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# Outline of Ivo Pondělíček's film thinking

Ivo Pondělíček is one of the great post-war film theoreticians. His pieces of work, which are based on the psychoanalytic method, represent an original contribution to the literature of Czech film theory.

## Ivo Pondělíček in the context of Czech film thinking

Czech film thinking is a large theoretical field which extends on the boundary of aesthetics, psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology. Its post-war years are mainly characterised by an intensifying interdisciplinary relationship between film and anthropological disciplines, which was developed in the 1960s in the reopened Czechoslovak Film Institute[1]. The latter focused mainly on sociologically oriented research. Its Research Division,[2], which gathered not only film specialists, but also experts in philosophy (Ivan Sviták), sociology (Marie Benešová) and psychology (Ivo Pondělíček), gradually started to turn away from the prevailing tendency of *impressionistic criticism*[3] towards interdisciplinary research, which focused equally on *filmic*[4] and *cinematographic*[5] facts. „*In the 1960s, the orthodox framework of ruling scientific or critical paradigms could no longer bear the weight of new and attractive hypotheses, or even of the new and interesting proof provided by disciplines such as psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology, which had previously not been trusted at all by secretariats. This is how also psychological proof helping to establish a new paradigm in the field of aesthetics and the sciences of art, including film theory, appeared in our film theory. It corresponded only little with the previous ideology, or at most at the revisionist level, and the original dogmas were at least exceeded in them, if not disproved.*“[6] A deviation from the impressionistic way of looking at film is explicitly present in Ivo Pondělíček's film thinking. His theoretical thinking, from the very beginning, was characterised by a

certain *diaecy of fields*[7], i.e. by an interconnection of professional interest in psychology and art and film theory. Pondělíček presents the complete idea of an approach to film theory, motivated by the requirement of an interconnection between psychology and film. This is done specifically by enriching film with the concepts of applied psychology, with regard to psychoanalytic methods, mainly Freudianism. This is his main theoretical contribution to Czech post-war film thinking.

Ivo Pondělíček is famous mainly as a clinical psychologist and as an art and film theoretician. He has written almost 200 papers and books on the areas of cinematography, aesthetics, psychology and sexology, which are interconnected by the unifying viewpoint of the psychoanalytical method. His texts are characterised by a strong methodological unity, which consists of following the theoretical foundations of Freudianism. These are constantly present in all his theoretical texts written between 1962 and 1998, when he worked as a freelance theoretician outside the Czechoslovak Film Institute, and later also as a lecturer at Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in (FAMU) and at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague.

Pondělíček's thinking was already formed in the period of his early works, within which his own methodical approach developed. It was based on the metaphorical conception of „communicating vessels“[8], which represented a mutual textual interconnection and the blending of psychological sciences with art and film theory. However, from the point of view of the development of his thinking, we can notice different thematically oriented tendencies in his way of thinking. These changed in different periods of time and depending on the ideological background of the era. Later, they were reflected in Pondělíček's efforts to interconnect film and applied psychology (general, social and clinical) and to enrich film thinking with sexological and erotological viewpoints, which brought about a new point of view in the areas of aesthetics and art theory.

Pondělíček's extensive theoretical works can be divided into four thematic periods, based on the prevailing tendencies (psychological, sociological, sexological and aesthetic), which are analogous with his professional orientation. This orientation was constantly influenced by the ideological background of the relevant period. We can date his psychologically oriented texts to the 1960s, sociological texts to the end

of the 1960s, sexological texts from the 1970s to the 1990s, and his aesthetic texts are spread throughout his career. The following text focuses on the thematic period in which he focused on eroticism and sexuality in films. It presents his contextual background and uses the selected topic of erotisation of mass culture to present how Pondělíček adapted the sexological conception to the area of film, and specifically to mass culture.

### **Erotology on the boundary of disciplines**

The interconnection of erotology, sexology and film is one of defining features of Ivo Pondělíček's film thinking. This is because it spreads into his personal and professional life – to a greater or lesser extent – across the decades from the early 1960s to the mid-1990s. However, his theoretical reflections are not in the spirit of the pre-war tradition of impressionistic criticism, which focused only on a descriptive form of depicting feelings and impressions created by the concerned piece of work, without deeper analytical observations. On the contrary, Pondělíček prefers a different approach to film. He regards film as a work of art, as well as primarily a cultural-anthropological construct, which can be studied from different perspectives. From a disciplinary point of view, his theoretical reflections can rather be classified along the line which follows the pre-war tendency of reflection on the sociological questions in film. Early researchers into these questions were, for example, Karel Teige, a member of the Czech avant-garde, and sociologist Bedřich Václavěk.

