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Dolls in Fragments: *Daisies* as Feminist Allegory

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As director Vera Chytilová put it, “Each of my films has met a certain resistance on the part of authority.”¹ *Daisies* [Sedmikrásky] (Czechoslovakia, 1966) was no exception. Denounced by state deputies in Czechoslovakia for “hav[ing] nothing in common with our Republic, socialism, and the ideals of communism,”² *Daisies* was initially banned and only eventually allowed public screening, and Chytilová herself was barred from filmmaking from 1969 to 1975.

The product of a collaboration between three premier filmmakers of the Czech New Wave (Chytilová, Ester Krumbachová, and Jaroslav Kucera),³ *Daisies* turns upon the picaresque exploits of two beautiful girls, Marie 1 and Marie 2 (played by two nonactors, Jitka Cerhová and Ivana Karbanová, respectively), whose destructive antics are rendered in an episodic narrative that ends by punishing them for their many infractions and inability to reform. In interviews and historical documents, Chytilová has always maintained that she intended *Daisies* to be a coded critique of its protagonists. In her view, the socialist bureaucrats who denounced it for celebrating its depraved hero-

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ines—and for food wastage—were misreading the film. Far from upholding the two Maries as role models, Chytilová claims the film is a morality play, a “grotesque” or distorted comedy that condemned its unruly heroines on ethical grounds.⁴

I begin by sketching the debate between Chytilová and the government detractors whose severe disapproval kept this brilliant, singular director from film production for six years. Working within the constraints of state-supervised film production in the Czech New Wave of the 1960s, Chytilová fashioned a “properly revolutionary” critique of the insipid bourgeois existence of the fashion model, a theme that she had pursued in a prior film. Despite Chytilová’s insistence that the film be seen as a moral allegory critical of its heroines, socialist censors took issue with the film’s depiction (and seeming celebration) of dissipated youth.

The crux of my argument is this: *Daisies* can be read multivalently as enabling both a critique of the heroines’ excesses (corresponding to the state-approved screenplay and Chytilová’s declared intentions) and a latent feminist delight in the heroines’ ability to effect reversals in the patriarchal order. This study espouses a counterreading of *Daisies* that corresponds neither to the director’s account nor to the censors’ ill-considered objections to the film. While my allegorical reading of the film might be at variance with declared authorial intent, it remains appreciative of that strong chord of defiance in *Daisies* that government officials were quick to impugn and Chytilová eager to gainsay. My counterreading of the film discerns, beneath *Daisies*’s apparent condemnation of its heroines, a feminist allegory in which the doll metaphor is retooled as a celebration of female recalcitrance.

The second and third sections explore *Daisies*’s extensive use of the doll as an allegorical device that encompasses the heroines’ various allusions to marionettes, fashion mannequins, and youthful feminine artifice. The discrepancy between Chytilová’s avowed intentions and the socialist censors’ response to *Daisies*—the film appears to excoriate the Maries on the one hand while celebrating them on the other—is owing to the double-tiered signification of allegory, a mode whose obliqueness has often

appealed to artists working in the context of political repression. *Daisies's* use of the doll-heroine accounts for the film's profound ambivalence toward its dual protagonists: the doll is the perfect satirical device with which to caricature women so vacant and self-indulgent they are practically living dummies; yet the doll is also a concrete instantiation of an overtly patriarchal ideal of femininity. For all its appropriateness to a project that seeks to find fault with two wayward girls, the doll metaphor proves to be a double-edged trope. In this, *Daisies* resembles the work of feminist writers Angela Carter (1940–92) and Rosario Ferré (b. 1938), whose respective stories “The Loves of Lady Purple” (1974) and “The Youngest Doll” (1976 in Spanish, 1991 in English) turn the tables on the conventional association of dolls with docile femininity.

While consumption and destruction are the elements of the film most often remarked by film reviewers, in the final portion of my discussion I focus instead on *Daisies's* thematic and formal preoccupation with collage and fragmentation in relation to an ironizing of gender performances. Chytilová has stated that the film's theme—an ethical critique of its destructive protagonists—was inextricable from its form: “The form of the film was really derived from the conceptual basis of the film. Because the concept of the film was destruction, the form became destructive as well.”²⁵ The “destructive form” that *Daisies* employs, with breathtaking results, is collage, a result of cinematographer Jaroslav Kucera's experiments with this technique. *Daisies's* surrealist motifs of montage and collage are epitomized in striking images of the heroines' bodies splintered and recomposed. These formal strategies suggest an appropriation of surrealist tenets—incongruity and surprise, the denial of mimetic representation, and the revelatory power of fragmentation—by a Czech feminist filmmaker. Though collage as a formal strategy was meant to support the film's cautionary warning against vacuity, it also serves to unmask gender attributes as naturalized masquerade. The formal devices of fragmentation (in sound, image, and spatio-temporality), as well as the narrative depiction of cutting and dismemberment, underscore the film's allegorical presentation of the heroines as transgressive assemblages of gender attributes.

Contested Intentions, or “A Philosophical Documentary in the Form of a Farce”

Antonin J. Liehm describes the predicament of the filmmaker in Czechoslovakia’s state-controlled film industry during the period of the Czech New Wave:

The artist in a nationalized film industry wages a constant struggle with his first viewer and producer in one person, the political establishment. . . .

Every attempt to create a work of art will lead him into direct contact with the establishment, where official taste, financial resources, and political interests of the moment are the court of first and last resort. This contact always implies conflict, in which the artist’s social sensitivity is formed and honed.⁶

The observation that Czech filmmakers in a state-controlled film industry often found themselves pitted against the political establishment’s official taste is particularly true of *Daisies*.⁷ “I am exhausted from all the commotion with *Daisies*,” Chytilová admitted wearily to one interviewer. “When you look back, you suddenly see all the energy they robbed you of, all the time, and how little got done in the long run. . . . One wages a constant, eternal struggle with external conditions for the opportunity to work.”⁸

Six years after the completion of *Daisies*, a “complex assessment” by a party committee recommended the termination of Chytilová’s contract with Barrandov Film Studio on the grounds that her films were “experimental by nature, uncommitted and pessimistic,” “elitist,” and appreciated mostly by western critics and film festivals. This assessment of her work was vehemently and movingly opposed by Chytilová in a letter written to President Gustav Husak in 1975. Responding to the commission’s allegations that she “lacked a positive attitude to socialism” and had failed to “underst[and] the contemporary cultural policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia,” Chytilová defended “the artist’s right to experiment” and insisted that all of her films are “*engagé* and therefore cannot be [politically] uncommitted.” Chytilová maintained that opposition to her work was rooted in

misogyny: “The real problem . . . lay elsewhere. I was a *female* film director.”⁹

Chytilová’s 1975 letter to the president remains an astonishing historical document of the vicissitudes faced by filmmakers of the Czech New Wave. With a palpable air of frustration, Chytilová notes that she was prevented from participating in several international women’s film festivals to which she had been invited.¹⁰ However, despite the fact that she had clearly gained an international reputation as a feminist filmmaker and had lost favor at home on those grounds, Chytilová’s characterization of her intentions in *Daisies* is conspicuously silent on the question of women’s concerns:

Daisies was a morality play showing how evil does not necessarily manifest itself in an orgy of destruction caused by war, that its roots may lie concealed in the malicious pranks of everyday life. I chose as my heroines two young girls because it is at this age that one most wants to fulfill oneself and, if left to one’s own devices, his or her need to create can easily turn into its very opposite.¹¹

This is in keeping with Chytilová’s statements to a French film critic several years earlier. In a 1966 interview, Chytilová described *Daisies* as a “philosophical documentary in the form of a farce,” a “bizarre comedy with strands of satire and sarcasm with regard to the two heroines,” whom she defined as

Parasites. Not only in relation to others, but also, and this is fundamental, in relation to themselves. . . . We [the filmmakers] would like to unveil the futility of life in the erroneous circle of pseudo-relations and pseudo-values, which necessarily leads to the emptiness of vital forms, in the pose either of corruption, or of happiness.¹²

Daisies’s distant and disparaging view of its mannequinlike heroines is reminiscent of the narrative of the “reformed fashion model” Chytilová pursued in *Ceiling* (1961), her graduation film from FAMU (filmová a televizní fakulta AMU), the state film school located in Prague. Like that earlier film, *Daisies* is a para-

ble about the ills of bourgeois acquisitiveness and materialism (symbolized by the two Maries' obsessive and ultimately destructive consumption). This properly "revolutionary" narrative was present at the level of the screenplay in *Ceiling*, though Czech film critic Joseph Skvorecky notes that even in that early film Chytilová's avant-garde innovations undermined the script's moralistic core: "Although the schematic morality remained, the director blunted it by completely shifting the emphasis to form."¹³ Skvorecky found *Ceiling*'s emphasis on "Rosseauvian communion" deplorably didactic, exemplifying the "then fashionable 'return to the people for cathartic purposes,'"¹⁴ and considered Chytilová's clear allusion to *Ceiling* in *Daisies* to be unmistakably ironic in tone.

