.¹⁰⁶

The photographer was at a disadvantage compared to the painter, Šmok believed, in that they worked with a real model and could not depict a form idealised in terms of proportions or other elements. The instructions contained in his book were therefore intended to help the photographer achieve the best possible form and resulting effect of the image. His book reproduced the ideal measurements of the female body from the centesimal canon of the *Anatomie pro výtvarníky* [Anatomy for Artists].¹⁰⁷ Photographers thus had at their disposal a normative base against which they might compare the proportions of a photographic nude. The commentary accompanying printed photographic examples were to show “how it was possible on bodies of different quality” to select elements from which the stylised nude would be created.¹⁰⁸

Something similar to Šmok’s process of aestheticisation can be found in Václav Zyk-mund’s text on the “denaturalisation” of the female body, a process by which the basic morphological facts were expressed, as opposed to naturalism, which cleaved “to the

104 ŠMOK, “Akt základní problém”, p. 228.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

106 Ján ŠMOK, “10 rad k fotografickému aktu”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 15, 1964, no. 4, p. 229.

107 Josef ZRZAVÝ, *Anatomie pro výtvarníky*, Praha: SZN 1957.

108 ŠMOK, *Akt vo fotografii*, p. 53.

surface of the phenomenal side of things”.¹⁰⁹ In the case of both writers the quality of photographic nudes was based on the degree to which the female body was mastered and transformed. The very concept of the male nude was inappropriate for Šmok, since the male genitals introduced “a disruptive element into the overall harmony”. It was for these reasons, he claimed, that photographers prioritised the female body as “aesthetically more valuable”.¹¹⁰ He preferred the use of a young body for the same reason, claiming it was more universal by virtue of its forms. An older body, with its excessive specificity, was at odds with stylisation.

According to Šmok the child nude was a specific genre that in itself did not contain an erotic element (“in the case of a normal person no erotic element comes into play in respect of a child’s body”), and so did not differ greatly from photographs of clothed children. In contrast, older people were suitable for portrait photography, since their characteristic features were already inscribed on their faces. However, their bodies evoked a different emotional response from that of a young person: “All the attributes that lent a positive emotional value to the appearance of a young woman’s body are transformed in old age into negative.” Šmok claimed this applied only to women, since the body of an older man (as long as he had not become fat) retained in principle the same shape as that of his younger self. The naked body of an old person, associated with decay, finality and death, was best used if the genre was social.

In addition to the visual form of the nude, another central theme at that time was its erotic framework. However, the texts written on the topic did not offer a single general interpretation, and each theorist used his or her own terminology. For instance, in an interview with Ludvík Souček in 1964, the photographer Karel Ludwig declared the erotic nude to be “filth”.¹¹¹ Šmok divided the depiction of the nude into the vulgarly erotic and the erotically aesthetic, with the proviso that the latter should contribute to increasing the level of the aesthetic perception of society.¹¹² In contrast to Šmok, the art critic Václav Zykmond was one-hundred percent positive in his approach to the term eroticism. He understood it as a humanised sexuality that distinguished human feeling from the simple reproductive instinct possessed by other animals. Drawing on Georges Bataille (*L’erotisme*, 1957), Zykmond saw eroticism as a specifically human passion that was present to varying degrees in all forms of human creative activity and was “confirmation of human life”.

According to Zykmond, the problem of socialist society was that it suppressed eroticism, which in turn led to a situation in which a hypocritical prudery reigned on the surface, beneath which was a “semi-illegal erotic kitsch”. In contrast to the nude, the consumption of pornography was driven purely by the sexual instinct. Pornography was sought out by those who, at least in their dreams, wished “to concretise their unfulfilled and largely unachievable sexual fantasies, people who no longer regard a woman as a person and have degraded her human essence into an instrument for sexual gratification.”¹¹³ In this relationship between the consumer and the woman/object of sexual desire,

109 Václav ZYKMUND, “Nové Stiborovy fotografie aktu”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 20, 1969, no. 1, p. 36.

