

CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

LIBERAL ARTS AND HUMANITIES



Nele Steiling

**Concepts of Childhood in Children's Television: the
Normalization coproduction of "Pan Tau"**

Bachelor Thesis

Supervisor: Mgr. et Mgr. Petr Wohlmuth, Ph.D.

Prague 2022

DECLARATION

I declare that I have created the thesis by myself. All sources and literature used have been duly cited. The work was not used to obtain another or the same title in the Czech Republic or abroad. This declaration and consent will be signed by handwritten signature.

Prague, 24.06.2022

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Nele Steiling

Abstract

The children's series Pan Tau was the first of many co-productions between West Germany and Czechoslovakia during so called Normalization. It was a considerable success in both countries, but paradoxically even more so in West Germany. This thesis establishes "childhood" as one of the central themes in Pan Tau and aims to analyze its relevance to the success of the show across the Iron Curtain. Adhering to the concepts of historical anthropology (van Dülmen 2000) and based on concept of culture by Clifford Geertz (1973), the thesis analyses and provides interpretation of several central cultural concepts, connected with Pan Tau's representations of childhood: The concept of growing up and maturing, of dealing with and representing authority, of agency and subjectivity, of imagination and the fantastical, and the concept of innocence. The research will focus on a performance of a number of child characters and their specific interpretation of concepts mentioned above.

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1 Introduction

"Who is Pan Tau?"

"He is my childhood. It is my dream to one day be able to live in Pan-Tau-land...."

"Where is Pan-Tau-land?"

"It is hard to find. It is a place where you can do what you want. Where you can rejoice when you want to."

"How can you find Pan-Tau-land?"

"With a lot of imagination! Adults do not believe in miracles. They have experience – and no imagination. If they had, they could find Pan-Tau-land. It is no problem for children."

Jindřich Polák and the WDR 1970¹

For adults, childhood is largely a notion of the past, of something that is only remembered, often with a sense of nostalgia. It is no surprise that many children's stories and television shows seem to try to recapture a sense of belonging and freedom in childhood. Similarly, childhood can also be in the future, with children as the hopeful next generation. Such a concept of childhood often includes criticism of the current circumstances and inequalities that have a chance to be resolved in this next generation. In this sense, childhood is not a singular phenomenon but a place for the negotiation of opposing perspectives and interpretations of adults.

¹ Pressedienst ARD 1970, "Er kommt aus einer anderen Welt... der Tscheche Otto Simanek und Pan Tau" in: Helena Srubar, *Ambivalenzen Des Populären: Pan Tau Und Co. Zwischen Ost Und West*, Erfahrung, Wissen, Imagination : Schriften Zur Wissenssoziologie, Bd. 16 (Konstanz: UVK, 2008), 73.

One notable example of the incorporation of different concepts of childhood into one, is the television show *Pan Tau* (1970-1979). As the first coproduction between the West German public broadcast Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), and the Barrandov Studios in Prague, the series *Pan Tau* ("Mr. Tau") is a very particular case both in Czechoslovakia and West Germany. It was produced between 1966 (pilot) and 1979 (last episode), spanning the Prague Spring, the invasion of Warsaw pact troops in August 1968, and the following years of Normalization in Czechoslovakia. In this sense, it defies all preconceived notions about an impervious Iron Curtain and almost no cultural transfer between East and West. Next to *Pan Tau* there are several other productions from director Jindřich Polák and screenwriter Ota Hofman, such as *Lucie, postrach ulice* (1980), *Návštěvníci* (1983), and *Chobotnice z II. Patra* (1986), all of which are coproductions with West Germany.

In the series, Pan Tau is a good-natured gentleman-magician who supports children unconditionally in their conflict with the adult world and their struggle between dreams and reality. He is always on hand when children need him. With a touch on his bowler hat, he can perform magic or shrink himself to the size of a doll so that adults cannot discover him. It is generally known for taking children seriously and justifying their actions, a notion that had prior been almost entirely unexplored in education and popular culture for children.

It is no wonder, then, that *Pan Tau* has made his way into the minds of many and reached cult status for an entire generation all over Europe.² Some people even go as far as to say that *Pan Tau* played its part in creating shared values and cultural ideals among children on both sides of the Iron Curtain that helped build common ground after the collapse of the socialist regime in 1989.³ Even today, these 'unpolitical' family TV shows from the

² Jindřich Polák, "Můj Život s Klaunem Ferdinandem a Panem Tau," in Ota Hofman, ed. František Šalé, Vyd. 1 (Dětský filmový a televizní festival Oty Hofmana v Ostrově, Boskovice : Ostrov: Albert ; Dům kultury, 1998), 92.