I quote Skvorecky's views on the film at some length because his illuminating commentary recognizes that *Daisies*'s "mischievous" tone is both constrained and produced by the realities of the nationalized Czech film industry of the 1960s. He is the only commentator on *Daisies* to engage with two key issues that most others miss: the ironic quality of the film and the overdetermined and possibly strategic nature of Chytilová's professed intentions regarding *Daisies*. He writes:

According to Vera [Chytilová]'s words, *Daisies* was supposed to be "a bizarre comedy with shades of satire and sarcasm oriented toward both the protagonists." It certainly was a bizarre comedy, *but I am not sure whether the satirical quill really aimed at the two impish main characters*. Also, I am not sure that the film really is "a parable on the destructive force of nihilism and senseless provocation," but it certainly is an excellent, rich, boldly and mischievously made film. It begins with a montage: a nuclear explosion, tanks destroying houses. *I suspect that the authoresses added the grandiose introduction as a counter-measure against probable later criticism (their intuitions were warranted)*. . . . The spectacle culminates when the girls manage to stuff themselves into a food elevator in a hotel and get into a banquet hall, obviously prepared for some official overindulgence. They begin by eating and end in a cream-cake battle. *At this point comes the final joke; it is de facto self-ridicule aimed against the moralistic end of Vera's first film Ceiling, about the reformed model*. The girls realize what they have done, and instantly reform. In a dream scene, the

girls, whose effect is enhanced by decelerated camera action, dressed in clothes made out of newspaper (symbol of “proper conviction”), sweep up the mess in a deadly tempo, arranging the ruined remnants of the hors d’oeuvres and cakes on the soiled tablecloths.¹⁵

I am entirely in agreement with Skvorecky that *Daisies* must be seen in an ambivalent and tacitly adversarial relation to the dictates of state-supervised film production. Seen in this light, it becomes possible for him to suggest that *Daisies*’s credit sequence, whose footage of explosions and air strikes links the heroines’ consumption to social destruction,¹⁶ might be a knowing attempt to avert criticism. Given the atmosphere of intense censorship surrounding the productions of the Czech New Wave, Skvorecky’s remarks suggest that the film, as well as the discourse of authorial intent surrounding it, are not straight communicative performances. This might help explain why Chytilová, on whose vehement feminism film reviewers and scholars constantly remark, repeatedly articulates the philosophical critiques at work in *Daisies* but remains surprisingly silent about the feminist content so often detected in the work.¹⁷ In stressing the overdetermined nature of *Daisies*’s regard for its heroines, it is not even necessary to impute conscious calculation or canniness to the filmmakers, as Skvorecky does. The nationalized, state-controlled film industry simultaneously provided conditions of possibility and exerted productive constraints upon *Daisies* and its director; given that the film was censored for seeming to endorse its unruly heroines, maintaining the converse is an understandable and expected line of defense.

Daisies’s avowed critique of its overindulgent heroines notwithstanding, the film was, for a time, prevented from exhibition due to official outcry over the “wastage of food.” Deputy Pruzinec, a member of the National Assembly, attacked *Daisies*’s depiction of food orgies “at a time when our farmers with great difficulties are trying to overcome the problems of our agricultural production.”¹⁸ Many Czechs at the time considered this to be an “unbelievable” interpretation of the film. Public support for the film finally convinced the government to allow its screen-

ing, but the entire debacle gives the point to the postdedication of *Daisies*: “This film is dedicated to all those soured by the sight of trampled down lettuce—only!”¹⁹

At the conclusion of a December 2000 panel discussion featuring Chytilová, I asked her what she felt might be the real reasons for the censoring of *Daisies*, given the fact that its screenplay had received state approval. Chytilová responded first by saying that in the context of an economic crisis the food wastage issue was a provocative one: “At that time there was a serious economic crisis, and they found it really outrageous that food should be trampled on in this movie, and this did come up in parliament.” But when I expressed surprise that a state-approved screenplay would still have come under such bitter attack, she remarked that government officials had not really understood the script they approved and thus only registered their protest upon seeing the finished product: “They [the government officials] just understood it on the most realistic level as a bad example for children and women to follow, and [as a result, felt they had to maintain] that Czech youth is not as bad as this.”²⁰ According to Chytilová, the censors thought she was holding up these improper heroines as role models and were unable to decode the fact that the film was actually a critique of the heroines.

The fact that the narrative of reformed models in *Daisies* somehow failed to circumvent state censorship suggests to me that the film operates on an entirely different semantic level, one that was not quite amenable to establishment socialism. In my view, a subtle allegorical structure underlies the film; its antinomies are provoked by the double-tiered significations at work. That is, if allegory “says one thing and means another,” in Angus Fletcher’s cogent phrase,²¹ then it becomes possible for *Daisies* to indict its heroines on one level while reveling in their transgressions on another.

***Daisies* Reconsidered: Feminist Allegory**

Allegory “destroys the normal expectation we have about language, that our words ‘mean what they say.’” It is an “ironic usage” capable of “subverting language” by pointing toward a meaning “other than what the open and direct statement tells the reader.”²² In contrast to other ways of “organizing the attribution of meaning” that consider meaning as “something inherent, to be drawn out of the depths of the object itself,” allegory “takes a figural view of meaning.”²³ The figural approach to meaning put forward by allegorical interpretation eschews the notion of the inherence or immanence of meaning in a text. The figural relationship between two orders of meaning in allegory (in which the discrepancy between the two levels is a precondition to the allegorical) allows us to see why a seeming antinomy between two orders of interpretation can be maintained by the same work. *Daisies* denounces its heroines (thus placating the socialist state censor) while also celebrating them and ridiculing the dogmatic moralism prescribed by the state. This double strategy may have unsettled the censors; it certainly opens up the film to a feminist reappropriation. Skvorecky’s reading of an ironic, subversive undercurrent in the film is thus implicitly allegorical and is in fact a penetrating recognition of the political astuteness of allegory. As Fletcher reminds us, allegory

appears to express conflict between rival authorities, as in times of political oppression we may get “Aesop-language” to avoid censorship of dissident thought. At the heart of any allegory will be found this conflict of authorities. . . . Allegories are far less often the dull systems that they are reputed to be than they are symbolic power struggles.²⁴

Artists contending with political repression have frequently made use of the artfulness of allegory. The strictures of nationalized filmmaking were also paradoxically productive, inspiring “an oblique, coded film culture” that “could tell quiet, often painful truths,” qualities that a film industry subjected to the vicissitudes of the marketplace could never have sustained.²⁵

The political adroitness of allegory derives from what scholars have called a “disjunction of meanings,” the “apprehension” of which “require[s] at least two attitudes of mind,”²⁶ a “larger degree of manifest incompatibility between the tenor and the vehicle” than is usual in other forms of figurative language.²⁷ To the degree that this disjunction between tenor and vehicle results in a similar schism between meanings or interpretive stances, allegory addresses a tiered audience, some of whom see what others do not. J. Hillis Miller reminds us that etymologically, allegory

means to speak figuratively, or to speak in other terms, or to speak of other things in public, from the Greek *allegorein*, *allos*, other, plus *agoreuein*, to speak (in public), from *agora*, an assembly, but also the marketplace or customary place of assembly. . . . The word *allegory* always implies not only the use of figures, but a making public, available to profane ears, of something which otherwise would remain secret.²⁸

Thinking of allegory as a “public secret,” spoken to many yet understood only by a few, accounts for its prevalent, dissident use as a disguised challenge to authority and censorship. Allegory as a mode lends itself to selective revelation, making certain meanings available to those attuned to its forked expression.

In *Daisies*, the allegorical drive toward figural interpretation is first provoked by the two Maries themselves. In the pivotal early scene following the film’s credit sequence, the girls resolve that, since the world is spoiled, “we’ll be spoiled too.” Referring to themselves as “dolls that no one understands,” and resolving henceforth upon unruliness, the two heroines combine a powerful use of the double (Marie 1 and 2 as blond and brunet mirrors for one another) with the image of the marionette. In our first glimpse of them, the young women sit side by side, sunbathing in bikinis, but their slumped posture, their backs against a fence and their arms and legs akimbo, suggests the limpness of dolls or puppets who cannot stand for themselves and thus need to be propped up against a wall. (See image on page 36.) The two Maries sit facing the camera, and their positions are exactly alike as the scene begins.

The prologue's striking use of the double establishes not only a pervasive thematic concern but also introduces *Daisies*'s consistent use of the two-shot, which underscores the notion of the dual protagonist (the actions of the two Maries, whether together or apart, must always be seen as dialectically linked). The scene begins the film with the striking conceit of two marionettes who recognize their status as dolls and decide to act spoiled—to embody in extreme form the conventional image of overindulged femininity, linked by semantic association to refractory children whose unmanageability is accompanied by a disposition to resist.