110 ŠMOK, “Problematika fotografického aktu”, p. 128.

111 SOUČEK, “Deset minut o aktu s Karlem Ludwigem”, p. 6.

112 ŠMOK, *Akt vo fotografii*, p. 15.

113 Václav ZYKMUND, “Erotismus a cudnost”, pp. 12–13.

eroticism in the form of a humanised sexuality that was supposed to be an element of interpersonal relationships, disappeared.¹¹⁴

In the texts referred to, Zykmond continued to promote a humanist perspective, though in his arguments drawing on Bataille we find the liberalising tendencies of the end of the 1960s. Bataille viewed eroticism as the dissolution of precisely those established social norms that, on the contrary, theorists of the socialist nude had sought to establish.¹¹⁵ Of the texts written at the end of the 1960s that refer to gender equality, it is worth mentioning a throwaway remark from the book *Akty a akty* [Nudes and Nudes] by Zdeněk Pilař and Jan Řezáč.¹¹⁶ The authors claim that acceptance of the nude would be less problematic in a society that had advanced in respect of “the emancipation of women from basic equality into the realm of love”.¹¹⁷ This approach was based on the revolutionary ideas of Soviet theorists (Alexandra Kollontai, Inessa Armand), who, in the 1920s, had promulgated the idea of a socialist society in which people would live in collectives and enjoy multiple sexual and spiritual partnerships “in which the more numerous these inner threads drawing people together, the firmer the sense of solidarity and the simpler the realisation of the working-class ideal of comradeship and unity”.¹¹⁸ However, this line of thinking never received much in the way of support in the official policies of the Soviet Union, which as far back as the 1930s had introduced conservative measures into gender politics. As in socialist Czechoslovakia, revolutionary, utopian ideas in the sphere of gender and sexuality were a marginal issue.¹¹⁹

*1968 and 1969 as the culmination of sixties
liberalisation and its Marxist critique*

In the late 1960s, political liberalisation took on a new quality. The change of party leadership, attempts at reform on the level of individual associations, and the abolition of censorship¹²⁰ transformed the atmosphere in society. An emphasis on freedom of speech was manifest in the publication of nudes in photographic magazines. These changes related to the position of artist, lending weight to tendencies promoting the autonomy of artistic production to the detriment of its social function. As the photographer Miloslav Stibor had claimed during the mid-1960s: one “must first and foremost express oneself”.¹²¹ Liberalisation was also to be seen in the change of form of photographic nudes located outside the framework of the socialist nude. This included more erotic, challenging photos in the

114 Václav ZYKMUND, “Ešte o fotografickom akte”, *Výtvarnictvo – fotografia – film*, vol. 7, 1969, no. 5, pp. 108–109.

115 Georges BATAILLE, *Eroticism*, London: Penguin Classics 2001.

116 Zdeněk PILAŘ – Jan ŘEZÁČ, *Akty a akty. Fotografie a kresby*, Bratislava: Tatran 1968.

117 *Ibid.*, unpag.

118 Lynne ATTWOOD, “Introduction”, in: *Creating the New Soviet Woman*, p. 6.

119 In scholarly discourse of the 1950s and early 1960s, the Marxist theory of “free love” was rejected for its selfishness and its demoralising, degrading impact on human dignity. Cf. Karel NEDOMA – Vladimír BARTÁK – Václav DOBIÁŠ – Ludovít ŠULC, *Pohlavní život a výchova k manželství a rodičovství* (1954), Praha: Státní zdravotnické nakladatelství 1962, p. 19; Lubor ELGER, *Manželství a zdraví*, Praha: Státní zdravotnické nakladatelství 1964, pp. 16, 17.

