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WILD SHARKA AHH!

We have an old Czech tale about a girl's war.

Women were disgusted by men's rule and they started an uprising and fought. Not for emancipation; they wanted to rule themselves. One of the female heroes was Šarka - the English transcription would be probably „Shaarkah“. She committed suicide at the end: she jumped down from a high rock. - Today there is a nature reserve on a Prague suburb named „Wild Shaarkah“.

We live close to the reserve; I like the name; and I like the mythical fighting women from the tale. So this is my personal fanzine.

...No.2... Dec 90...

BIOPUNK

BIOPUNK - A NEW LITERARY MOVEMENT SPECIFIC FOR POST-TOTALITARIAN REGIMES

When we heard about the American Cyberpunk and read some cyberpunk stories, we (it means some Czechoslovak fans, SF authors and editors) were enthusiastic over its spontaneity, its electrizing power, the strength which casts the reader into the middle of the future world - without much explications and guidance.

Our best (and most active) SF writer Ondřej Neff, who gave us a lecture about Cyberpunk at our national con in 1987, concluded: "Well, it's difficult to develop Cyberpunk in our country where one can't find even a functioning public telephone box. Cyberpunk stems from the atmosphere of highly developed technology and society that had absorbed this technology into itself."

I thought a lot about it and I said to myself: "But we are not just a backward country which is delayed in development; no, the situation in our country has some specific traits, qualities, something which is worth describing, expressing, studying, extrapolating. And as I am a biologist by origin, it came to my mind that people in this system are not manipulated and co-created by technology, but perhaps by influences which are essentially biological..."

The heroes of cyberpunk, in spite of all novelty and expressivity of the Cyberpunk visions, are - in their heart - the old familiar American boys, optimistic, active, money-greedy and longing for success. The heroes of Biopunk, similar to people that I saw in my surroundings, can't be so straightforward at all.

On a certain level of disintegration and paralysis of society, people are losing motivation for anything. That's what we experienced: people were extremely skeptical, passive, as they realized many and many times that whatever they tried didn't bring any result, that any revolt, any anger doesn't change anything, and that results of any creative work are not acknowledged or rewarded or used in practice. You could have a lot of money but couldn't do much with it; you could be outstanding in your field but nobody would hear about you.

How challenging to analyse this deformed world! (It was obvious that I did it anyway - even without Biopunk. Biopunk was only a sort of label - or advertisement - to the stuff that I wrote anyway, and that was disliked by some of the more conservative fans.)



So what will act instead of computers, displays, programs? - There were two "branches", or possibilities, that were clearly visible:

1. Mutants, genetic diseases and deformations, chimeric organisms (my original field was genetic engineering...) - these old SF properties had to be used with great certainty, with inner tensions and expressivity - reader has to put the position of a manipulated creature with deformed mind in deformed circumstances. (For example, the heroes of my stories often consider their situation marvellous and pleasant, though in fact it's scaring or utterly disgusting - which reflects totalitarian society with its grotesque voluntarism - the newspaper stating all the time that we are extremely happy and that we live in a very highly developed society and if there are some problems, they are not so important at all...)

Environmental and pollution problems of course are connected with all that very closely - mutants and diseases, and this terrible voluntarism - the authorities kept secret the catastrophic state of our environment, did not allow to inform people about true values and predict trends - futurology itself was accused to be a "bourgeois pseudo-science", and it was a hard

time for prognostication and forecasting as well.

Environmental problems were touched only very superficially, vaguely: everybody spoke about the necessity of better care of nature, of saving of energy and sources etc. - but nobody could to say or do anything concrete, point to the real culprit.

Our "official" SF treated this theme with terrible didactic schemes which were extremely widespread: the extraterrestrials come to the Earth and they see that people aren't able to solve their problems (wars, environments) and they say: "You ugly, stupid, immoral people! WHY-ARE-YOU-NOT-BETTER? We shall not enter into any contact with you! - This scheme was really nauseating.

Biopunk should treat environmental problems without this terrible didactising.

2. Etological themes: There often appeared something bestially animal in people's behavior: reluctance of other people, aggressivity, or apathy. The patterns and outer layers of civilized manners were washed off, destroyed, and the individual appeared naked and primitive - without any valuable moral, any ideals and ideas. People's values really degraded to food, house and consumption - especially the things from "the West" represented a real goal to achieve: blue jeans were not a symbol of nonconformism but on the contrary of the consumption - the same with cassettes, recorders, walkmans, satellite TV, video sets... or just a T-shirt with the misspelled (badly imitated) English inscription or a bottle with "Western" design in the bathroom.