³ Martin Zips, "Mit Hirn, Charme und Melone," *Süddeutsche.de*, November 7, 2018, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/panorama/pan-tau-und-die-wende-mit-hirn-charme-und-melone-1.4200976>.

Normalization era are generally seen as a positive aspect of collective memory and have become a cultural heritage.

This international success is at least in part due to shared patterns of identification for children no matter the context they lived in. Even in entirely different realities of life, they could identify with the themes and conflicts in *Pan Tau*. Consequently, the question arises as to what different notions of childhood exist in *Pan Tau* and how they can be interpreted. An interpretation such as this can offer more insight into how childhood was constituted in popular culture during Normalization. It can also shed light on the continuities and discontinuities of traditional concepts of childhood within a transcultural context.

2 Theory and Methodology

2.1 The Current State of Research

Normalization and Normalization culture in Czechoslovakia have been studied extensively over the last decades as a time of binaries, of the "official culture versus unofficial culture, of the first (state-planned) economy versus the second (black market) economy, of the party elite versus the dissident elite, and the politicized public sphere versus the depoliticized private sphere."⁴ According to historian Paulina Bren, everything in between these two "neatly dug trenches" has traditionally been constituted as a disconnected grey zone; a concept that has only been challenged in recent years.⁵ In this regard, one of the most promising fields of study is state television and its unique position both in state ideology and private everyday life. Thus, television does not only exist in a grey zone but "reaches into both trenches."⁶ Several studies about the role of television and film during Normalization have already shown how television existed not in a binary system and filled a role between repression, censorship, and subversion.⁷

There are not only Czechoslovak domestic productions that demonstrate television's ambivalent character. Numerous coproductions within the socialist bloc and across the Iron Curtain establish the dynamic and transcultural character of television even during the Cold War.⁸ However, research in this field mainly focuses on the role of East-West film coproductions and cultural transfer as a form of Cold War diplomacy and struggle for cultural

⁴ Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, [N.Y.]: Cornell University Press, 2010), 8.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*; Alexander Badenoch, Andreas Fickers, and Christian Henrich-Franke, eds., *Airy Curtains in the European Ether: Broadcasting and the Cold War*, 1. edition 2013, Schriftenreihe Des Instituts Für Europäische Regionalforschungen, Band 15 (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2013).

⁸ Badenoch, Fickers, and Henrich-Franke, *Airy Curtains in the European Ether*.

supremacy.⁹ These interpretations often disregard the cultural and symbolical levels and codes in East-West coproductions in favor of examining the intertwined relationships on the technical level of the broadcasting process.¹⁰

The available research on normalized Czechoslovakia goes in a similar direction. There has been an increased interest in the question of subjectivity and agency, an avenue that consequently challenges the idea of the powerful regime and the powerless Czechoslovak citizen.¹¹ Recent historiographic research has further shown that socialism's universal claim on people has never been fully implemented and was not wholly consistent, allowing people to retreat into the private realm and fostering more consumer-friendly policies.¹² This indicates that popular culture, especially television, was never a 'pure' ideological tool as it was often made out to be. It opens up an exciting avenue of research concerning agency and subjectivity within television productions.

In this field of research, one of the most relevant studies was conducted by sociologist Helena Srubar, who argues that the internationally successful Czechoslovak-West German

⁹ Marsha Siefert, "Co-Producing Cold War Culture: — East-West Film-Making and Cultural Diplomacy," in *Divided Dreamworlds?: The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, ed. Giles Scott-Smith, Joes Segal, and Peter Romijn (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 73–94; Badenoch, Fickers, and Henrich-Franke, *Airy Curtains in the European Ether*.

¹⁰ Marie Cronqvist, "From Socialist Hero to Capitalist Icon: The Cultural Transfer of the East German Children's Television Programme *Unser Sandmännchen* to Sweden in the Early 1970S," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 41, no. 2 (April 3, 2021): 378–93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01439685.2020.1857923>.