120 Act 84/1968 of 26 June 1968, on periodicals and other means of mass information.

121 Editorial, “Náš rozhovor s Miloslavom Stiborom”, *Výtvarnictvo – fotografia – film*, vol. 4, 1966, no. 9, pp. 202–203.

sphere of pop culture,¹²² as well as illustrative shots in news reports (photographs from nudist beaches).¹²³

At the same time, the way that women were being written about in magazines was changing. The songwriter Vladimír Merta recounted a risqué story in the pages of *Fotografie* of being in Paris and being attacked by the local prostitutes for trying to take shots of them.¹²⁴ Characteristic of this type of article was a patronisingly sexist tone, in which the proportions of the female body were emphasised, women were referred to as being “caught” by photographers, and the supposedly typical attributes of women, e.g. “natural feminine charm”, made numerous appearances in various guises.¹²⁵ There was suddenly a lot of interest in Western celebrities. Brigitte Bardot was received positively as a sex symbol of the time, thanks to which “women are now more beautiful, or at least less ugly, because they all want to look like her”.¹²⁶ A significant shift in the interpretation of the visualisation and role of women in society is to be found in an article dated 1968 about Olga Schoberová,¹²⁷ who had been involved in a film shoot for a Western production team and had been photographed for *Playboy*. The article framed Schoberová’s life story as one in which, until recently, she had worked at a typewriter in an office and “every day seemed to her to be interminably long and monotonous”, whereas now she had several films to her name, was married to the Hollywood actor and bodybuilder Brad Harris, and her “popularity was spirally upwards”. This interpretation of her life as an upwardly mobile trajectory from “dreary” work at a typewriter to an awesome career as actress – albeit one who tended to be seen and not heard (e.g. her role in *Kdo chce zabít Jessii* [Who Wants to Kill Jessie?], directed by Václav Vorlíček in 1966) – could be seen as symbolising the transformation of the official policy of the 1950s, which promoted the working woman and her active role, into the discourse of the 1960s, the main feature of which was visualisation of the female body.

This fundamental change to the way the female body was depicted was reflected in a new approach to advertising photography. In the 1950s, advertising was problematic, especially from the point of view of “truthfulness” and how it was perceived as the product of a capitalist economy.¹²⁸ In the early 1960s, theorists were still keen to put a distance between themselves and Western advertising in their writing, though they were not averse to linking Czechoslovak advertising with commercial purposes. In contrast to the West, where everything was subject to “the profit motive”, which was responsible for the emergence of “tasteless, sometimes even old-fashioned, sometimes

122 E.g. the supplement “Zaostřujeme na zahraniční tisk” by the editor Jiří Macků at the journal *Fotografie*.

123 Jiří KOHOUT, “Fotografoval jsem na FKK”, *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 2, pp. 76–77. In the mid-1960s the State Security (StB) had intervened to quash an attempt to create a Czechoslovak nudist club. Cf. KNAPÍK – FRANČ, *Průvodce*, p. 816.

124 Vladimír MERTA, “Jak fotografovat v uličkách lásky”, *Fotografie*, vol. 14, 1970, no. 1, pp. 78–79

125 Václav JÍRŮ, “Staroměstský sex”, *Fotografie*, vol. 16, 1972, no. 2, pp. 60–61.

126 Karel JIRMANN, “Zaostřujeme na paní Brigitu Bardot”, *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 1, pp. 58–59.

127 Daniela MRÁZKOVÁ, “Zaostřujeme na Olgu Schoberovou”, *Fotografie*, vol. 12, 1968, no. 3, pp. 64–67.

128 Cf. Lucie ČESÁLKOVÁ, “The Five Year Plan on Display: Czechoslovakian Film Advertising”, in: Patrick VONDERAU – Bo FLORIN – Nico De KLERK (eds.), *Films that Sell: Moving Pictures and Advertising*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016, pp. 145–163.