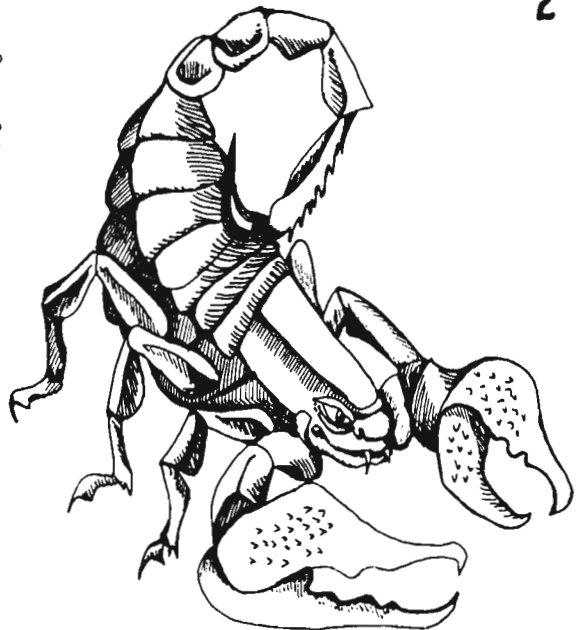
People felt that "Westerners" are somehow better- behave more friendly, have more self-confidence, more professional skill - and of course a higher standard of living - but sometimes they considered "Resteners" a bit naive - why do they discuss so much? Why do they pose such ridiculous, funny questions? Ha, ha, they can never understand what's happening here... what's the real, harsh life like. When they heard of feminism or animal rights and similar topics, they mocked it: "Oh, but they have really funny problems! They are too gentle, too over-civilized, almost somnambulist! They ouhht to live under socialism for a couple of years...2

Yes, that would surely channel their minds to essential thoughts: food, house, consumption.

No wonder that biopunk had to be extravagant, shocking, aggressive.

It had to focus on manipulated human beings, on the deformations of their psychic.

In my story named "In our State of Agony" - Agony is in fact the name of a country - I've described people cooperating by sharing their inner organs, such as kidneys or liver. These people quarrel who's turn it is to get the kidney on a particular day, and I found this scene quite funny... But it was unbearable for some of the readers - which is ridiculous if you realize



W A CON-REPORT V

EUROCON

Eurocon was held 1. - 4. November in Fayence, a small town about 50 km north from Cannes. It was my second international con (after ConFiction), and my first visit of France.

It was a business travel as I had to acquire some stories by foreign authors for Ikarie - it's important for us just to get into contact, know people, addresses etc. - Moreover, we have problems with payments of authors from western countries as our currency is not convertible, and so we offer payments in our Czech currency and we smile nicely to the authors and say them: "We shall depose your royalty in Czechoslovakia and you can have it whenever you will come. Why not to spend in Czechoslovakia a nice holiday?" Most of authors accept this as it's better than nothing i.e. not to publish in Czechoslovakia at all.

It was good opportunity for me to spend 2 more days in Paris - mainly for buying some books, especially new French SF, but also for some sightseeing; I love to go sightseeing alone, absorbing the atmosphere, observing people, staying for a while where and whenever I want. First of all, I rushed to Louvre as I wanted to see the controversial glass pyramid. I liked the pyramid but found that Louvre is under reconstruction - vast hole in the ground instead of Carousel, scaffolding, building machines, lot of noise. I didn't go inside to see the paintings as I didn't have enough time. I quickly went around Tuilleries, Champs Elysées, Arc de Triomphe, La Tour Eiffel...

And then I decided to look at



that they were living in strikingly similar conditions... but they didn't admit it to themselves. People protect themselves from too much of unpleasant information. My heroine who finds it really boring that her child is again and again in the state of clinical death... and is again and again recovered from it by doctors. Sensitive readers feel uneasy while reading these scenes - but my children were extremely often ill when they were small and I found it also boring not to sleep for several nights because of their rattling and to wait if they will not start to suffocate... there is little imagination in my stories in fact. But there is also little traditional sentiment. Those readers who were horrified by my stories were probably this sort of

manipulated beings who prefer to spend their day in a queue for blue jeans or a recorder than to try to influence the environmental situation or to get some information about it - or at least to bother the administration a little which was well possible to do...