¹¹ Martina Winkler, "Czechoslovakia: Children's Media in Transformation," *Strenae*, no. 13 (May 15, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.4000/strenae.1783>; Christian Stewen, *The cinematic child: Kindheit in filmischen und medienpädagogischen Diskursen*, Marburger Schriften zur Medienforschung 29 (Marburg: Schüren, 2011); Zsuzsa Millei, Iveta Silova, and Susanne Gannon, "Thinking through Memories of Childhood in (Post)Socialist Spaces: Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary Times," *Children's Geographies*, August 2019, 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2019.1648759>; Miroslav Vaněk and Pavel Mücke, *Velvet Revolutions: An Oral History of Czech Society*, Oxford Oral History Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹² Maïke Lehmann and Alexandra Oberländer, "Introduction: Socialism to Be Embodied," *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures* 34, no. 4 (November 2020): 802–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325420921917>.

coproductions in the 1970s and 80s allowed a series of multiple "interpretations through which different social groups can arrive at meaningful articulations of their own relationship to the dominant ideology."¹³ She focuses on how major themes in the series transport socialist ideology but can be read ambivalently as official, national, and oppositional.¹⁴ She asserts that patterns of interpretation inscribed in these productions show a level of ideologization that is less pronounced than in domestic Czechoslovak productions and that the codes can be read as universal.¹⁵ The fact that the children's productions were seen as unpolitical shows that the focus did not lay on ideological aspects but on the value of entertainment.¹⁶ In her analysis of *Pan Tau*, Srubar only somewhat focuses on the notion of childhood/children, arguing that the show's main focus lies on adult characters.¹⁷ While this observation is accurate, and *Pan Tau* does not portray children as fully-formed characters, I believe that *Pan Tau* does, in fact, have much to offer in terms of the underlying concepts of childhood. It is a show created to address children, so studying the understanding of childhood might offer a new perspective not only on socialist childhoods but also on the cultural fields and traditions that Czechoslovakia existed in during Normalization.

Just like other fields of study, Martina Winkler argues, childhood studies "have discussed the "subject" and "subjectivities" in their attempts to overcome binary views of the powerful (the adult or the regime) on the one hand, and the powerless (the child or the citizen) on the other."¹⁸ Seeing the child as powerless, as "unfinished, irrational, and lacking agency"¹⁹ is a traditional view that is turned on its head in the popular reception of *Pan Tau*,

¹³ Srubar, *Ambivalenzen Des Populären*, 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., 248.

¹⁵ Ibid., 338.

¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷ Ibid., 251.

¹⁸ Martina Winkler, "Reading Mateřídouška: Children's Culture and Children's Subjectivities in Socialist Czechoslovakia," *Paedagogica Historica*, March 8, 2021, 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00309230.2021.1885457>.

¹⁹ Winkler, "Reading Mateřídouška."

where the series was famous for finally giving children agency and for taking their wants and dreams seriously.²⁰

It is exactly at this point that this thesis sets in. Drawing on the existing research by Helena Srubar, this thesis identifies the conflicting concepts of childhood in *Pan Tau* and works out how they can fit together regarding the ambivalence of television and ideology in its historical context. I have interpretatively researched the various sets of meanings communicated through several cultural representations present in *Pan Tau*, with particular emphasis on several concepts pertaining to childhood: 1) the construction of adults and children and their relationship, 2) the question of children's agency and subjectivity, especially in the series' socialist context, 3) the way authority and authority figures are treated, 4) imagination and elements of the fantastical, and 5) the notion of innocence, nostalgia and the romantic ideal of childhood.

2.2 Approach

Pan Tau and the concepts it transmits exist in an intermediate field, between the public and private, the child and adult, the political or unpolitical, the East and West. This coincides with the classic epistemological motive of historical anthropology, meaning that in producing cultural representations, each individual is allotted room to move and challenge the existing system, not to communicate just hegemonic and ideologically correct representations but also to challenge them as something creative or even subversive.

Historical anthropology is a kind of historical research primarily concerned with independent, differentiated, or even subversive agency, diversity of cultural phenomena, and plurality or alterity of views and attitudes. This is a central tenet of historical anthropology, as explained by Richard van Dülmen:

“Historical anthropology does not assume that people have complete autonomy in action as if they were masters of things, but neither does it see them as the playing

²⁰ Spiegel, “Neue Zeit,” *Spiegel*, 1970.

of events completely surrendering to the things of the world. Describing this intermediate field, i.e., exploring the possibilities and scope for action, is one of the main tasks of historical anthropology."²¹²²

This fits very well with the research focus on historiographical works on television, such as by Srubar and Bren, who have argued that even under Cold War conditions, socialist film productions can be seen both as a somewhat state-controlled and ideologically acquiescent cultural area and at the same time as a stage for forms of artistic freedom and "bottom-up demands for entertainment."²³