ultra-modern kitsch, using which it plays on the poor taste of customers”,¹²⁹ Czechoslovak advertising was to differentiate itself by virtue of the quality of its creative concept.¹³⁰ In 1962, Jindřich Brok went one step further and distinguished between capitalist and socialist advertising on the basis of their respective approaches to the representation of woman. The place where Czechoslovak photography found itself in direct competition with the advertising of capitalist states was in the sphere of exports. This competitive pressure led local photographers to take shots of women that did not correspond to the socialist “way of life and thinking” of that time. In such cases it was left to an artistic commission, notwithstanding the possible commercial success of such a shot, to reject “tasteless photography with pornographic tendencies”.¹³¹

At the end of the 1960s, however, the use of an erotised naked female body in advertising was regarded as a completely legitimate way of increasing sales. Some people went so far as to claim that advertising photography without a female model was simply impossible.¹³² “These days, in a period filled with the aroma of eroticism and sex, any advertising photographer who took snaps of women’s underwear either perfectly folded or on a clothes hanger would stand no chance of success. These days such garments must be worn by a model, whose physical elegance, pose and smile meet the criteria imposed on the perfect female nude.”¹³³ Advertising that included naked women was generally interpreted as a progressive feature of Western society that Czechoslovakia should emulate as part of the process of modernisation and liberalisation.

Nevertheless, these developments found themselves the target of criticism by certain theorists of photography and society. One of the themes subject to criticism involved formal experiments associated with the nude. For instance, readers of *Fotografie* complained about nudes created using the Sabattier effect or coarse grains and grids,¹³⁴ and condemned the “luminous and spatial deformation of the model” (solarisation, wide-angle lens),¹³⁵ which did not pay proper respect to the woman depicted. Some of the experimental techniques used (e.g. shattering the optical image with another element) involved practices that had already been criticised in the mid-1960s by Šmok for their tendency to cover up or obscure the actual effect of the nude, thus encouraging an inappropriate voyeurism (he wrote that they possessed a “hint of the peeping Tom”): “The peeping Tom is a man looking through a keyhole. He sees very little, but what he does see enables him to create fantasies in his head and to become more aroused than if he had seen everything.”¹³⁶

The theoretician of photography Karel Dvořák¹³⁷ described the advancing tide of liberalisation as a need for “openness” under all circumstances, and warned against favouring economic interests at the expense of the philosophical and artistic character of the nude.¹³⁸

129 Jindřich BROK, “Ještě reklamní fotografie”, *Fotografie*, vol. 6, 1962, no. 1, p. 35.

130 Luděk PEŠEK, “O reklamní fotografii”, *Fotografie*, vol. 6, 1962, no. 1, pp. 32–34.

131 BROK, “Ještě”, p. 35.

132 “Reklamní fotografie”, *Fotografie*, vol. 13, 1969, no. 3, pp. 72–75.

133 Karel JIRMANN, “Reklamní fotografie automobilů”, *Fotografie*, vol. 13, 1969, no. 2, pp. 66–69.

134 Jiří HAMPL, “Vážená redakce”, *Fotografie*, vol. 14, 1970, no. 1, p. 58.

135 Jiří VYHNÁLEK, “Vážená redakce”, *Fotografie*, vol. 11, 1967, no. 2, p. 38.

136 ŠMOK, “Akt základní problém”, p. 228.

137 As an author of catalogue texts he participated on exhibitions of Josef Sudek, Karel Kuklík or Miloslav Stibor.

138 Karel DVOŘÁK, “Fotografický akt ano či ne”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 18, 1967, no. 8, pp. 308–402.

The modern photographer hurls projected abstractions at the model, he combines negatives under the enlarger, he deforms shapes by means of unusual angles of view, he creates giraffes, double breasts, hips reminiscent of rock formations, and other curiosities – and you hope in vain that there is a deeper idea contained within, a reflection of social consciousness, or at least a manifestation of the unconscious.