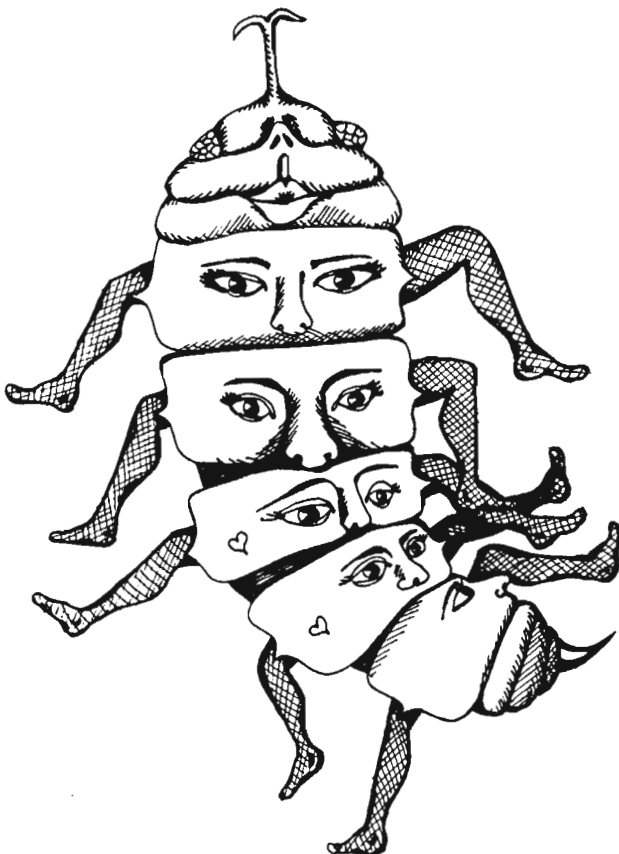
My other stories are more experimental, playful, with motives only loosely bounded to each other. Again - mutants, inner organs, strange social structures, etc. For example, the vision that the scientists found out that people were in fact larvae and after pupation (caused by specific conditions) came out in an imago form... I describe this form, recovered from human genes by scientists, and it's of course utterly disgusting... Or - in another story written with my co-author Martin Klíma - we focus on the specialization of people for their jobs to an extreme: the hero is specialized for destroying old unnecessary books and he has only a big belly, a few tentacles and a strong grinding device. He is proud on his high productivity of work... or he perhaps isn't any more as his brain is extremely simplified.

I found several foreign authors which do write pure Biopunk - sometimes when I was enthusiastic with a story I said to myself: "But that's it, exactly!" Just one example: Octavia Butler, Bloodchild. - So, in fact, I don't mean very seriously my statement that Biopunk is very specific for the post-totalitarian systems. Perhaps it's specific for handicapped layers of society, for societies which have something written in their core, for people whose living conditions are somewhat altered so that they are disadvantaged, repressed.

Among Czechoslovak authors, there are also a couple of writers who made some Biopunk. Usually they don't write it consciously but they are pleased when I say to them that their story is a Biopunk one. Of course the incidence of Biopunk stories in our country is high. I translated as an example an ultrashort story by Zdeněk Páv. I consider him a very good author, with rich and widely opened imagination. This story is playful, almost dadaistic, so my translation (also dadaistic, but not deliberately) might not harm the text much.

EUROCON

La Défence, which was a good choice as it was utterly fascinating for me. I have seen some New York skyscrapers and big shopping malls like Rockefeller's Center - but La Défence is different. Lot of surprising ideas, lot of art everywhere, inviting, friendly, playful. You should know the modern quarters of block of flats in Prague - I lived in one for ten years. Grey, plain, with an alienated atmosphere. I couldn't even imagine anything like La Défence before I had visited it. It's the place where one may start to hope that the future of mankind could be better than the past... I wanted to see La Villette - City of Science and Technology - too, but it was also under reconstruction. So I went to Montmartre, Notre Dame, Centre Pompidou (I was lucky and saw there an old film by K.T.Dreyer: Lord of the Flat. Very feminist one!) Thursday 1.11. I spent mostly in Cannes as there was no bus connection to Fayence - it was a fest. So I walked along the beaches, saw the Festival Palace, yachts, old centre of the town. In fact I waited for my colleague from Czechoslovakia, Richard (who



A BIOPUNK STORY

Zdeněk Páv

BY EAR

The platform was stuffed with crowds of people.