In this early scene by the pool, the movements of the two girls are paced and deliberate, every movement punctuated by creaking noises on the soundtrack, as though their joints were stiff and in need of oiling. Marie 2, the brunet, attempts to play the trumpet, but this results in a discordant sound. Dismayed, she complains to Marie 1, the blond, that she “can’t do anything well,” as the image track briefly intercuts a building façade collapsing, as if from an explosion or an upheaval. The rest of the scene unfolds in long take, framed as a two-shot in which Marie 1 on the left mirrors, in movement or speech, Marie 2 on the right.

MARIE 1: A doll! I’m like a doll, aren’t I? I’m a doll.

MARIE 2: Uh-huh.

MARIE 1: You understand?

MARIE 2: Nobody understands anything.

MARIE 1: Nobody understands us!

MARIE 2: Everything’s being spoiled in this world.

MARIE 1: Everything?

MARIE 2: Everything . . .

MARIE 1: . . . in this world.

MARIE 2: [Leans forward excitedly.] You know, if everything’s spoiled . . .

MARIE 1: [Excited. Drum roll.] Well?

MARIE 2: We'll—

MARIE 1: Be spoiled—

MARIE 2: Too—

MARIE 1: Us, too.

[Their movements have progressively quickened and they have shifted with each line until they are on their knees facing each other.]

MARIE 2: Right?

MARIE 1: Does it matter? (*Vadí?*)

MARIE 2: It doesn't matter. (*Nevadí.*)

In his insightful close reading of the film, Peter Hames remarks the “marionette-style limb and hand movements” of the two Maries, who “sit like static dolls in bikinis,” playing “a game of ‘It matters?’ ‘It doesn’t matter’ (*Vadí?* ‘*Nevadí.*’),” a game which, repeated in many forms throughout the film, leads to the girls’ downfall.²⁹ The rhyming gestures, accompanied by creaking noises on the soundtrack, indeed underscore an impression of mechanized action, rigidity, and lack of spontaneity that contrasts starkly with the wayward escapades that follow. This first image of the girls as marionettes who have embarked upon a deadly game suggests that the motifs of the two Maries as double protagonists and the recurrence of the nihilistic game are linked. The dialectic of affirmation and denial of validity that recurs throughout the film in the game of ‘*Vadí?*’ ‘*Nevadí.*’ necessarily requires that the game be played by two.

We meet these two girls in medias res, at the very moment of their recognition of their status as dolls and their ensuing commitment to unruliness and to a cavalier questioning of existence; we as spectators know nothing of their lives before. The prologue introduces our heroines to us at the moment of their decision to vacillate between an assertion of meaningfulness and a generalized futility (“Does it matter?” / “It doesn’t matter”), whether in reference to the “spoiled world” or to their own “spoiled” actions. The film, which traces the consequences of their play, is book-

ended by this game. In *Daisies*'s last scene before the epilogue, the girls undermine their self-satisfied attempts at reform by first reflecting happily on their ability to "put everything to rights," and then concluding once again that this achievement is of no significance. Marie 1 declares, "We are really, truthfully happy." When Marie 2 counters, "But it doesn't matter," the chandelier hurtles toward them, and their game is at an end (See image on page 6).

The image of the marionette pervades *Daisies* and is not restricted to those sequences in the prologue and denouement in which the Maries are portrayed as puppetlike, through stylized movement and the mechanized, rigid quality of marionettes and automatons. The likeness of the two protagonists to dolls is key to the rest of the film's allegorical critique of the emptiness of surface appearances.

Slim, vibrant, and always stylishly dressed, the two young girls at once suggest that other mannequin, the fashion model. Several scenes in dressing rooms, as well as witty images that overtly parody fashion shows, make obvious this aspect of the doll metaphor in *Daisies*. In one sequence set in the countryside, the two Maries, fresh from the city, are shown emerging from a pile of debris. The brilliance of Krumbachová's production design is nowhere more evident than in the ironic clothing of the heroines. Marie 2 is shown wearing a gigantic hat whose brim supports a pile of wood shavings. She pouts and poses, making the incongruous allusion to extravagant and outlandish high fashion ensembles unmistakable. At the same time, Marie 1 is shown wearing a stole composed of fencing wire, and a rapid montage of fashion stills in which women's faces are seductively shadowed by voile or mesh veils underscores the reference. Later, in the banquet room where the girls commit their most serious crimes, they trample upon a rich feast in high-heeled shoes, sauntering up and down the dinner table-turned-runway in makeshift clothes intended to mimic a white bridal gown and a diaphanous cocktail dress. In such scenes, the motif of dolls and the theme of destruction/consumption intersect, resulting in an allegorical critique of the facile pleasures of childish women oblivious to ethical considerations.

Toward the middle of the film, the two girls revert to the marionette movements of the prologue. In a stylized choreography of hops and shuffles, punctuated by staccato notes in the soundtrack, the two girls face the camera side by side as in the prologue, ostensibly speaking to each other but giving an unmistakable impression that camera and viewers are being directly addressed. Bored with their lives, they ask, “Shouldn’t we try other places?” “Do you mind? (*Vadí?*)” “I don’t mind (*Nevadí*),” the other replies. “One should try anything once!” they assert in unison. The next scene finds them in the countryside, stealing corn from farmers and trying unsuccessfully to catch the attention of workmen. Dejected by their inability to arouse the interest of the men in the village, they are plunged briefly into despair: “I thought we had disappeared into thin air!” Their spirits lift when they come upon a heap of discarded corn husks, the remains of their stolen meal. “We do exist after all!”

These provincial sequences, as well as an earlier scene in which the girls regret having stolen tips from a female bathroom attendant, are remarkable for being the only ones in which the girls show any self-criticism or regret. In contrast to all the other secondary characters in the film, the bathroom attendant and the workers in the countryside are spared critique or scorn. Unlike the men who desire the Maries for sexual gratification, the female worker treats them with kindness and the male workers fail to notice them at all. Reflecting on these episodes, the two Maries sometimes question their own selfishness and self-importance, and this critique of the heroines contains an implicit class dimension.

As I mentioned earlier, *Daisies*’s depiction of the heroines’ trip to the rural village has been read as a reference to Chytilová’s graduation film *Ceiling* (1961), in which “the boredom of the model’s life is repeatedly emphasized and seen from a feminist standpoint.” In *Ceiling*, the heroine breaks from “the routine of acting as a living dummy for the dressmaker,” gives up her “superficial and materialistic life,” and takes the train to the countryside.³⁰ Clearly, then, *Daisies* in some sense continues the satirical preoccupations of Chytilová’s earlier work. Chytilová, herself a former fashion model and draftsman before being accepted

into FAMU, might well have considered the fashion model an allegorical cipher for superficiality and excessive consumption, attributes that the double protagonists of *Daisies* possess in abundance.

Looking back at Chytilová's interviews, one notes a conceptual density to her description of the protagonists. As Chytilová puts it, "We made the girls look like dolls or puppets from the beginning because it was our intention to make it clear that this was not a psychological portrayal. This was not actually realistic." Rather, the film is an allegory that expects the viewer to look beneath the surface: "On a superficial level *Daisies* is the story of two girls but it really is an existential story. . . . The idea is that every human action has a basis in ethics and there's absolutely nothing we do that does not have an ethical dimension."³¹

For Chytilová, the two Maries are less characters than ideas interacting: they are ciphers for "pseudo-values" and materialistic excesses. The film's presentation of the two Maries as dolls facilitates this because in Chytilová's hands *Daisies* mobilizes the semantic weight of doll figures as inauthentic for the purposes of social criticism. The two Maries are more akin to superficial mannequins than they are to well-rounded people, and this allows them to embody that "constriction of meaning" that characterizes the allegorical caricature's "transformation of the real into an abstraction." It has been said that "caricature is allegorical in essence, since it strives for the simplification of character in terms of single, predominant traits."³² This allows the heroines to depart from the well-rounded characters of realist convention in order to attain the striking iconographic legibility of personified ideas—the Maries are variously bad bourgeois girls in need of reform or punishment, women so vapid they are literally "living dummies," exempla of infantilized femininity and doll-like abstractions of Woman. Yet for those who apprehend *Daisies* as a feminist allegory, these heroines are captivating not only for their ability to reveal womanliness as naturalized masquerade, but for their decidedly wicked, denaturalized play with these signs.

There is more than one way to read allegory in *Daisies*: to claim, as Chytilová does, that *Daisies* is a veiled critique of the heroines, which the state censors were too obtuse to see; or, to pursuing the very reading that unnerved the censors to its radical conclusion, to note that the film takes a covert satisfaction in the heroines it professes to condemn. The viewer's adjudication regarding the two Mariés is profoundly equivocal, because, as Chytilová maintained, the doll metaphor encourages the viewer to see the heroines not as real people but as types, turning their characters into allegorical agents. In *Daisies*, the flattening out of character in favor of allegorical signification opens the door to semantic uncertainty, to readings other than those the filmmakers authorize.