Dvořák believed that commercial nudity embellished the covers of magazines in spheres ranging from philology to technology, just as nudes appeared at every turn, in professional and amateur publications, the recipient of praise for various reasons, but in reality characterised by dilettantism and eclecticism. “The flood of the semi-clad and, in this country, less than perfect bodies of girls with extraordinarily stupid faces – this is perhaps the best way to overwhelm most people, especially the young, into finding a ‘relationship’ to nudity.” Another route for the nude to take, Dvořák felt, was not to slavishly follow and amplify the phenomena associated with it at that time, but to seek inspiration in the first half of the 1960s, when the nude was conceptualised on the basis of specific ethical and aesthetic principles (he cited as an example the work of Karel Ludwig).

In addition to the commercialisation of the nude, the exaggerated ideal of the beauty of the female form also came in for criticism. The photographer Ivan Koreček complained about an exhibition of amateur nudes at the Tatra club in Smíchov, Prague,¹³⁹ which had been inspired by *Playboy* and other glamour photographs published en masse abroad. He declared glamour photography to be immoral, since it created a “false cult of beauties and sex bombs” and pressurised the viewer to rate the model, something that could not be done in the case of photographic nudes depicting a generalised female form. What is more, argues Koreček, the cult of the “ideal” body type resulted in emancipation taking a wrong turn. Women avoided these normative demands relating to their presentation and identity in such a way that they attempted to adopt the status of men rather than occupying the position of equal counterpart.¹⁴⁰ As regards the photographic nude, which was supposed to possess a “deeply chaste and humanist mission”, Koreček claimed that it should not depict particular proportions of the female body, but female beauty in the broadest sense of the word, not just the physical.

The ideal of beauty celebrated in Czechoslovakia from the mid-1960s onwards in beauty pageants was also criticised by Ján Šmok, who claimed the attempt to capture the non-existent ideal of the female figure in three vital statistics “reduced a woman’s body to the status of a tailor’s dummy”.¹⁴¹ The idealisation of the female body in pornography was also highly problematic in respect of the effect it had on society. According to Šmok, though pornographic photographs might evoke merely amusement in the cultivated viewer with sufficient experience of photography and eroticism, the rot really set in when it was consumed by inexperienced young people, since it created “unrealistic expectations of the body and sex.”¹⁴²

139 Ivan KOREČEK, “O fotografii aktu”, *Československá fotografie*, vol. 18, 1967, no. 1, p. 13.

140 Within the debate Koreček advocated the idea of promoting the specific position of women – part of the 1960s discourse – in contrast to the “masculinisation” of women that had allegedly taken place after 1948. Cf. PLACÁKOVÁ, “Člověk, nebo sexus?”.

141 ŠMOK, *Akt vo fotografii*, p. 53.

142 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

The ideal body shape does not arise as the outcome of the genuinely experienced, but is implanted as a norm from without. There is a fetishisation of a certain physical type that in reality does not exist, an example being the cult of the sex bomb. This is highly inappropriate in respect of relationships with normal women. Reality finds itself in conflict with the norm. The individual does not find the concretisation of his false ideal, instilled from without, in life, and is dissatisfied.¹⁴³

In his book *Akt vo fotografii*, Šmok attempts to “show what the body really looks like”, and “explain the difference between the naked body in reality and its image in art”.¹⁴⁴ He undertook to demystify the sexual effect of pornography by describing how it was produced: what an important role is played, for instance, by the face, by props, by the provocative pose that in reality the model must feign and often “is obliged to do in order that large breasts find an acceptable position through the appropriate inclination of the body”. The model therefore “must be arranged in a suitable way and served up as one might arrange and serve up vegetables or meat”.¹⁴⁵ Šmok’s aim was to provide enlightenment in the form of a denial of the “sexual myth” (his own term) and by ridding the reader of any “faith in the mythical sex bomb”.