Jaroslav had to develop strong effort to avoid a group of wildly looking youngsters which shouted and stabbed with the flagstaves to the surface of the road. Blood flew from the pavement, precipitated on the horny street, and fumed feebly.

Jaroslav crawled on the soft and pliable wall to the jump that he had looked for before, he hid himself and waited. He felt that his strength is sorely tried, and he knew that if the train wouldn't appear in a couple of days it will be his end. He didn't have enough strength to walk.

He waited about two hours and observed the buzzing crowd on the road under him when a protracted roar resounded from the deep dark gullet. The crowd on the platform fell silent immediately but then enraged with a multiplied power. The banners and slogan boards flew to the air, the maxims memorized long time ago and the enthusiastic rejoicings were heard.

Jaroslav relieved. He got his chance at the end.

He heard rumbling of steps and strokes of the mighty body to the walls of the gullet. The eyes suffused with blood appeared and the train jumped into the crowd of chocked people on the platform. The rejoicings changed into horrified yelling and Jaroslav turned aside from the view.

He knew the habits of the trains too well and he knew how they nourish themselves.

However, such situation suited him well. The full train uses to lounch in the road, it opens the body ventholes, it belchs and digests. He grapped a long fibre, judged the distance and he took himself off. He stroke the ground and sooner than the train could notice anything he casted himself by the venthole to the soft pink entrails of the train.

"Hallo, boy!" A pleasant voice was to be heard.

The conductor sat behind an oblong desk, his hands prostrated on the spread newspaper. He smiled.

"Hi," Jaroslav sat down. "I am lucky. The trip will pass better."

"Yeah, that's everytime when one can talk."

After a while the ventholes closed. The train rosed and slowly set itself to motion.

"People rarely have the idea you had," said the conductor.

"Yeah, I tooked it over. I know the trains well."

"Yeah..."

A BIOPUNK STORY

The muscles of the train contracted rhythmically. The nutritious solutions flew through the ducts in the floor, they gurgled and diverged to the muscular filaments.

"Terrible rite, isn't it?" Jaroslav remembered the massacre on the platform and shook. "I can't understand how it comes that they don't stop believing..."

"What?"

"That the train will bring them outside, to the daylight. And that it will cast out them intact."

The conductor howled.

"I didn't suspect it! Really!"

"It's hard to make head or tail of it," he continued.

"What's the purpose of the Railway, can you tell me?"

Jaroslav didn't say anything.

"The trains are suffering," said the conductor genially, "and they have only one goal: to get outside at least for a while. People are suffering too and they also don't have any other goal than to get themselves away from the Railroad. What's the purpose of all this..."

"Difficult to say."

They kept silence for a long time and they observed the contractions of the muscles. They listened to the rumbling of the steps and Jaroslav realized that there is a great hope in this rhythm. He touched his chest carefully. His heart started to pain a bit.

Suddenly the train put up violently. Jaroslav clinched himself between the folds of the tissue and he felt the huge body trembling with strain.

They were getting across the last division of the way. The animal bit through the firm and resilient shell bounding the Railway.

Jaroslav closed his eyes with relief. He will be outside after a couple of minutes...

And then everything became silent. The vibrations stopped and the ventholes started to pulsate violently.

The train breathed.

The light pervaded into the entrails. It was genuine daylight.

Jaroslav stood up and crawled through the venthole out.

"You will not go?" he asked the conductor.

"I thought you know," said the conductor quietly.

"Know what?"

Jaroslav looked inside the train.

"What should I know?"

The conductor without a word draw aside the newspaper spread on the desk.

His body was terminated in the middle of his belly. Only the desk and the pink tissues of the train continued it.

The conductor was the train.

"I see," said Jaroslav.

He turned away and walked off.

"But you are not an ordinary passenger," called him the conductor.

"You have recognized it, didn't you?" Jaroslav stopped.

"So, why do you ask?"

"I like certainty. To know who the passengers are."

"You don't really know it or you just want to assure yourself?"

"Rather... the later."

"Well?"

"You are... God. The creator of the Railway."

Jaroslav laughed.

"That's half true. The God had died long time ago, I possess only his body. The body of Jaroslav the God, the architect and builder of the Railway."