Thus it would be a mistake to see the narration's tone toward the two madcap heroines as only and always bitingly critical. Rather, my own screenings of the film, as well as the responses of other spectators, lead me to suspect that while viewers are aware of the protagonists' callousness and superficiality, on quite another level a powerful sympathy for the heroines is at work. In certain scenes, we actually root for our spoiled protagonists, if only because their victims are hardly less culpable than they are, and because the girls' excesses are so often seen to effect a reversal in patriarchal gender roles—reversals that viewers often find outrageous, and exceedingly pleasurable for that reason. *Daisies*'s "mocking acrimony" toward "the majority of male characters" allows it to read as feminist satire.³³ Hames's account of the female laughter provoked by *Daisies* is yet again evidence of a powerful feminist undercurrent:

Contemporary Western screenings of the film are often accompanied by exclusively feminine laughter. Equally, male viewers frequently feel an antipathy toward the film's "heroines." This division no doubt relates partly to the fact that the film is on target and partly to a sense of humor that is sometimes only "seen" by one-half of the audience. . . . Also, the girls fail to conform to the stereotypes expected by a male audience. . . . socialism in Czechoslovakia tended to institutionalize existing inequalities between the sexes, and *Daisies* certainly constitutes an attack on some identifiable targets.³⁴

Hames's account resembles my personal experience of viewing this film. At the screening where I first encountered *Daisies*, a concerned male viewer expressed his objections to the film's protagonists, whom he characterized as "annoyingly babyish, infantile girls." Even then I felt that his understandable reading of the film—as confirming misogynist stereotypes about women as vain, frivolous creatures—merely skimmed the surface of a nuanced text whose objectionable heroines are paradoxically a source of glee for many women. In later screenings and conversations with others about this film, I began to recognize the contours of a particular feminist reception of *Daisies*. This reception, only one of many possible feminist readings, is characterized by delight in the diabolical heroines' capacity to controvert gender expectations even when they appear to uphold them and by a double-tiered, allegorical reading of the film that allows the monstrosity of these unruly girls to come across as powerfully women-positive. It was this first glimpse of *Daisies*'s radical disingenuousness regarding gender performance that prompted my examination of allegory's entanglement with feminist reception.

I differ, however, with Hames's suggestion that the film necessarily divides opinion along gender lines. I hold that both vectors of meaning can be simultaneously apparent to spectators. For instance, while one writer's reading of *Daisies* accords with Chytilová's assertion that the film is about the philosophical questions of nihilism and parasitism, she nevertheless remarks that *Daisies* manifests a "reconsideration of the conventional female role. . . . Chytilová exhaustingly takes into account the symptoms of the whole syndrome."³⁵ The interpretive double vision provoked by allegory might explain the feminist reception of *Daisies*. One female reviewer writes appreciatively of Chytilová's "gifts of mockery" and notes, "the woman's angle was, of course, also crucial to the vision in *Daisies*, an extraordinary film partly because of the astonishing ways it handles sexual politics, and the two odd female figures at its center."³⁶ Despite the distance at which the two girls are perceived and the film's seemingly scathing take on their unscrupulousness, *Daisies* cannot be understood as funda-

mentally averse to its heroines. Rather, it adroitly characterizes the place of women (a position that is in many ways analogous to the condition of a marionette or mannequin) in the society of its day.

Thus, rather than see the heroines exclusively within the ambit of Chytilová's intended critique of superficial female mannequins, I am concerned with *Daisies's* use of dolls as idealized simulacra of a patriarchal conception of femininity. I read *Daisies* as a narrative of recalcitrant dolls who realize the limits of their position and set out to overperform their constructed characteristics to the point of severe infractions against the very masculine establishment that set the terms of their subjectivity. Their strategy is not to stop being dolls; rather, the two Maries set out to wear their femininity with all the self-awareness and hyperbole of masquerade, so that they move from docility (their limpness in the prologue) to defiance (hence, their tragic end). The tale of dolls that awaken to a life of subversion links Chytilová and Krumbachová's film to other texts that deploy the figure of the doll toward feminist critique, such as the short stories of the British fictionist Angela Carter and the Latin American writer Rosario Ferré.

Dolls in Feminist Satire

Rosario Ferré's short story "The Youngest Doll" is the tale of a Puerto Rican woman who successfully escapes her unsatisfying marriage by installing a doll who looks exactly like her to "pass" in her place. The story takes its name from an aging maiden aunt's practice of crafting increasingly realistic dolls in the image of her many nieces. As her young wards get married one by one, the aunt gives each of them an "exuberant doll made in their image and likeness," with the cryptic words, "Here is your Easter Sunday." With the family's fortunes failing fast, the youngest niece marries a pretentious doctor who sees her only as a trophy wife and exploits her aristocratic pedigree to attract a growing patient clientele. But the doctor proves to be as unfeeling as he is cynical, and on the day he pries out and pawns the doll's diamond pupils,

he destroys the last shred of his wife's regard for him, as well as obliterating the only trace of difference between his bride and her doll. Soon after, his wife tells him that the doll was consumed by ants. Several years later, the doctor, gray with age, notices that his wife's beauty seems impervious to time and realizes that his wife long ago made good use of her "Easter Sunday." She has managed a kind of death and resurrection, embarking on a new life by installing her porcelain double, the youngest doll, in her place.³⁷

Ksenija Bilbija's thoughtful study of this text situates Ferré's doll amid the representation of other kinds of human simulacra, like golems and cyborgs. Surveying the representation of male and female doubles in myth and literature, Bilbija finds that such doubles function differently based on two factors: their own gender and the gender of their owners or makers. Whereas male golems, like Frankenstein, demand an equality with their maker that frequently leads to patricide, the female golem is not traditionally seen to vie for authority with her proprietor but rather to function as a "sexual surrogate."³⁸

Contrary to male golems, female golems have diligently crafted and perfected bodies, while their souls/minds receive almost no attention whatsoever. Their purpose, consequently, is not to engage in a sophisticated debate with their Demiurge, but to please him sexually. . . . In the case of a woman, it is usually a girl who plays with dolls and through the game learns about motherhood and other activities related to the domestic sphere of life. However, in the case of a mature man, she fulfills the role of a sexual surrogate and is highly eroticized. In both cases, the doll is a hybrid simulacrum which endlessly repeats the image of the woman as object.³⁹

Like the youngest doll of Ferré's story, Marie 1 and Marie 2 in *Daisies* epitomize a decidedly arch manipulation of the iconography of the attractive young woman as a "doll." In three different restaurant scenes that punctuate the film, we see the girls inveigle rich, older men into paying for an extravagant meal in expectation of sexual favors the two girls manage never to deliver. In this regard they resemble Ferré's trickster doll, whose stratagem affords the woman an avenue of escape from oppressive marital

demands. In all three of *Daisies's* restaurant scenes, the girls' imposture is evident in their use of assumed names—Marie 2 is Jirinko with one old man and Marcela with another, while Marie 1, posing invariably as Marie 2's sister, goes by the name of Jarmila with one man and Julie with another suitor. The two supposed sisters stage a convincing (and for the spectator, hilarious) drama in which Marie 1 discovers Marie 2 on a date with a much older, and very likely married, man, and Marie 2, visibly embarrassed and fearful of her sister's disapproval, pleads silently with her lover to invite the suspicious sister to share their meal. Once seated, Marie 1 takes cruel advantage of their victim by ordering an incredible amount of food and wine on his bill. Marie 2 pretends embarrassment at her sister's rude behavior but clearly enjoys the joke tremendously, and the two consume huge amounts, smiling broadly, while their unwitting patron grows increasingly outraged.



These long sequences, which make frequent use of jump cuts, abrupt shifts in sound, and changes in color tinting to signify the interminable length of the meal, are framed mostly as a three-shot in which Marie 2 sits facing the camera while the other two sit in profile on opposite sides of her at the table, each exercising their claims upon her. The composition accentuates the triangulated situation and emphasizes the work of deception, as we clearly see Marie 2's conspiratorial exchange of looks with Marie 1, as well as her imploring glances at the older man. The suitor finds Marie 1 obnoxious; he is enraged by her overeating at his expense and at her pointed questions about his exact age or whether he has any children. In one scene, Marie 1 interrupts the old suitor as he caresses Marie 2, skewering his hand with her fork and asking, "How old is your old woman?" The role playing between the two Maries in the restaurant scenes is clear: Marie 1 is cast as the termagant, Marie 2 the coy maiden. When signaling to her sister, Marie 2 is giddily alert, but when responding to the man, she speaks with downcast eyes, silent and shocked at her sister's excesses. The restaurant scenes end always with the concerned question, "What time is your train?" as the girls strive to be rid of their victim on the pretext of helping him catch his train on time. The sequences at the train station that inevitably follow the restaurant scenes are a marvel in their inversion of cinematic clichés about heartbroken women seeing their sweethearts off as a train departs. Typically, Marie 2 waves goodbye to her sister while on the train with her relieved suitor, who believes that his ordeal at the restaurant will finally be recompensed when he is alone with the girl and able to exact sexual favors. The girls frustrate this plot time and again, with Marie 2 always managing to join Marie 1 as the train departs.