In the field of television and the question of ideology, it is essential to note that neither the institution of television nor state ideology is a definite system of 'dominant ideas,' passively absorbed by people, but "a field of 'common sense' within which people negotiate or struggle over meanings and values."²⁴ In this thesis, I employ John Fiske's definition of television-as-culture as a "bearer/ provoker of meanings and pleasures, and of culture as the generation and circulation of this variety of meanings and pleasures within society."²⁵ This is closely related to Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as a "symbolic system" and "historically transmitted patterns of meanings embodied in symbols."²⁶ In this sense, television programs not only transmit but also attempt to make meanings "that serve the

²¹ My own translation of the original: "Die historische Anthropologie unterstellt den Menschen zwar keine völlige Autonomie im Handeln, als wäre er Herr der Dinge, sie sieht ihn aber auch nicht als den Dingen der Welt völlig ausgelieferten Spielball der Ereignisse an. Dieses Zwischenfeld zu beschreiben, d.h. die Handlungsmöglichkeiten und Handlungsräume auszuloten, zählt zu einer der Hauptaufgaben der historischen Anthropologie"

²² Richard van Dülmen, *Historische Anthropologie: Entwicklung, Probleme, Aufgaben* (Köln Weimar Wien: Böhlhau, 2000), 33.

²³ Aniko Ímre, "Gender, Socialism and European Film Cultures," in *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, ed. Kristin Lené Hole et al. (London ; New York: Routledge, 2017), 88–97.

²⁴ David Forgacs, "Cinema and Cultural Studies," in *I Film Studies*, ed. Emiliana De Blasio and Dario Viganò, 1a ed, Studi Superiori 890 (Roma: Carocci, 2013).

²⁵ John Fiske, *Television Culture*, Repr, Media Studies (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

²⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.

dominant interest in society, and [...] circulate these meanings amongst the wide variety of social groups that constitute its audiences."²⁷ The use of the word 'audiences' in a plural form makes evident that there is not one homogeneous audience but that society is a complex system "crisscrossed by axes of class, gender, race, age, nationality, region, politics, religion, and so on, all of which produce more or less strongly marked differences,"²⁸ which always include a dimension of power and power relations. Fiske sees television as a cultural agent, reproducing the same hierarchies and dominating the discourse in its struggle for meaning, as popular culture does. Just as there are multiple audiences, there are also multiple dominant ideologies that sometimes corroborate but can also contradict each other.²⁹

Consequently, television does not only offer one way of interpretation according to a dominant ideology but is continuously "making, remaking and unmaking meaning"³⁰ through interaction with its audiences. It always prefers the circulation of particular meanings and interests over others, but it can never be a closed system. Instead, television is ambivalent, offering diverse cultural meanings. In this regard, I refer to television as a stage for negotiating and renegotiating the meaning of and relationship with multiple ideologies. The symbols and meanings that television offers are fluid and thus changeable over time and space. Nevertheless, they also offer different simultaneous ways of interpretation.

Conducting research exploring various avenues of interpretation is necessarily subjective. Therefore, I focus only on a small sample of possible interpretations from my particular position and do not claim completion. As someone who grew up with *Pan Tau* decades after it was produced because of my parents' enthusiasm for the series, I have a good understanding of how meanings can change over time and in different contexts. Intellectually, I understood why they loved the show, but even as a child, I could never enjoy

²⁷ Fiske, *Television Culture*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁹ Matthew Tinkcom, ed., *Keyframes: Popular Cinema and Cultural Studies*, 1. publ (London: Routledge, 2001), 7.

³⁰ Roger Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994), 160.

it in the same way they had. Furthermore, my position as someone from West Germany necessarily makes me more susceptible for finding patterns of interpretation within my own scope of awareness. Considering the limitations of my own experience and position, I consciously highlight conflicting interpretations to see how far each can be taken and explore the notion of ambivalence as extensively as possible.

This thesis primarily draws on both the original Czech and German versions of the TV show and several interviews with the filmmakers and producer.³¹

³¹ I worked with two different versions of Pan Tau: the Czech original and the German dubbing both in their respective original form from 1972 and 1970. The versions are surprisingly similar with only some slight differences in wording.

3 *Pan Tau* between Reform and Normalization

This chapter introduces the history of the early Normalization of television and contextualizes the creation and production of *Pan Tau* within a broader historical and political context concerning children's television both in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). It further outlines the reasons for the coproduction and the role the series played in each country.