"I would be interested in... why in fact... you should know..."

"Why the Railway was built? - But it's a brilliant idea!"

"But..."

"It's a brilliant idea, I say. But nobody understands it, unfortunately. Nothing to be done with it."

The conductor inspired as he wanted to say something but Jaroslav didn't let him to interrupt his speech.

"It's necessary that everybody gets used to it. Both people and trains. Then everything will be OK."

"So who are you... if you are not the God?"

Jaroslav smiled complacently.

"I am an immense source of energy," he said proudly, "I am keeping all that in function."

His hand touched his chest. He felt a jabbing pain there, once and again.

"I must go."

He turned off and walked to the town nearby. A small church, couple of little houses and stores stood there.

He entered one of them.

An orange extraterrestrial slept at the counter, his head laying on the desk, one hand under his head, the other extended in front of him.

"Hi!"

EUROCON

works in another publishing house) as he claimed that the organisers should pick him in Cannes. Finally Richard came, but nobody awaited him. In fact he didn't get the telephone connection to fix the details. We wanted to phone but we haven't got these cards which are necessary for telephoning in France.

At the end we founded out that the bus goes from St Raphael (it was the only one per day) and in the evening we finally reached Fayence.

The whole convention was not large (some 60 - 80 participants) and the program consisted mainly from cocktails, vernisages, celebrations and awarding of prizes. There were also two astronomical lectures and two panels about European SF (the Western and Eastern part), a theatre performance and a demonstration of hypnosis - I saw it for the first time in my life.

What fascinated me, was the French hedonic way of life - the 3 hours long pause for the lunch which consisted of lot of courses (vegetables, cheese, dessert) - and of chatting and drinking wine. Pleasant. Fayence itself is extremely beautiful, with mediievally looking narrow lanes, old stone houses and little churches, in the middle of the mountains, and with subtropic vegetation in the tiny gardens (oranges, opuntia, bougainvillea etc.). We met there Wiktor Bukato, an editor from Poland, who is very friendly and nice man, Sándor Horváth from Hungaria (seems to me that possibly sits in his editorial post till the old totalitarian times), some very nice Soviets, especially a guy from Ukraina called Leon Kouritz, David Brin from USA who lives now in Paris with his fiancée, and - surprisingly - almost twenty people from Rumania. I must admit that I wasn't able to control myself enough to pretend some warm feelings toward them. I simply couldn't withstand their grim seriousness, aggressivity, invasiveness and prevalence in everything that was on program - for example the panel about West Europe SF finished by a long speech of Alexandru Mironov in which he told to Frenchmen how he will help SF to promote in their country...

The Rumanians overruled completely the European Society of SF - when we had to decide who will get the prizes they started to claim that only people from states whose delegations are present can obtain the prizes. Reason: it was strenuous to go to Fayence from Rumania and they want to be rewarded. - I am really suffering in such situations.



The extraterrestrial rose his head, grunted and wiped the slavery flowing out from the corner of his mouth.

"What... what do you wish?"

His forehead was bruised from the sleep and his left antenna was directed somewhere behind him.

"I need to change the battery."

Jaroslav the God unbuttoned his chest, grasped inside and pulled out the heart. He lifted off the lid and tried to nudge out the tiny accumulator with his nail.

"Damn... it got stuck somehow... ah, here we are."

He passed the accumulator to the extraterrestrial who thoughtfully rubbed a fleshy bulge on his antenna.

"Hm, hm, I must look what's there. A moment please."

"Yeah. I'll wait."

"So you are lucky," the extraterrestrial returned. "We have a couple of pieces left. But it's an old type."

"I know."

Jaroslav set his heart and buttoned his chest. He felt great.

"Thanks."

"For nothing. Good bye!"

"Good bye!"

He opened the door and went out on the veranda.

He was taken aback by the view.

He train bored itself into the skin by all its strength so that the stems of the hairs standing around were trembling. It disappeared in a short while.

Jaroslav the God swore and hit the wall of the store.

"Damned train! I will have to come back by ear. And on foot!"



EUROCON

I hate myself for speaking about Rumanians in so ugly way but I can't help it. Of course, I understand that they were under a strong pressure for a long time... but why then Soviet people behave so modestly, tactfully, kindly? - Perhaps the real reason is that there's still no democracy in Rumania and these people who are allowed to represent them on international conferences are selected by the ruling group - the same way as it was under the Communists...