At the end of the 1960s, a Marxist criticism that promoted gender equality was a somewhat marginal phenomenon. The commercialised representation of the female body, the promotion of the cult of beauty and the depiction of women based on reification and sexism had seeped into realms other than popular culture. A lot of the art that nowadays springs to mind when we think of the Golden Sixties drew on similar principles. Such art, be it literature, film or fine art, equated the liberal representation of sexuality and its sexist framework with freedom of expression, while the concept of gender equality (and thus a gender-correct way of depicting women) was deemed to have been debased by its association with the socialist state.¹⁴⁶

*The Czechoslovak discourse within
an international context*

Marxist critiques of the female nude first made their first appearance in the West at the start of the 1970s in the television series *Ways of Seeing*,¹⁴⁷ later adapted into a book, in which author John Berger criticised the way the representation of the naked female body turned it into one more commodity in capitalist economies. He analysed the tradition of the nude in European oil painting, the forms and strategies of which were later reflected in the way that women were represented in modern advertising. Berger formulated the basic arguments as to why the nude was problematic, and these were later further elaborated and critiqued by feminist theory. These arguments included the objectification of the female body, the viewer’s gaze, women’s relationship to their own sexuality, their self-disciplining practices, and the nude versus the naturally naked body. In comparison

143 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

144 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

145 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

146 Cf. Petra HANÁKOVÁ, “From Mařka the Bricklayer to Black and White Sylva: Images of Women in Czech Visual Culture and the Eastern European Visual Paradox”, *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, vol. 2, 2011, no. 2, p. 145–160; Jan MATONOHA, “Dispositives of Silence: Gender, Feminism and Czech Literature Between 1948 and 1989”, in: HAVELKOVÁ – OATES-INDRUCHOVÁ (eds.), *The Politics of Gender Culture*, pp. 162–187.

147 John BERGER, *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin Books 1972.

with Berger's critique, considered one of the foundational texts of visual studies, Czechoslovak theory during the 1960s was focused mainly on the status of women in society. From its Marxist-Leninist background it tended to examine the relationship of the nude to reality on the level of social and economic issues rather than create a new visual theory.

Nevertheless, allusions to the issue of social and visual practice did appear in Czechoslovak theory that were later addressed in Western theory. For instance, Ivan Koreček wrote in a way that seems to anticipate Foucault of the self-disciplining practices of women, who found themselves expected to live up to the standards of beauty that society had placed on them. Ján Šmok was critical of photography that featured an "element of Peeping Tom", and examined the voyeurism and fetishisation of a certain body type in photography.¹⁴⁸ Compared with Western theory, the Czechoslovak debate posed an interesting question regarding the effect of the nude on the viewer, which it discussed in terms of the viewer's level of education and his or her experience with sexuality and art. A similar discussion took place in the 1970s within feminist circles as to how feminist art might work with the naked female form in light of the way it might be received by the viewer, who was in danger of confusing a critique of patriarchal practice with the very practice thereof. Control over the impression given by feminist work was thus debated with consideration for the context of the exhibition, the media, etc.¹⁴⁹

A more relaxed atmosphere around sex that saw an expansion of visual depictions of the eroticised female body in public space was manifest in the late 1960s in both the West and socialist Czechoslovakia. Like the details that accompanied it – the promotion of an aesthetic ideal in beauty contests and the exploitation of women through the representation of their body with the aid of marketing strategies – this was subject to criticism, though one formulated differently in the East and West. In Czechoslovakia these phenomena were criticised from Marxist positions by male theoreticians promoting gender equality in relation to women and their visualisation, while in the West they featured as themes addressed by a second-wave feminist movement gathering in strength (the demonstration against the Miss America beauty contest in 1968 was one of the first large feminist protests) and organised on a grassroots basis by female activists whose theoretical texts on this subject only began to appear in the 1970s.¹⁵⁰

In 1960s Czechoslovakia, the approach to pornography within the context of Marxist criticism was wholly negative. As regards the Western feminist movement it was a controversial topic that, especially in the 1980s, erupted into a dispute between one faction seeking to have pornography banned, and another defending it. Anti-pornography feminists claimed that it degraded and objectified women and thus promoted violence against them and was the basis of women's oppression in society. In contrast, liberal and libertarian feminists and those against censorship declared that this was to overlook the diversity

148 For a comparison with Western concepts, cf. Laura MULVEY, "Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious; or, 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?'" (1973), in: *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 1989, p. 13; Laura MULVEY, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", *Screen*, vol. 16, 1975, no. 3, pp. 6–18.