The restaurant and train scenes, in which the girls are shown at the heights (or depths) of their economic parasitism and utter lack of compassion, are nevertheless enjoyable because of their subversion of the usual ruse of male seduction. The two sisters working together reverse the expected story of a knowing older man cheating on his wife with a naive younger woman whom he treats only as a sexual object to be discarded after use.

In *Daisies*, it is not the ingenues who are taken in; rather the joke is on the men, who all the while attempt to delude themselves that they are successfully passing as young and unmarried. This gender reversal makes *Daisies* kin to “The Youngest Doll,” which reverses the cliché about the worldly suitor who dupes a virginal girl. The canny girls of *Daisies* and “The Youngest Doll” realize that their suitors are incapable of distinguishing between the women in their lives and their constricted fantasy of Woman; it is this hegemonic blindness that allows our defiant heroines to “pass” unscathed.

Cynical in the extreme, Marie 2 consummately embodies (or convincingly passes for) a proper young lady who fears the scandalous consequences of her impropriety should it become known that she has had an illicit affair. “She’ll say I go around with old men!” she wails to one suitor as she weeps on his shoulder, expecting comfort from the man she has just insulted. Likewise, Marie 1 is shown to be remorseless, unmoved by the entreaties of her young suitor, a butterfly collector (the butterfly is “a specifically Czech reference to sex.”)⁴⁰ In one scene, the two Mariés listen to the young man’s ardent pleading over the telephone while biting into and cutting apart various phallic objects. As the young man lyricizes about true love on the receiver, the Mariés, unmoved, gorge themselves in a bedroom picnic staged to convey a steady stream of castration jokes—pickles, sausages, bananas, and eggs are sliced, skewered, scissored, knifed, and devoured as the suitor pleads and cajoles. As was the case with the older men at the restaurants, the film suggests some justification for the girls’ severity toward the young man. The butterfly collector is characterized as wooing Marie 1 with poetic platitudes while betraying ungentlemanly motives: He pretends to throw a lover’s tantrum in the hopes of forcing Marie 1 to take off the clothes she has just put back on. Ultimately, he cannot contain himself and rather rudely plucks the butterfly from the picture frame Marie 1 uses to conceal her crotch.

In their condign indifference to the feelings of their lovers, the two heroines are reminiscent of both Angela Carter’s Lady Purple, a “prostitute upon whom men prostituted themselves,”⁴¹ and Rainer Maria Rilke’s terrible doll, that “alien body

for which we have wasted our purest warmth.”⁴² For Rilke, his childhood doll was a tormentor who sat cruelly unmoved by his affection. In contrast, in Chytilová’s and Carter’s narratives the indifferent doll does not stand accused for her disdain of male lovers; rather, *Daisies* and “The Loves of Lady Purple” take a certain delight in the fact that the women’s unresponsiveness, their lack of need for men, is finally more terrifying to their suitors than castration anxiety.

The figure of the indifferent doll becomes charged with feminist satire because it reverses the usual scenario in which men find themselves affirmed by the attentions of a charming young creature. The heroines are to some extent confident in their cruelty because they know that, no matter how immoderate their actions, they can always count on their suitors to reify them into signs that are immediately legible to patriarchy as shrews or as damsels. Their cunning ruse is that their seeming legibility as icons—a girl so pretty she’s a doll, or an inane young woman easily duped by romantic platitudes—is profoundly at odds with their intractable, knowing deployment of these signs.

Fashionably outfitted in thigh-length dresses and coiffed in the styles of the day, the two Maries, young, beautiful, and high-spirited, attract lovers by the dozen because they seem an intensification of Woman, a quintessence of erotic femininity. Doll narratives very often share this conception of the doll as a distillation of erotic womanliness, and the story line frequently turns on questions of sexual transgression or propriety. The desirous men in these narratives are enamored of a thing (“Woman”) wholly other to their masculinity that yet demands to be possessed as an extension of themselves. Stories of male makers smitten with the artificial women they create are essentially stories about an obsession with a female muse who embodies an entirely patriarchal conception of feminine perfection.

Carter’s “The Loves of Lady Purple,” the story of a marionette courtesan who comes alive and kills her aging puppet master, thematizes the circularity of what Judith Butler calls gender’s “regulatory fictions.” The Lady Purple, a magnificent, life-size marionette, is the star of a play about a whore so cruel, amoral, and lustful that she finally loses her humanity and becomes

petrified into the very puppet that performs the play. The tautologies of the story reach their peak when the doll becomes animate, murders her proprietor, and sets out in search of a bordello. The story's ambivalence toward Lady Purple resembles *Daisies's* treatment of the two Maries in that the celebrated moment of insurrection is also subjected to a critique of the heroine(s)' limited agency—"Had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette?"⁴³ Carter's resonant question concerning gender parody prefigures the words of Butler: "The parodic repetition of the original . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original."⁴⁴

In *Daisies* as well as in "The Loves of Lady Purple," the women grow aware of their positioning as dolls and strive to rewrite the terms of their gendered selves rather than attempting to go outside these fabrications completely. Like Lady Purple, the two Maries are dolls who awaken to revolt. The image of a marionette who cuts loose from her strings is so potent in feminist satire, because conventionally the puppet is always a placeholder for an "occluded actor." Devoid of agency herself, she is the "site of [a] signification" that originates from someone else, the puppeteer hidden in the wings.⁴⁵ This explains the fascination of the recalcitrant puppet as a figuration of women's anger. Refusing the restraints of occluded patriarchal interests, the Maries are not just dolls who seize their own "Easter Sunday" but mannequins in rebellion. The Maries might be accused of merely duplicating and thereby upholding the very fictions they attempt to expose, but, as Butler cautions, such repetition is inescapable. She writes:

That the power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism seek to augment themselves through a constant repetition of their logic, their metaphysic, and their naturalized ontologies does not imply that repetition itself ought to be stopped—as if it could be. If repetition is bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural production of identities, then the crucial question emerges: What kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?⁴⁶

The question is not, then, *whether* these dolls come alive ought to rehearse their old (im)postures but *how* they stage and manage gender performances that are derived from and yet contrary to hegemonic conceptions. In Carter's description of a scene at a brothel, one notes a deliberate slippage between the streetwalkers as real women paid to perform sexual services and as inanimate simulacra of a feminine ideal. The passage distinguishes between their "real features" and the "symbolic abstraction" of their painted faces, yet blurs the boundaries between them inasmuch as the prostitutes are deliberately posing as "motionless idols." This slippage prefigures Lady Purple's own transformation from woman to puppet, from a prostitute's knowing self-stylization to the petrified eroticism of a female automaton:

Along the streets, the women for sale, the mannequins of desire, were displayed in wicker cages so that potential customers could saunter past inspecting them at leisure. These exalted prostitutes sat *motionless as idols*. Upon their *real features* had been painted *symbolic abstractions* of the various aspects of allure. . . . the gestures of these heterae were as stylized as if they had been clockwork. . . . each one was as absolutely circumscribed as a *figure in rhetoric*, reduced by the rigorous discipline of her vocation to the nameless essence of *the idea of woman*, a metaphysical abstraction of the female which could, on payment of a specific fee, be instantly translated into an oblivion either sweet or terrible, depending on the nature of her talents.⁴⁷

In this passage, Carter puts her finger on what allows a marionette to be mistaken for a woman (as in "The Youngest Doll") and, conversely, on what allows a woman to pass as a doll (as in *Daisies*). The conventional association between dolls and femininity is not owing to the fact that mannequins mirror women but that women are expected to fashion themselves in accordance with "symbolic abstractions" of feminine "allure" to produce themselves in accordance with "the nameless essence of the idea of woman, a metaphysical abstraction of the female" to come as close as possible to resembling "mannequins of desire." The radical character of a feminist appropriation of the doll as figurative Woman is that the seemingly self-evident conception of woman as

given (the “natural” character of femininity) is revealed to be as “absolutely circumscribed as a figure in rhetoric.” In “The Youngest Doll,” this realization leads to subterfuge (a woman lets herself be taken for a doll), while in “The Loves of Lady Purple” the slippage between dolls and women allows a mannequin to awaken to rebellion. Both stratagems—passing and outright defiance—are at work in *Daisies*.

The feminist manipulation of gender repetitions in *Daisies* may explain why the accusations against the two Maries, when seen at one remove, turn against themselves. Rather than evoking the desire to discipline deviance, the film incites support for the heroines’ malfeasance. Put another way, the achievement of *Daisies* as feminist allegory lies in its seeming ability to confirm misogynist views while inciting deep acrimony toward the patriarchal order. Apart from the film’s subversive reiteration of the female muse—the innocent mannequins of childlike beauty turned destructive—what is really extraordinary about *Daisies* is the way that a woman-positive sensibility is accomplished through a seemingly monstrous representation of Woman as a rapacious, vain, and self-indulgent doll. Paradoxically, the antimuse (the diabolical doll), neither pliable nor palatable, is frequently a more eloquent and satisfying representation of women than their idealization (the docile marionette). *Daisies*’s representational politics is not one of positivity but of obstinate monstrosity. Although the narrative regards its heroines in disidentified terms, another kind of engagement for and with misfits is achieved.