We met several French authors and editors, for example Raymond Audemard from French radio, an author of adventurous fantasy Richard Nolane, or leaders of the French Society of SF as Mr Cronimus or Mr Brouillaud. They all said that the interest of Sf in France is arriving in waves (a sort of a fashion). By now the wave is on its minimum. People are more interested in horoscopes, macrobiotics, yoga, oriental religions, esoteric and such topics; and these who read SF prefer the American one.

We saw on Eurocon a group of young enthusiastic Frenchmen who mostly wore the Trekkie costumes and discussed with great interest the American SF movies and TV series.

We got a prize of SESF (Société Européenne de la SF) for IKARIE - as for the best professional SF magazine. That

made my boss O. Neff extremely happy!

The sculptures of a young artist, Didier Cottier, were probably the most interesting among the exhibited works. He creates assemblages of melted plastic and various tiny objects such as beads or pins; each assemblage represents a cosmos, which Didier explains with great enthusiasm - every detail has its purpose, its meaning. It's modern, abstract art - quite the opposite of the kitsch that is sometimes presented as SF art.

The whole program was held in French (I was surprised that the Frenchmen don't speak English much - on ConFiction it seemed to me that EVERYBODY in western countries speaks an excellent English); so I was grateful to my parents who made me to learn some French when I was a kid - I understood great deal (especially David Brin who spoke very slowly and clearly) and I was able of some attempts of conversation which were not all the time succesfull but were always acknowledged.

THE FOLLOWING LETTER IS MY REACTION TO AN ESSAY
**"WOMEN WHO WAIT" DEALING WITH WOMEN AND FEMINISM
IN THE STATES OF EASTERN EUROPE WHICH WAS
PUBLISHED IN NEW STATESMAN AND SOCIETY MAGAZINE
31.8.1990. I HOPE IT COULD BE INTERESTING EVEN IF
YOU DON'T KNOW THE ORIGINAL ESSAY.**

Dear friends!

Recently I got a copy of Slavenka Draculić's essay The women who wait. I feel that I should make some comment of Drakulić's article as it seems to me superficial or even incorrect in some items. I would like to show how the situation looks from my view of a Czechoslovak journalist, working woman, mother of two small children.

I don't think that the reproductive freedom in Czechoslovakia is endangered. A few years ago, the problem of safe & legal abortion was solved quite satisfactorily: the institution of so called "interruption committee" (group of doctors and psychologists) was cancelled and by now it depends purely on the woman's will whether she decides for the abortion. (The "interruption committee" wasn't of any sense anyway, it permitted about 97% of abortions, but it delayed the process and sometimes could severely shake woman's self-esteem and self-confidence). The only danger is that Christian Democrats can become more powerful in future and they may stress on ban of abortions; but by now they don't even dare to express publicly this goal and they state that "the problem of abortions depends on the complex, whole situation of the society" (they probably mean that it's necessary to solve what to do with the unwanted children - and it's a long - term problem). Nobody can expect our women to organize themselves and struggle for something so misty and uncertain as is this danger which can appear perhaps in five or ten years.

It's really ridiculous to state that forty years of careers, jobs and independence on men didn't influence Czechoslovak women at all and that they just are not aware of their minority status. Our society is not patriarchic in the traditional sense of the word.

In our legislative, you could find only a short time ago some laws dealing with allowances and facilities of "working mothers". Why not "working fathers"? It really infuriated me. But at present, these laws were discussed in Parliament, and they replaced the term "maternal allowance" by term "parental allowance". So there is nothing to complain - officially.



Of course the status of women and men in our society is not optimally balanced; but Drakulić with an obvious voluntarism tries to find that women are oppressed and in a submissive position.

If you want to understand properly what happened with Czech women in past 40 years, you must look at their education in socialist society: of course the Communist education was mostly rubbish and if they taught us that women are equal it was utterly the same as if they stated that the working people is ruling, and such junk. But at the other hand, we were never told that the traditional family is of any value; that it's good if father earns money and supports mother - housewife who cares of the house and children; that women should be understanding, soft, helping, sentimental etc. Really, nothing like that.

When I am reading through Western feminist books, I am getting a strong impression that girls in Western countries are educated - at least partially - in this traditional way. You must consider that we were said that it's a shame, it's something inferior to stay at home and "not to

work". It was not only the need of labor force - that's harsh simplification. It was a belief that a human being really needs to work on behalf of the other people, altruistically and creatively - not only for his/her own family.