149 Lucy LIPPARD, "The Pains and Pleasures of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art", in: *From the Centre: Feminist Essays on Women's Art*, New York: Dutton Books 1976, p. 125.

150 Laura MULVEY – Margarita JIMENEZ, "The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World 1970", in: Laura MULVEY, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 1989, pp. 3–5; Andi ZEISLER, "American Dreams, Stifled Realities: Women and Pop Culture in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s", in: *Feminism and Pop Culture*, Berkeley: Seal Press 2008, pp. 23–55.

and potentiality of women's sexual experience and to limit the development of a positive politics in respect of female sexuality.¹⁵¹ On the theoretical level, restrictions on the visualisation of sexuality were based on feminist readings of Lacan and Foucault, who viewed sexuality within its problematic socio-psychological oppressive form and as an expression of social discourses and institutions.¹⁵² Later theories based on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari were against an understanding of the female body as an object of regulation and control. Such thinkers did not conceive of desire as lack, but as a positive force of productivity, and regarded the female body as the object of desire and pleasure.¹⁵³

In the case of Czechoslovakia, theoreticians of photography drew on the Marxist apparatus exclusively for the purpose of placing restrictions on sexuality associated with economic regulations. A hint of the deconstruction of power mechanisms contained in the visual arts that Western feminist theorists and artists were addressing in the 1970s is to be found, for instance, in the description of pornographic procedures by Ján Šmok, who thus attempted to unveil and interrogate the effect of pornography for his readers. At the same time, reflections in Czechoslovakia upon the issue of sexuality did not take place on the basis of sexual difference, as in the West,¹⁵⁴ but within the framework of the humanist perspective of that time that, on the contrary, suppressed sexuality and sexual difference (in the sense, for example, of thinking about features of experience and sexuality specific to females). And so ideally the socialist nude was to represent all the categories pertaining to gender (women, men) and age (children, adults, seniors), with the aim of portraying them as social beings.

However, not all theories at that time cleaved to these humanist principles. Ján Šmok, who created the most sophisticated guide to the socialist nude, did not recommend the representation of the bodies of men and old people, since they would subvert the appropriate stylisation of photographs in which he worked with unity, symmetry, and with compositional and proportional order. This principle, generally applicable to the creation of the socialist nude, was based on stylisation, aestheticisation and denaturalisation, in which the female body became a way of creating an emotionally effective photograph, i.e. an artwork that was to be distinguishable from kitsch, naturalism, pornography or erotic art. This involved a traditional approach to the nude of the sort we find, for example, in Kenneth Clark's classic study,¹⁵⁵ which was later criticised from feminist poststructuralist positions. This perspective viewed the transformation of the female body into the female nude as a process of regulation, during which the female form was adapted to certain visual norms. At the moment the representation of the body was not sufficiently regulated and disciplined, a boundary was crossed and critical evaluation passed from the sphere of high art into that of eroticism or even pornography.¹⁵⁶

151 Helen MCDONALD, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art*, London and New York: Routledge 2002, p. 32.

152 Griselda POLLOCK, "Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice – a Brechtian Perspective, in: *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, London: Routledge 1988, p. 221.

153 Elizabeth GROSZ, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1994, XVI. Cf. MCDONALD, *Erotic Ambiguities*, pp. 20, 36.

154 Cf. for example Kate MILLET, *Sexual Politics* (1970), New York: Columbia University Press 2016; Shulamith FIRESTONE, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970), New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2003.

155 Kenneth CLARK, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (1956), Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984.