Pondělíček's early reflections on eroticism and sexuality in film were already formed during his studies at Masaryk University in Brno. There he started to study psychology and aesthetics in 1947<sup>[9]</sup> and became acquainted with psychoanalysis and Sigmund Freud's ideas for the first time. This means that he was able to use his knowledge obtained during his studies of psychoanalysis not only in his clinical psychological practice in the 1950s, but also in the field of film theory. It was within this context that he started to focus on the topic of eroticism and sexuality in 1965, when already employed at the CFI. In this way, Pondělíček held a position in a specialised film workplace, where he worked until 1972 as part of the Research Department. This Department was inclined to interdisciplinary research, thanks to its institutional organisation<sup>[10]</sup> at that time. Due to the interdisciplinary approach, the research team started to use methods during their specialist work which were no

longer based only on film theory. The research field was extended into the areas of sociology and psychology. This resulted in very progressive projects for the time of their creation. It can be said that they were even revisionist, taking into consideration the traditional line of impressionistic criticism, which was still felt in the Czech environment after World War II.

However, a crucial influence on Pondělíček's thinking on eroticism in film was brought about by his cooperation with his wife, the respected sexologist, MUDr. Jaroslava Pondělíčková-Mašlová. At that time, she was employed at the Sexological Institute at the Faculty of General Medicine in Prague[11]. The couple started to collaborate already in the 1960s, when Ivo Pondělíček was still working at the CFI, but only extended their collaboration in the 1970s. At that time, Pondělíček could not publish in specialised film theory periodicals or run a psychological practice due to a negative assessment of his private and public activities made by Communist Party officials. However, thanks to his wife, he could at least contribute to sexological studies as a co-author[12]. He also enriched these studies with his theoretical reflections on film. In this way, he was not under scrutiny any more and could keep on publishing freely under the auspices of a non-ideological institution, which the Sexological Institute undoubtedly was.

Pondělíček's first texts were limited to the topic of sex. They had the nature of rather short articles and papers and were published in the specialised periodical, *Film a doba*. In these texts, his theoretical propositions started to emerge first in the form of short reflections of an essayistic nature. Later, they only gradually crystallised into topics which he developed in depth and which became a point of contact of his reflections on sexuality and eroticism in film. Selected topics, such as erotisation of mass culture, spectator practices, image of a film hero and the myth of film actors, were systematically cultivated on theoretical and analytical levels from 1966 to 1997.

### **Erotisation of mass culture**

The largest and most complete collection of texts is dedicated to the topic of eroticism and sex in mass culture, where film is one of the most widespread and influential media. Pondělíček sees mass culture as a key topic, which he started to focus on more systematically in 1968. He published a series of articles, *Seksualni*

*moral je mrtav* (1)[13], *Sexualni moral je mrtav* (2)[14] and *Erotika i seksualnost u masovnoj kulturi*[15] in Belgrade. These articles treated mass culture from an erotological point of view. This is where he started to develop his original reflections on the nature and sense of eroticism in film, from the point of view of spectators' ethics and morality. However, it was only in the form of comments on selected B-movies where only partial analytical findings appear, without theorising conclusions. The reason is that Pondělíček worked as a freelance art theoretician during his semi-exile in Yugoslavia, meaning that he only collaborated externally with the editorial office of the *Film-Novosti* magazine in Belgrade. This is why we cannot mention the formation of Pondělíček's erotological theory for the moment, but only its initial shaping, when the given topic was developed only through partial analysis, without using specific methodology or paradigmatic affiliation. In these introductory texts, Pondělíček works only within the basic terminological framework of psychoanalysis, which he uses to describe the studied phenomenon.