Feminism/Surrealism:

Collage, Montage, and Fragmentation

In *Daisies*, disjunctive montage, jump cuts, unstable spatial relations, abrupt changes in color tone to fracture long takes, and a knowing use of sound bridges and matches on action in order to give the impression that the diegesis continues across temporal and spatial ellipses present the spectator with a picaresque narrative that at times seems to border on incoherence. In one fantastic sequence, the two Maries turn their scissors upon each other

in a startling game. One Marie loses her arm and indignantly decapitates the other, whereupon, giggling, they escalate the game and the image on screen breaks into countless shards like a jigsaw puzzle, transforming their bodies into so many energetic, frolicking fragments (despite the visual splintering, the action is still quite visible—the girls chase each other around the room and over the bed, laughing).⁴⁸

This scene is the culmination of a series of preceding sequences that emphasize cutting (of paper, of food) and collage. The girls' apartment is transformed throughout the film, so that their space and its semantic charge is never stable—it is alternately overlaid with leaves (an indoor garden), scribbled over with phone numbers (an address book filled with old lovers), or papered with photographs. In the highly ironic picnic scene I mentioned earlier, the skewering of pickles, cutting of eggs, and biting of sausages is accompanied by choral music and the plaintive sound of a young man's voice addressing Marie 1. The butterfly collector pleads, "Don't be mean to me now you know I love you. . . . Now I know what love means." "Another piece of meat," Marie 2 remarks in a hilarious double entendre. Marie 1, pretending obtuseness, makes as if to plunge her fork into Marie 2's flesh, but Marie 2 protests, and they sate their appetites instead by clipping out paper images of food. Sometime later, as they bathe in their bedroom, Marie 1 muses over the events of the earlier scene, asking, "Why does one say I love you? Why not, for example, an egg?" as she cuts out a magazine photograph of a muscular man, her scissors pausing at his crotch.

These scenes link *Daisies's* motifs of cutting and consumption (castration of men as well as dismemberment of women) to surrealist imagery of the doll-like woman as a female praying mantis that devours its mate.⁴⁹ For male surrealists, the mantis's "voracity made it the perfect symbol of the phallic mother, fascinating, petrifying, castrating."⁵⁰ The characterization of the two protagonists as predatory women thus can be seen as coinciding with the film's thematic and formal concern with severing and recombining elements in the manner of surrealist collage and photomontage, as in the rapidly edited juxtaposition of various still shots that continually irrupt upon the diegesis. In some of

these rapid sequences in *Daisies*, the effect of photomontage is achieved temporally by editing shots of short duration together in quick succession (Chytilová recalls that some portions of *Daisies* were edited frame by frame);⁵¹ in others, this first device of temporal montage is further supplemented by the fact that the images in the shots are themselves collages, thus heightening the frenetic effect. The frenzied impression cultivated in these quickly edited sequences prefigures the delirium of the girls' scissors scene, in which the rapid, fractured quality used to interrupt the diegesis has finally become a part of it, as shards of the girls' bodies quiver and jump across the frame. The scissors scene has been characterized as "a correlative to the film's editing style, itself a fragmented montage."⁵²

It would be a mistake, however, to claim that *Daisies's* use of these formal devices merely sunders relationships between objects, locales, times, and occurrences. Collage and photomontage are linked by their ability to detach elements from their habitual relations in order to connect them in new ways, so that the space between things that find each other in strange company is also at the same time the shared "space of an encounter."⁵³ André Breton described Max Ernst's collages in these terms:

The external object had broken away from its habitual environment. Its component parts had liberated themselves from the object in such a way that they could set up entirely new relationships with other elements, escaping from the reality principle and yet gaining a certain importance on the real plane (disruption of the notion of relation).⁵⁴

Collage resorts to fragmentation and recombination in order to configure a dishabituated object configured in new semantic relationships and therefore open it to disruptive signification. In *Daisies*, sound bridges, color tinting, rhythmic editing, and matches on action correlate divergent spaces and ambiguous chronicities, so that a windfall of green apples from a distant garden thud onto the girls' bedroom; city and village, separated only by a frame, are adjacent playgrounds for the heroines; and the two Maries can merrily conduct an eating orgy at one moment and find themselves drowning in open sea the next.

In its filmic style as well as in the narrative action of the scissors scene, *Daisies* presents us with fragments that, seen as an assemblage, are as eloquent as they are surprising. Rosalind Krauss writes that the “emphatic gaps” between segments are a prerequisite of signification in collage and montage. Both techniques resort to fragmentation because “leaving the blanks or gaps or spaces of the page to show” destroys the realism of photography and results in a “language effect”:

Normally, photography is as far as possible from creating such an effect. . . . By carrying on its continuous surface the trace or imprint of all that vision captures in one glance, photography normally functions as a kind of declaration of the seamlessness of reality itself. It is this seamlessness that dada photocollage disrupts in an attempt to infiltrate reality with interpretation, with signification. . . . To convulse reality from within, to demonstrate it as fractured by spacing, became the collective result of that vast range of techniques to which surrealist photographers resorted and which they understood as producing the characteristics of the sign.⁵⁵

Surrealist collage and montage strove to make images emphatically textual, to destroy the seeming mimicry of film by making the image more like the word. The disjoining and recombining of collage and montage produced linguistic syntax via spacing, fracturing the seamlessness of realism and making the previously whole image speak with the separateness of linguistic signs.⁵⁶ Chytilová’s techniques have, on more than one occasion, been criticized by “orthodox” surrealists.⁵⁷ The point of my argument here is not to establish retrospectively Chytilová as a “found” or heretofore unrecognized surrealist, but rather to trace her particular utilization of techniques associated with surrealist work—the disorienting recombination of fractured elements and the harnessing of shock and surprise for disruptive signification.

Canonical surrealist texts and images by male artists of the 1920s and 1930s (Man Ray, Max Ernst, André Breton, and Hans Bellmer, to name a few) have been accused by some of misogyny, in that the aesthetic devices of fragmentation and distortion for provocative signification have often resulted in brutal images of

mutilated or dismembered women's bodies. A great deal of feminist scholarship on surrealism has insisted on the gendered character of the body on which surrealist experiments are performed.⁵⁸ Woman is the most pervasive surrealist trope and the primary object of the movement's aesthetic arsenal. It comes as no surprise, then, that the fragmentation and disruption of collage were principally aimed at images of women: "The practice of tearing something from its original context in order to associate with some other, similarly decontextualized image was metaphorically realized as brutally sexual defloration, plain and simple."⁵⁹ Feminist critics have therefore charged that patriarchal sexual politics often underpin the surrealist lexicon.⁶⁰

While I do not concur with the view that images of violence against women are necessarily misogynist (as I have argued regarding the scissors scene, a certain violence in relation to girls' bodies is enacted by *Daisies* to feminist ends), I do feel that antipathy toward women is quite pronounced in dolls that might be instructively contrasted with Chytilová, those of surrealist Bellmer. As Breton put it, Bellmer's dolls are images of the "eternal woman, pivot of man's vertigo . . . [as an] adolescent."⁶¹ His doll tableaux of faceless, mangled, often doubled mannequins, their limbs missing, grotesquely multiplied, or bulbously grafted onto one another in images of foul fecundity, enact fantasies of dismemberment.⁶² These malign fantasies, situated on the featureless bodies of life-size female dolls, have been read as figurations of castration anxiety that end by "mitigat[ing] the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which [in a woman] is the cause of the horror."⁶³

To my mind, *Daisies* reads like a radical rejoinder to the animosity toward women found in Bellmer's dolls. Like his dolls, the two Maries are doubled adolescents, mannequin women who engage the castration complex. Yet for all their resemblance to certain aspects of Bellmer's work, they advert to this surrealist vocabulary only to overturn it, as they would confound the accusations Rilke hurled at the cruel indifference of dolls that never returned his regard. Unlike Bellmer's *femme-enfants*, the Maries enact scenarios of castration but do not assuage them. This is

because patriarchal overinvestment in the phallus is viewed in *Daisies* with irony and humor. To a Freudian perspective that sees women primarily in relation to their lack of a penis, the two Maries' jocular laughter as they snip away at sausages and men's undergarments holds out no prospect of solace.