Our women are persuaded that they must manage everything - family, household, career - and they do manage it. They are not dependent on men much - excluding perhaps the period when the children are really very small and they can't be put into kindergarten. I can't give the exact numbers in this moment but I think that Czechoslovak women decide very often for divorce - much more often than women in Western countries. Women are self-sufficient, they don't submit themselves to men. They don't need men much - men are becoming unnecessary "parasites" in the family. Thus, it's more problem of men's role in family and in life, than of women's role.

Do Czechoslovak women need the feminist movement? Yes, but not the radical and angry one. What damages the feminism most in our eyes, is its grim seriousness, lack of sense of humor; there is no fun in feminism. Why, for example, this anger feelings towards pornography? Why not to be open-minded and tolerant? But these feelings don't exist just in "Eastern countries with lack of information". Recently two French girls, journalists, came to see us. They visited Czechoslovakia to do some interviews with interesting women personalities (not with me, I must remark!); as I am interested in feminism, I asked them of it. "I AM NOT A FEMINIST!" was their almost angry response. And they refused to speak about it more.





We need more understanding and acknowledging - both for men and women. The real danger is that women will be now fascinated with the traditional women's role - not because they are so backward and conservative but because lives of each of us lose any order, any ideals, and we all search for some identity; and the traditional women's role is a very easy way how to find it. But - I stress once more - it's something utterly new for us. Do women need political struggle? - I don't think that problems like kindergarten, services or babysitters and kitchen devices are women's problems. They are family's problems. When Drakulić treats them as women's problems she implicates that these are not men's problems, and it sounds extremely backward and conservative.

Is it alarming that in Czechoslovakia there are only a few women on important, high political posts? - You must consider our political life in past - I mean the character of Communist ruling. There is some evidence that biologically, women have a capability to see all things in a whole, in a complex (men, on the contrary, are fond on doing constructions and incline to more one-sidedness mentally). The power and richness of Communist leaders was something so deformed, freak and dirty that no normal woman could ever yearn for that. Men, yes: they are biologically capable to elimin the silly, stupid and immoral sides of the whole thing. Among people who signed Chart 77 and thus became dissidents, there is a fair share of women. But till nowadays, women have stronger reluctance to acquiring political posts than men - as women still are feeling all the dirt and immorality that politics can represent. However, there are perhaps half or more than half of women on lower leading posts, and on universities there is a prevalence of female students. There are more female doctors and scientists than the male ones. I can't really see the "patriarchy built in the system" - and Drakulić doesn't give any evidence of her statement.

She is extremely superficial in judging the details of our everyday life. Her image of Eastern "tomato tourists" is almost offending; but she should know that the Czechs didn't consider the Yugoslav people "rich and free Westerners" as she obviously imagines but they disliked their attitude to