A more extensive and theoretically structured contribution to the topic of erotisation of mass culture are the studies which Pondělíček published in 1971. These were contained in the anthology on film theory of the CFI and in the anthology of the Sexological Institute. His first and important contribution generally theorising about film from the point of view of its role and position in mass culture was the anthology on film theory, *Film jako fenomén masové kultury*[16], on which he collaborated with his colleague, Jan Svoboda. The anthology was published in 1971. This was at a time when Pondělíček did not have a very good position at the CFI, due to the negative assessment of his activities. It was his last specialised output within this Institution, which he officially had to leave in 1972. The anthology contains a complete reflection of mass culture. This includes a general theoretical introduction, presenting an initial insight into the topic, followed by studies dedicated to concrete, specifically profiled questions. Pondělíček contributed to the anthology with his study, *Erotika a sexualita v masové kultuře*, which is an extended version of his papers published in Belgrade, and *Obraz lásky a erotiky ve filmu*.

Ivo Pondělíček deals mainly with the philosophical-anthropological meaning of mass culture. His texts are impacted by several external influences, which contribute to the formation of his theoretical thinking. This is how they predetermine his approach to sexuality to a certain degree. His texts show the very visible influence of the Anglo-

Saxon and Anglo-American tradition of cultural studies (Birmingham School) and media studies (Toronto School), which focused mainly on the development of mass media theory and its specific aspects. Pondělíček's texts contain many references[17] to the „Toronto School“, mainly to certain propositions of its main theoretician, Marshall McLuhan. Based on the grounds of McLuhan's technical determinism, Pondělíček sees the film era as an „empirical-visual age“[18], which is based on our spectator experience and image basis. At the same time, he follows Jung's theory of the collective unconscious when he says that: „*The mass human being's experience creates not only enlarged stereotypes in ideas and in behaviour, but also a phenomenon which has been called collective unconscious since Jung's time. And film is particularly able to create this phenomenon. We can see a film collective dream as a material, but also as a creation of the cultural and entertainment industry.*“[19]

This means that he sees film as a product created in a quantity, whose main goal is to satisfy our psychological needs, including our basic instinctive needs, i.e. sexuality, which is stimulated through the aforementioned image. According to Pondělíček, film is an *ideal instrument of mass culture*, because it *creates daydreams made visible*, i.e. *myths personified in natural reality*[20]. Film is therefore an objectified and collectively shared media, which *enables spectators to identify immediately with reality thanks to its photographicality*[21]. Besides the psychoanalytical perspective, Pondělíček's methodological point of view also contains tendencies paradigmatically belonging to the already mentioned technical determinism and analytical psychology. An interdisciplinary link between psychoanalysis and cultural studies is therefore developed, which reflects the tendencies of foreign – mainly western – film thinking of the 1970s.

His good orientation[22] is confirmed by his sexological book, *Lidská sexualita jako projev přirozenosti a kultury*[23], which he co-authored with his wife for the above-mentioned reasons. It was published under the institutional auspices of the Sexological Institute in 1971. Pondělíček deals with a narrower conception of the theory of mass culture with the emphasis on sexuality. Instead of treating general propositions of the communication theory, process and functioning of mass communication, he focuses exclusively on the “process of erotisation of mass culture”[24]. Unlike his wife, whose propositions represent the biological-deterministic approach to human sexuality, Pondělíček inclines (in the second part of the book) to

the Freudian and partially to the behavioural approach, which works with empirical data, but mainly by using the historical-developmental method.

He sees man as a sociocultural construct, permanently sexualised by film, which is what differentiates him from animals. According to him, film is a resublimed sexuality, which helps the human libido to remain constantly active. In opposition to Freud's opinion[25] on the biologically conditioned stability of human sexual behaviour, Pondělíček holds the opinion that human instinctive needs are variable due to the effect of culture and that they change, depending on the social changes which are reproduced by mass culture. This means that film is an ideal intermediary to provide an excess of impulses to sexual arousal, which are conventionalised and stereotyped. This is reflected in the form of our own sexual relationships.

Ivo Pondělíček has always sought an interdisciplinary approach to his theoretical work.[26] This is also proved by his efforts to interconnect film theory and erotology under the unifying viewpoint of the psychoanalytical approach, which he also enriches with the foundations of cultural studies. It shows his broad research scope in the topic of *erotisation of mass culture*, which helped to cover this broad sociocultural phenomenon. Given the context of his era, Pondělíček's thinking is very progressive because it foreshadows to a certain degree the great increase of professional interest in the area of mass culture. However, this did not start to resonate in our professional discourse until the 1990s. His contribution to modern Czech film thinking is therefore unquestionable.

## **Literature:**

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## Notes:

[1] The Czechoslovak Film Institute was reopened in 1963. The abbreviation „CFI“ will be used from now on.