Many feminists have traced the ways in which female surrealists responded to the image of Woman in surrealism as muse (for example, the Automatic Woman of *écriture automatique*, the *femme-enfant*, the *femme sorcière*, and the *femme-végétale*).⁶⁴ Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, in her study of female surrealist writing, asks, "How were they [female surrealists] to respond to images of the female body dismantled, dismembered, aggressed, turned inside out, recomposed to please men's wildest erotic fantasies? . . . Upon what different basis did their own body imagery, which at times seems so similar, disorganized, and often subjected to so much violence, rest?"⁶⁵

An overhead full-length shot reveals the bodies of our heroines in their final hour, laid out on a banquet table. The dolls are terrified, looking up at the chandelier about to come crashing down upon them. Tied with twine in newspaper ensembles, they resemble both papier-mâché figures and trussed roasts of meat, except that they are far from inanimate. The staging of their death is loaded with significance: the two girls, frenzied with dismay, lie side by side like double dishes on a banquet table in a film that emphasizes consumption. This image in *Daisies* calls to



mind surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim's famous roast, *Ma gouvernante* (1936), in which a pair of feminine shoes, white and frilly, are shown trussed like poultry and served on a platter, a telling image of femininity offered up for consumption.⁶⁶ Our unmanageable heroines are meted out harsh medicine—death—yet even here the film manages to unsettle the logic of that punishment. The two Maries, voracious eaters who quashed food under their heels, are themselves reduced to dinner table offerings, but the comic despair on their faces suggests that they could never be made palatable to conventional tastes.

Daisies shares with the work of female surrealists what Cottenet-Hage calls “a redesigning of traditional body representations.” The works of Gisèle Prassinós, Leonora Carrington, and Joyce Mansour contest “the symmetrical body, free of excesses (of flesh, of movement, of color, of expression),” crafting instead “an unstable body, made of parts that can be disassembled and recombined in fanciful ways . . . a grotesque body which calls into question canonical representations, particularly those of the female body.” Such images are radical by negation: “They point to an absent image, that of the harmonious female body, young and chastely naked.”⁶⁷

The unruly bodies of the two Maries, flying piecemeal across their bedroom, resonate with the repertory of surrealist collage but refunction this often patriarchal aesthetic vocabulary for feminism. The Maries' ludic, grotesque bodies dispute the canonical Woman's body. With their nubile yet infantilized dolls' visage, the Maries begin by drawing us in with their nearly flawless approximation of the patriarchal ideal, only to fracture, dismember, and cut up these bodies, forging new significations that contest gendered corporeality.

Cottenet-Hage's question, concerning the differential semantic charge that images of severed women's bodies might have in the work of a woman artist, is particularly relevant to *Daisies*. The trope of bodily segmentation in *Daisies* begins first with castration jokes that literalize masculine anxieties over the predatory woman, but progresses to the corporeal atomization of the protagonists themselves—the female body first splintered, and then rebuilt.

Conclusion

This study has pursued several lines of inquiry in relation to *Daisies*. Given the strictures of the nationalized Czech film industry of the 1960s, Chytilová claimed that the film worked as a disguised denunciation of its heroines, two nonpositive, unethical, and self-absorbed young women who meet with a just, if terrible, end. Yet this declared didacticism is not all that meets the eye: *Daisies* affords an alternative view, one that upholds, with great relish, the defiant unruliness of the heroines the film purports to disparage. This ironic undercurrent in the film, whose potential for radical critique so alarmed socialist censors, is precisely the reading I have attempted to elaborate and redeem. I have argued that the doubleness of *Daisies* is owing to its allegorical structure; crucially, the use of dolls as allegorical ciphers for superficial and rapacious materialism opens the path to another reading of the film in terms of satirical feminist humor. At the heart of the film's joke on blinkered masculinity are those stratagems whereby the perceived resemblance between women and dolls is exploited to ruthless effect by the two Maries.

In the doll narratives of Chytilová, as well as Ferré and Carter, the doll metaphor is retooled as a feminist ruse, a joke on patriarchal expectations that a doll-like woman be a kind of living dummy, erotically appealing yet childishly vulnerable. In such narratives, the doll provides a highly convincing structure of passing and an avenue for subversion, allowing women to pose as naive sexual subordinates to their easily convinced male lovers, who then manage to renege upon the terms of this conventional dynamic through a subversive repetition of gender's regulatory fictions. The doll's overstated repetition of the gender ideal ruptures the apparent absoluteness of Woman. This is why the monstrosity of our doll-like protagonists, far from confirming misogynist stereotypes, ends up fostering a kind of cunning insight into the occluded patriarchal interests at work in an essentialist conception of womanliness. *Daisies*'s feminist thematic is deepened by formal techniques of collage and montage, surrealist devices pressed into the service of disputing seemingly natural and universal gender categories. The impossibility of a unitary and immanent femininity comes across most potently in those scenes where

the female body is itself splintered and recombined in inventive and incongruous ways.

Rather than read the representation of corporeal instability in *Daisies* as a representation of violence against women, I would argue that the film's use of cutting, collage, and bodily fragmentation are consistent with a feminist allegory intent on interrupting the seamlessness of gender fictions. The action of the diegesis, which recounts the exploits of the two girls' various impostures—by turns coy, shrill, spoiled, affectionate, or cruel—echoes the fragmentation of collage in that the girls perform *pieces* of femininity in such a way that the edges show.

The naiveté of a chaste young woman taken in by a dishonorable older man is entirely discontinuous with the “man-eater” that gorges herself on penile delectables while her lover suffers. The discrepant traits within each of the dual protagonists are thus analogous to a collage in which reproductions of disparate gender performances are pasted together. This miscellany of feminine attributes banishes the integrity of woman. In *Daisies*'s narrative of unruly dolls who mimic in order to transgress, the motif of bodies, narratives, spaces, and times fractured and refabricated bolsters a gender allegory that shatters the mirror and photographs the ensuing reflection.

Notes

This paper is dedicated to the two people I most love to watch movies with: Joel David, whose wise eyes detect more than mine can see, and Lauren Steimer, whose sharp responses always clarify my own occluded thoughts. I owe a debt of gratitude to several friends and colleagues: without the encouragement and guidance of Jean Gallagher and Chris Straayer in the early stages of this project, this essay might not have been completed; deepest thanks also to Richard Peña, in whose class on Eastern European cinema I first encountered *Daisies*, to Roger Hallas, whose thoughtfulness afforded me the chance to study the film at close range, to Ed Baluyut, who graciously helped with interview translation, and to Carol Hau, who gave me my first, much prized copy of Carter's “The Loves of Lady Purple” so many years ago. I am greatly indebted to Terry Geesken and the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive for their help in obtaining the images

for this article. And I am profoundly grateful to Patricia White for her graciousness and acumen — her comments deepened and focused this essay.

1. Panel discussion with Vera Chytilová (translator Caterina Pavlitova), Milena Jelinek, Amos Vogel, and Jerry Carlson, 19 November 2000, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York.
2. *A Speech by Deputy Pruzinec delivered in the National Assembly on May 17, 1967 concerning the Film "Daisies" by Vera Chytilová*, http://maxpages.com/czechcinema/21_Deputies_Against_Daisies.
3. Chytilová and Krumbachová collaborated on the script; Krumbachová was responsible for production design, and Kucera, Chytilová's husband, was the cinematographer.
4. Chytilová, panel discussion.
5. Ibid.
6. Antonin J. Liehm, "Introduction" [1973], *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience* (White Plains, NY: International Arts and Sciences, 1974), 3–5.
7. On the Czech New Wave and the nationalized film industry in Czechoslovakia, see Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and Bjorn Ingvoldstad, *After the Velvet Revolution: An Industrial Survey of the Czech and Slovak Film Industries in the Cold War Era*, <http://www.mediaguide.hu/book/bookID19.html>, which summarizes the effects of the 1945 nationalization of the Czech film industry. The Czech New Wave refers to "the emergence of a group of talented young filmmakers" during "the political thaw of de-Stalinization" in the 1960s. This era came to an end in August 1968 when the "liberal vision of 'socialism with a human face'" espoused by President Alexander Dubcek was "shattered by direct Soviet military intervention." Some of the directors associated with the Czech New Wave left for the West (Milos Forman and Jan Nemeč), but others, like Chytilová, remained in Czechoslovakia "despite being barred from working in film for several years"; moreover, "many New Wave films were 'banned forever' by subsequent government decree" (Ingvoldstad).
8. Chytilová, interview with Liehm (fall 1967), in *Closely Watched Films*, 242–43.

9. Chytilová, "I Want to Work," *Index on Censorship* 5.2 (1976): 18–19.
10. Ibid., 18.
11. Ibid., 17.
12. Chytilová, "Chytilová parmi les marguerites," interview with Adriane Aprà, *Cahiers du cinema* 174 (1966): 14.
13. Josef Skvorecky, *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A Personal History of the Czech Cinema*, trans. Michael Schonberg (Montreal: Peter Martin, 1971), 99–101. One could speculate that the same strategy of using formal devices to undermine the didacticism of the screenplay is at work in *Daisies*. In this light, Chytilová's remark that she, Krumbachová, and Kucera agreed to be "bound by nothing" except the dialogue, which would "remain absolutely fixed," might have been a strategy that served not only to "guard" meaning (as Chytilová maintained) but also to dissemble it. Chytilová's 1968 *Cahiers du cinema* interview with Jacques Rivette and Michel Delahaye is quoted in Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 212.
14. Skvorecky, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 99–101.
15. Ibid., 108–9. My emphasis.
16. See Claire Clouzot, "Daisies," *Film Quarterly* 21.3 (1968): 35–36. Clouzot identifies "the equation consumption = destruction" and writes, "Gluttony and devastation are linked as an indication that consumption and destruction might not be that far apart, but Chytilová does not proclaim her film has one single interpretation. It seems that the greedy little creatures are specimens of the capitalistic (or, for that matter, socialist) drive for acquisition, the rage for appropriation; the connoting factor that they are 'schnorrers' or 'spongers' brings in the idea of social or economic parasitism" (35–36).
17. For critics who detect a feminist sensibility in *Daisies*, see Skvorecky, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 108; Barbara Quart, "Three Central European Women Directors Revisited," *Cineaste* 19.4 (1993): 58; and Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, where he writes that the newness of *Daisies* lay in its admixture of radical form and feminist thematic: "At a superficial level of interpretation—the problems of apathetic and 'nonpositive' youth—there was nothing that broke significant new ground."