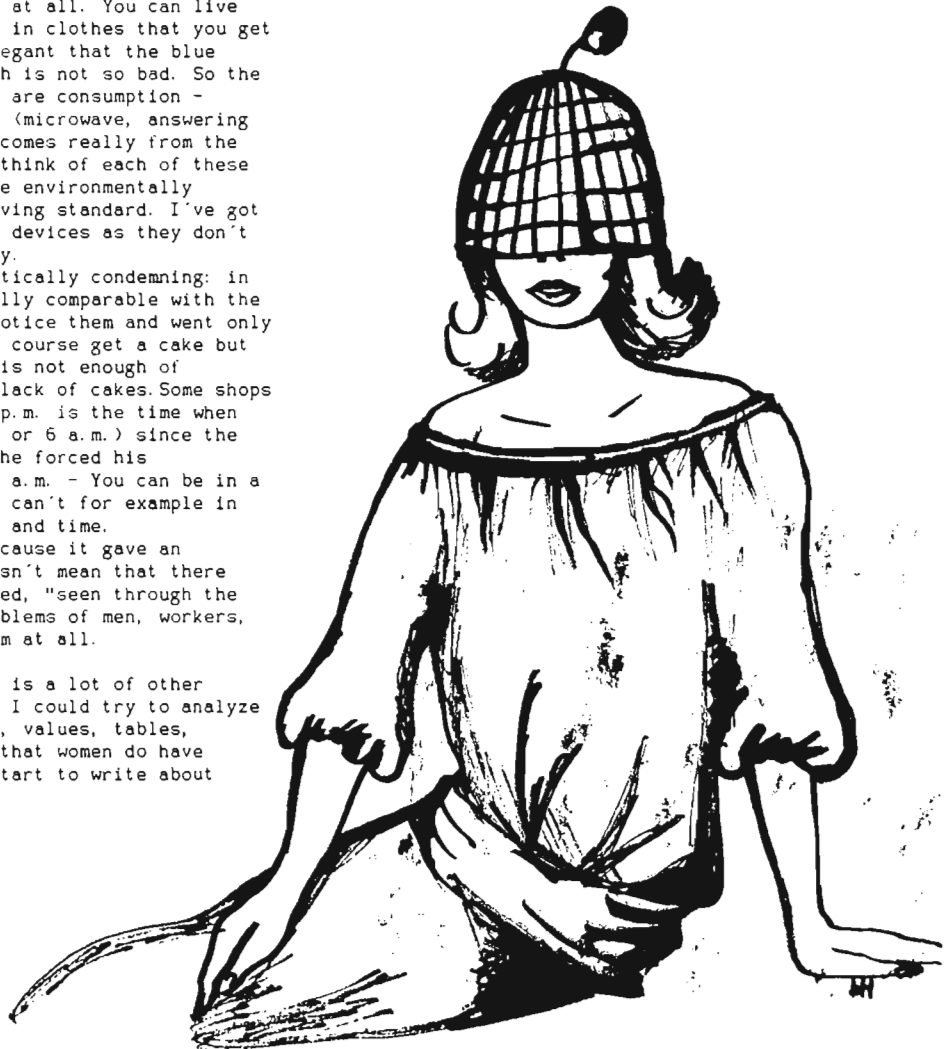
tourists (money-greedy, cheating), the inflation, the prices so high that the living standard of ordinary Yugoslav people clearly wasn't very good, and in the whole, most of the Czechs consider all the Balcan nations less culturally developed, without this long history of education, science, literature etc. that Czechs, Poles and Germans do have. Of course I don't identify myself with this attitude but Drakulić should know it.

What I dislike in Drakulić's article is her stress on western goods in the households or on people exaggerately overpaying the stuff with western etiquettes (I mean the goods like blue jeans, chewing gum, Earl Grey tea etc.) - as it doesn't show the real living standard at all. You can live very happily without western goods, on Georgia tea, in clothes that you get in a boutique and that are cheaper and much more elegant than the blue jeans, and you can buy cheap Czech chewing gum which is not so bad. So the stress on western etiquettes only shows that people are consumption - orientated fetishists. What concerns the technology (microwave, answering machine etc.) - most of it, of acceptable quality, comes really from the West. But if you are a sincere Green than you must think of each of these devices and judge if they don't waste energy and are environmentally friendly: so it again doesn't show very well the living standard. I've got friends in West Germany who simply don't have these devices as they don't want to possess things that are not really necessary.

Drakulić's observations of our cities is voluntaristically condemning: in Budapest, there are some nice private boutiques fully comparable with the Paris ones - as Simeoni or Joker. Drakulić didn't notice them and went only to the big ready - made shops. In Prague you can of course get a cake but you must know where to find the proper shop. There is not enough of advertisement, but the aboriginals don't suffer by lack of cakes. Some shops are opened till 8 h p.m. but you must know them. 6 p.m. is the time when the Czechs have their dinner; we get up early (at 5 or 6 a.m.) since the times of Kaiser Franz Josef who couldn't sleep and he forced his subordinates to start working in their offices at 4 a.m. - You can be in a situation that you want to do some shopping and you can't for example in Paris as well - if you don't know the proper places and time.

Women were pleased on Berková's TV play on women because it gave an adequate image of their lives; but it of course doesn't mean that there were no plays on women! But their problems were faked, "seen through the pink eye-glasses", but it was the same with the problems of men, workers, any profession, Gipsies, Slovaks... with any problem at all.

I see that this letter is abundantly long and there is a lot of other topics and questions to be discussed... if you wish I could try to analyze the situation more thoroughly, find out the numbers, values, tables, interview some interesting persons... I don't deny that women do have severe problems in our country, but I didn't even start to write about them.





LOT OF
SUCCESS



LOT OF FUN



1991



Happy New Year