3.1 The Creation of *Pan Tau*

In 1964, Gert K. Müntefering, newly instated head of the children's film department of the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR), became acquainted with the Czechoslovak children's film *Klaun Ferdinand a raketa* (1963) at the Children's Film Festival in Venice. It was one of the best children's productions he had ever seen,³² so he bought the film for the WDR and established contact with the screenwriter Ota Hofman. Two years later, he traveled to Prague and met with Hofman at the Barrandov Studios, where he found out about a project that had initially been commissioned by the Italian producer Carlo Ponti for an international audience. "Mr. Jeeves" – as the series was supposed to be called – was about a man who could change his size and perform magic. However, Ponti rejected the completed pilot episode due to disagreements with Polák and Hofman. Müntefering liked the main idea but not the scripts and locations, which seemed to be a kind of "children's Fantomas."³³ So the locations were changed to Bohemia, and "Mr. Jeeves" became *Pan Tau*.

Pan Tau existed between the reforms of the 60s, the Prague Spring, and Normalization, making its story a very intricate and complex one. The central part of the production planning for *Pan Tau* took place in 1967 and 68, during the reforms and the Prague Spring. However,

³² Gert K. Müntefering, WDR-Geschichte(n): Gert K. Müntefering, interview by Klaus Michael Heinz, ARD Mediathek, 2017, <https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/wdr-geschichte-n/gert-k-muntefering/wdr/Y3JpZDovL3dkci5kZS9CZW10cmFnLWVvYzFIZjA5LTI5NmItNDA2Ny1hZTg0LTZmNzIxOTQ5ZDJkNg>.

³³ Václav Křístek, *Prahou s panem Tau a Arabelou* (Česká televize, 2018), <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/11811852873-prahou-s-panem-tau-a-arabelou/>.

just as the contracts were being signed, the Prague Spring suddenly ended when Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. The first German-Czech children's film project seemed to be over before shooting had even begun. Against all expectations, Müntefering received a telegram from Prague only a few days after the invasion: Shooting started on schedule. Expect you in Prague."³⁴ The first season is unique because production and shooting fell in the months between the invasion and the harsh implementation of counter-reforms and was thus almost entirely exempt from strict censorship.³⁵ Of course, not everything went smoothly. After the season was finished, the last episodes were banned in Czechoslovakia,³⁶ and a West-German production company withdrew their substantial grant because they did not want to enable the socialist regime after the invasion.³⁷ However, these complications seemed to die down during the production of the later seasons, and no such accounts exist in the years to come.

When Gustáv Husák was appointed the first secretary of the Communist Party in April 1969, Czechoslovakia officially started the process of 'normalization.'³⁸ This term was first officially and later colloquially used to describe the restoration of party rule and the reinstatement of Czechoslovakia in the Socialist Bloc. A new censorship system was introduced, and the party was purged of its more liberal members. Furthermore, many intellectuals and other important people, who had openly supported the reforms, were dismissed from their positions and replaced by loyal figures fully supportive of Husák. It meant drastic changes in personnel and management for state television, but it also impacted actors, directors, and other creative positions.³⁹ In the autumn of 1969, leading functionaries

³⁴ Müntefering, WDR-Geschichte(n): Gert K. Müntefering.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Jindřich Polák, "Můj Život s Klaunem Ferdinandem a Panem Tau," in *Ota Hofman*, ed. František Šalé, Vyd. 1 (Dětský filmový a televizní festival Oty Hofmana v Ostrově, Boskovice : Ostrov: Albert ; Dům kultury, 1998), 84–97.

³⁷ Müntefering, WDR-Geschichte(n): Gert K. Müntefering.

³⁸ Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, 36.

³⁹ Ibid., 62.

of the Barrandov film studios were dismissed, among them the head of the group for children's and youth films, Jan Procházka.⁴⁰ The director of Barrandov Studios filled this position with Ota Hofman, one of his last official acts before he himself was let go.⁴¹ After the restructuring of the Barrandov Studios in 1970, Hofman kept this position and stayed head of the 'dramaturgic group for children's and youth films.'⁴²