156 Lynda NEAD, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. 6.

Within this traditional understanding, the boundary between the nude and pornography was given by the degree of control and transformation of the female body, and embedded in the dualist programme of Euro-American culture that structured the way we think about the ideal of the female body. It is for this reason that the transformation of the *natural* naked body into the *artistic* artefact, the real into the ideal, which becomes an expression of unity and the integrity of form, plays such an important role. And so the distinction made between an artistic nude and pornography was played out in Czechoslovakia within a similar framework to the West, in which the relationship to reality was an important factor. For example, the boundaries of pornography were defined on the basis of to what extent it prompted the viewer to take action,¹⁵⁷ or on the degree to which the depiction was detailed and explicit. Pornography was therefore more associated with photography than other art forms (painting, drawing) based on the principle of abstraction and mediation (idealisation).¹⁵⁸

Conclusion

Between the communist takeover in 1948 and the end of the 1960s, the relationship of Czechoslovak gender policy to the visualisation of women changed radically. At the start of the 1950s, the main theme of artistic production was the active, public role of women. A decade later, following the period of gradual liberalisation beginning 1956, it was the representation of the female body. Within this context it is interesting to observe the attempt made to conceptualise the socialist nude by Czechoslovak theoreticians of photography during the 1960s, the aim being to ensure that this nude, unlike that of the Western liberal democracies, did not contribute to the exploitation of women.

During the early 1950s, the humanist approach, which demanded the equal representation of socialist citizens, led paradoxically to the nude being banned and in the latter half of the same decade, to its reacceptance. However, this could only take place with the demarcation of its humanist framework, in which those being represented were to be viewed as equal beings bound by certain social and ethical norms. The aim was to repudiate the traditional depiction of woman as above all a sexual object.

The socialist nude was to feature outside the framework of market relations and was not to induce sexual arousal in its viewers. These attributes were intended to prevent the exploitation of the visualised female form. Indeed, the nude should ideally to have a positive influence on the status of women in society thanks, inter alia, to its potential to educate socialist citizens. The reception of a photographic nude in the correct form was to light the path to a healthy sexuality and fulfilled relationships containing, among other levels, erotic and aesthetic relations, and to contribute to improving the aesthetic taste and ethical conduct of citizens.

An important level for the nude was its visual form, which placed it within the category of high art and distinguished it from kitsch, pornography and erotic art. The basic principle was to be the representation of the beauty of the human body. Though the socialist nude was to possess an erotic element, this was to be only in suppressed form

157 Kenneth Clark said the same thing in 1972 to Lord Longford's committee on pornography, which examined the conceptualisation and effects of pornography. *Ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

158 E.g. the conclusions of the liberal-minded commission examining pornography and its influence on US society from 1970 [Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography]. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

as one of many. For this reason the child nude presented no problems to contemporary theoreticians, since they reflected upon it completely outside the sexual problematic. The restrictions placed on the sexual level of the nude related to its visualisation, which was based on the maximum degree of idealisation within which the “generalisation” of the body depicted was to take place. The outcome of all of these considerations was to be an impressive art work based on classical principles as they pertained to composition and proportion.

What this means is that a Marxist critique of the commodification and reification of the visualisation of the female body appeared in socialist Czechoslovakia some ten years earlier than in the West. Debates about the depiction of the naked female form were primarily based on social and economic perspectives and did not lead to the creation of a standalone visual theory. At the same time, the positive conceptualisation of a socialist nude that would not contribute to the exploitation of the female body was imprisoned within a traditional understanding essentially based on regulation of the female body in accordance with classical aesthetic standards (thanks to which the male body was not recommended for nude photography by Ján Šmok, for instance). The idea of the specifically socialist nude was promoted in Czechoslovak photographic theory only during the 1960s. At the end of this decade it was replaced in mainstream discourse by a liberal approach to sexuality and a more erotic depiction of the naked female body that could be used in advertising in order to increase profits.