What was new was an aesthetic form linked to a feminist statement that was certainly original—and not only in Eastern Europe” (222).

18. Pruzinec quoted in Skvorecky, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 109–110.
19. After 1968, Chytilová was banned from filmmaking for six years: “Her film *Daisies*, admired both in Czechoslovakia and abroad, was so innovative and provocative that it was one of the goats for the Russians clamping down in 1968” (Quart, “Three Central European Women Directors,” 58).
20. Chytilová, panel discussion.
21. Angus Fletcher, *Allegory: Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1964), 2.
22. *Ibid.*, 2.
23. Jonathan Culler, “Literary History, Allegory, and Semiology,” *New Literary History* 7 (1976): 263.
24. Fletcher, *Allegory*, 23.
25. Quart, “Three Central European Women Directors,” 59. The many instances in which state repression paradoxically incites bursts of creativity confirm Michel Foucault’s observation that the operation of power is never merely prohibitive or repressive; it is also productive, creating conditions of possibility and inciting the formation of knowledge (for instance, the nationalized Czech industry produces the Czech New Wave as well as the harsh censorship that strove to contain it). Foucault writes, “the notion of repression is quite inadequate for capturing what is precisely the productive aspect of power.” Foucault, “Truth and Power,” interview with Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 119.
26. Fletcher, *Allegory*, 19.
27. J. Hillis Miller, “The Two Allegories,” *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol*, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 356–57.
28. *Ibid.*, 356–58.
29. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 213, 211.

30. Ibid., 207–8.
31. Chytilová, panel discussion.
32. Fletcher, *Allegory*, 32–34.
33. Skvorecky, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 108.
34. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 222.
35. Yvette Biró, “Pathos and Irony in East European Films,” *Politics, Art, and Commitment in the East European Cinema*, ed. David W. Paul (New York: St. Martin’s, 1983), 42.
36. Quart, “Three Central European Women,” 58.
37. Rosario Ferré, “The Youngest Doll,” *Papeles de Pandora: The Youngest Doll*, trans. Rosario Ferré and Diana Vélez (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 1–6.
38. Ksenija Bilbija, “Rosario Ferré’s ‘The Youngest Doll’: On Women, Dolls, Golems, and Cyborgs,” *Callaloo* 17.3 (1994): 878–88.
39. Ibid., 881–82.
40. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 218.
41. Angela Carter, “The Loves of Lady Purple,” *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (New York: Penguin, 1987), 32.
42. According to Eva-Maria Simms, Rilke’s writing reveals a loathing for dolls, due to their indifference to the [male] child’s affections. See Simms, “Uncanny Dolls: Images of Death in Rilke and Freud,” *New Literary History* 27.4 (1996): 670.
43. Angela Carter, “The Loves of Lady Purple,” 38–39.
44. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 31.
45. Steve Tillis, “The Actor Occluded: Puppet Theater and Acting Theory,” *Theatre Topics* 6.2 (1996): 111–12.
46. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 32.
47. Carter, “The Loves of Lady Purple,” 31. My emphasis.
48. Clouzot writes: “The use of animation technique as in the mechanized ballet of disembodied bodies flying all over the

screen when the girls cut each other up, set[s] the humorous pace which makes for the humor in *Daisies*." See "Daisies," 36.

49. The predatory mantis meets the exquisite mannequin in Raoul Ubac's 1937 photograph of Masson's doll, *Mannequin* (1937), reproduced as figure 68 in Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingston, *L'Amour Fou: Photography and Surrealism* [(New York: Abeville, 1985), 76], issued in conjunction with an exhibition held at the Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington, DC), September to November 1985.
50. Krauss, "Corpus Delicti," *L'Amour Fou*, 70.
51. Chytilová, panel discussion.
52. Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 217.
53. Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 11–12.
54. André Breton, "Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism in the Plastic Arts" [1942], *What Is Surrealism? Selected Writings*, ed. Franklin Rosemont (New York: Pathfinder, 1978), 223.
55. Rosalind Krauss, "Photography in the Service of Surrealism," *L'Amour Fou*, 28. Collage and montage seem to be used almost interchangeably by Krauss, but the beginnings of a historical distinction (first Ernst's collages and then montage in Man Ray's photography) is evident in Williams's discussion, in which she situates collage and montage within the same spectrum of combinatorial experiments that aimed at putting objects in new relationships with one another: "In Ernst's collages, actual objects were separated from their customary surroundings and recombined in new relationships with other objects. The result of these recombinations was the famous *dépaysement* or disorientation so typical of Surrealist art. . . . From Ernst's collages it was a natural step to the development of a similar combinative procedure in photography. Man Ray's use of montage processes in his 'rayograms' gave a similar effect of *dépaysement*" (Williams, *Figures of Desire*, 11–12).
56. Krauss, "Photography," *L'Amour Fou*, 28.
57. Skvorecky, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 112.

58. See Rudolph E. Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny," *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws, Rudolph E. Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 23–25.
59. Robert J. Belton, "Speaking with Forked Tongues: 'Male' Discourse in 'Female' Surrealism?" *Surrealism and Women*, 51.
60. Kuenzli points out that the femaleness of the body that gets mangled is often overlooked by overappreciative art historians: "These are not just 'bodies'; these are always female figures. . . . the unformed subjectivity produced in surrealist photography is the female subjectivity only" (Kuenzli, "Surrealism and Misogyny," 23–25).
61. Breton, "Genesis and Perspective of Surrealism in the Plastic Arts," *What Is Surrealism?* 229.
62. See, for example, reproductions of Bellmer's works in *L'Amour Fou*. In particular, see figure 83, *Doll (La Poupée)*, 1936/1949, and figure 36, *La Poupée*, 1934. Those dolls of Bellmer that are comparable to the imagery of *Daisies*'s two Maries are figure 23, *Doll (La Poupée)*, 1935, and figure 24, *Doll (La Poupée)*, 1935, both of which show two pairs of adolescent girls' legs, at once sexually enticing in their liveness and infantilized by their schoolgirl shoes and socks. The twin pairs of legs are joined to one another rather than to separate torsos, resulting in a striking image of monstrous doubleness and dismemberment.
63. Krauss, "Corpus," *L'Amour Fou*, 86.
64. What Madeleine Cottenet-Hage calls the "typical male surrealist image of 'la femme végétale' (the body of the 'beloved' lies on a bed overgrown with grass)" is analogous to the bedroom-turned-garden scenes in *Daisies*, in which the two Maries repose atop a grass-covered bed; the surrealist image of the *femme-enfant* is everywhere in the film, as the Maries style themselves as childishly gullible girls in nubile women's bodies. For more on these surrealist images of women, see Cottenet-Hage, "The Body Subversive: Corporeal Imagery in Carrington, Prassinis and Mansour," *Surrealism and Women*, 76–77, 87–88; see also Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Woman in Surrealism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).
65. Cottenet-Hage, "The Body Subversive," 76; see also Conley, *Automatic Woman*.

66. The Maries wrapped in newspaper also call to mind Bellmer's *Doll (La Poupée)*, 1934, whose face and body are obscured in a papier-mâché-like cast, reproduced as figure 76 in *L'Amour Fou*. Renée Riese Hubert writes of *Ma gouvernante*: "The roast made of two shoes, rather than one leg, is presented with strings and paper frills. . . . The artist problematizes the feminine without referring directly to a body and even less to a face. . . . Diminished or elevated to the role of a roast fresh out of the oven, these lady's shoes are ready to be devoured by consumers" (Hubert, "From *Déjeuner en fourrure* to *Caroline*: Meret Oppenheim's Chronicle of Surrealism," *Surrealism and Women*, 39). Hubert's description of an installation I have been unable to see, Oppenheim's *Le Festin*—in which a mannequin is stretched out on a tablecloth with men looking on, collocating food and the woman's body, hunger and desire—suggests that this shot in *Daisies* also strongly resembles that work. See Hubert, 40.
67. Cottenet-Hage, "The Body Subversive," 92.

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Detail from *Daisies* [Selmikrásky] (Czechoslovakia, 1966), directed by Vera Chytilová.