[2] The Research Division also included Jaroslav Brož, Zdeněk Štábala, Jaromír Bulíček and Jan Svoboda.

[3] Hanzlík, Jan and Hudec, Zdeněk. Ve vědě o filmu jsem usiloval o interdisciplinární přístup. Rozhovor s Ivo Pondělíčkem. *Iluminace*, 2010, No. 4, p. 153.

[4] Filmic facts are limited by film as an object, or by film as a signifier. The focus is the film as such and its ability to represent the world by visual, sound and verbal means. Ibid. p. 153.

[5] Cinematographic facts are understood as complex sociocultural phenomena with social and economic aspects in the foreground.

[6] Pondělíček, I., 1999. *Svět k obrazu svému: příspěvky k filmovému vědomí a videokultuře 1962–1998*, Praha: Národní filmový archiv, pp. 329–330.

[7] Ibid. p. 9.

[8] Ibid. p. 9.

[9] Týdeník Rozhlas: programový týdeník. Praha: Radioservis, 2005, No. 13.



[10] The Research Division of the CFI gathered experts from the fields of philosophy (Ivan Sviták), sociology (Jaromír Bulíček), psychology (Ivo Pondělíček), statistics (Marie Benešová) and others.

[11] She belongs to Professor Hynie's founding generation of the Czech sexological school.

[12] Pondělíček himself describes the specific situation as follows: „I therefore tried to find my use in the ‚non-ideological area‘ which was not so exposed to the ‚supervising spotlight‘ of power. At that time, the area of sexological education was completely untouched in our country, but it was already called for, for political reasons. Thanks to the fact that my wife was a doctor at the Sexological institute, which was a competent institution, she covered many of my speeches, articles, papers, lectures and books as a co-author at that time. The medical publishing house, Avicenum, where the political profile of the authors was not – luckily for me – as screened as in other publishing houses which worked with ‚ideological‘ titles, accommodated us“. In: Pondělíček, Ivo. *Outsiderova zpověď: vzpomínky a sebereflexe sepsané s přičiněním Miloše Šindeláře* (The Confession of an Outsider: Memories and Self-reflections Written with Miloš Šindelář's Contribution), Hodkovičky [Praha]: Pragma 2007, p. 268.

[13] The following papers are concerned: *Seksualni moral je mrtav* (1), Film-Novosti (Beograd) 3, 2. 10. 1968, No. 101, p. 7, *Seksualni moral je mrtav* (2), Film-Novosti (Beograd) 3, 9. 10. 1968, No. 102, p. 7, *Erotika i sexuálnost u masovnoj kulturi*, Kultura (Beograd), 1969, No. 4, pp. 61-77. All the papers were later translated into Czech and published in the *Film a doba* magazine.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Pondělíček, Ivo, Bulíček, Jaromír and Svoboda, Jan. *Film jako fenomén masové kultury*, Praha: ČSFÚ 1971.

[17] These are not direct quotations, often not even propositions mentioning their source, which was probably due to the fact that the propositions belonged to the western tradition and were not an acceptable source of academic knowledge at that

time.

[18] Pondělíček, Ivo, Bulíček, Jaromír and Svoboda, Jan. *Film jako fenomén masové kultury (Film as a Phenomenon of Mass Culture)*, Praha: ČSFÚ 1971, p. 27.

[19] Ibid. p. 14.

[20] Ibid. p. 27.

[21] Ibid. p. 27.

[22] Ivo Pondělíček obtained foreign literature mainly from his Czech colleagues who were allowed to travel abroad, mainly to Germany. On a few occasions, he himself arranged for imported foreign literature distributed from the USA during visits of the Czech film delegation to Berlin. In: An audio recording of an interview with Ivo Pondělíček from 4. 10. 2016.

[23] Pondělíček, Ivo and Pondělíčková-Mašlová, Jaroslava *Lidská sexualita jako projev přirozenosti a kultury*, Praha: Sexuologický ústav 1971.

[24] Ibid. p. 14.

[25] Freud's 'propositions on civilization and its discontents' are described in the book *Civilization and its Discontents* (Freud, Sigmund. *Nespokojenost v kultuře*. Praha: Hynek, 1998).

[26] Hanzlík, Jan and Hudec, Zdeněk. Ve vědě o filmu jsem usiloval o interdisciplinární přístup. Rozhovor s Ivo Pondělíčkem. *Iluminace*, 2010, No. 4, p. 151.