

Abstract

Culture in Quarantine: Artists Unions and their Consolidation in the Early Normalization Era.

The era of Czechoslovak 'normalization' is usually perceived as a time of cultural, economic and moral decline. According to the traditional interpretation, the dynamic diversity of the 'golden sixties' was replaced by the 'grayness' and 'inertia' of the new normalized order. This approach is legitimate and understandable. Nevertheless, it overshadows the questions of how the 'consolidation' regime was formed, which goals it pursued and if it followed some intrinsic logic.

This study offers a detailed analysis of the normalization process within the institutional framework of Czech culture (including artists unions as well as the state and party apparatus inherited from the reform period). The first chapter follows the development of official cultural policy, beginning in the post-Stalinist era of Antonín Novotný, then continuing through reformist period of the Prague Spring and the new understanding of culture that emerged under normalization. This reconstruction of state socialist cultural policy reveals long-term continuities (for example, in the way culture used as a tool for socialist development) as well as short-term transformations caused by immediate political changes. The second chapter focuses on 'the restoration of the order' in the artists unions. This chapter examines the historicity of normalization strategies and argues that there existed no clear consolidation tactic in the beginning, and that none was directly imported from the Soviet Union. In the third chapter, in an analysis of the activities of the artists unions, the author employs the theoretical framework of Antonio Gramsci and introduces artists unions as a specific form of state socialist civil society. The author reconstructs the path of the cultural intelligentsia toward reformist hegemony and analyzes the defensive strategies employed by the intelligentsia after the military invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. In contrast to existing historiographical understandings of artists unions as one of the last 'islands of freedom' in the normalized sea, the author argues that the success of normalization strategies correlates precisely with the insular nature of artists unions, which fought to maintain their own hegemony and to defend their particular professional interests, rather than attempting to create a distinct form of collective resistance based on a coalition with students and workers.