Control over television productions' distribution was generally ambiguous and dynamic in its execution, reinforcing the notion that television constitutes a gray zone "between top-down attempts at influencing viewers and bottom-up demands for entertainment."⁴³ On the one hand, the regime knew that "the media needed to be tamed and then fully incorporated into the task of shaping a post-1968 political state,"⁴⁴ ultimately constituting media as the "primary means of communicating with the public."⁴⁵ On the other hand, television played a crucial role in creating and promoting private niches by implementing the so-called 'social contract.' The regime promised better living standards and an economy that focused on consumer goods in exchange for political passivity and the retreat from "contesting the political realm."⁴⁶ Between these fundamentally different usages and interpretations of television, there were many movies and series ranging from pure propaganda to subversive. Many filmmakers played it safe in this climate and produced so-called 'unpolitical' films and series that were above reproach and fit for private consumption. Another possibility was the retreat into the area of children's television and fairytales, which

⁴⁰ Štěpán Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění : počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov ; (1968-1973)* (Praha: Academia, 2012), 151.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Hans Strobel, ed., *Der Kinderfilm in der Tschechoslowakei* (München: Kinderkino München e.V, 1982), 12.

⁴³ Imre, "Gender, Socialism and European Film Cultures."

⁴⁴ Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*, 34.

⁴⁵ Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV*.

⁴⁶ Padraic Kenney, "The Gender of Resistance in Communist Poland," *The American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 402, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/104.2.399>.

could be either concerned with everyday private life or fantastic problems far removed from reality.⁴⁷ It is not surprising, then, that fairytales were one of the main genres during this time. A central aspect of these and other films for children is their 'unpolitical' character, "recording the children's present life in its dynamic development, with its problems and perspectives."⁴⁸

As several contemporaries maintain, Ota Hofman was a blessing and a shaping influence on Czechoslovak Children's television.⁴⁹ He believed that "a children's film must not serve as an excuse for dilettantism or incompetence. There is only one art. And if a children's film does not include charming adults, then it is a bad film."⁵⁰ One of his aims was "to convey a complex picture of the manifold inner life of a child, to express the depiction of conflicts among the children themselves, and between the children and adults, especially the parents."⁵¹ He rejected the simplification of the world and emphasized that films should please everyone. Compared to other dramaturgic groups in the Barrandov Studios, the group for children's television could operate much more independently. In historiography, this group is often referred to as an 'isle of freedom,'⁵² with space for subversive agency within the heavily censored state television and filmmaking structure, at least in the early years of Normalization.

⁴⁷ Strobel, *Der Kinderfilm in der Tschechoslowakei*, 13.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁹ Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění : počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov ; (1968-1973*, 152.

⁵⁰ Hans Strobel, ed., *Der neue Deutsche Kinderfilm 1970-1989. Kinderfilme der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (München: Kinderkino München e.V, 1989), 1, <http://www.kjk-muenchen.de/archiv/index.php?id=1869>.

⁵¹ Strobel, *Der Kinderfilm in der Tschechoslowakei*, 10.

⁵² Hulík, *Kinematografie zapomnění : počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov ; (1968-1973*.

3.2 Excursion: Situation in West Germany

The status of children's movies in West Germany was fundamentally different from that of Czechoslovakia at the time. Where children's films were very much part of Czech culture, they had just started to be seen as a legitimate contribution in West Germany.

Official children's television in the FRG only began in April 1951 with a children's hour, a few months after the implementation of an experimental television program.⁵³ The spread of television sets in the private context of families and the uncontrollability of children's viewing behavior led to a general mistrust.⁵⁴ Both educators and representatives of the churches feared a loss of control in public opinion about family and education. In educational sciences, television was almost exclusively a medium for adults; "that children could also watch television disturbed pedagogues the most. Most troubling was that the child could slip out of educational control."⁵⁵ Children's television at this stage was caught in an ambiguity between restoration and modernization. It was supposed to develop as a promising market but became increasingly a menacing and uncontrollable entity. By the end of the 1950s, repressive conservative tendencies were gaining ground, and in July 1957, children under the age of six were forbidden from going to the movies, a law that state television adopted as well.⁵⁶

This critical position toward television for children, which many people still held in part until the 1970s, had consequences for German children's films on several levels. First, the old principles were adhered to for a long time on the pedagogical level. In contrast to

⁵³ Hans-Dieter Kübler, "Vom Fernsehkindergarten zum multimedialen Kinderportal. 50 Jahre Kinderfernsehen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *TELEVIZION. Internationales Zentralinstitut für das Jugend- und Bildungsfernsehen IZI*. 14, no. 2001/2 (2001).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Hans Dieter Erlinger, "Kinderfernsehen: Zielgruppenfernsehen, Insel im Markt oder Markt ohne Grenzen?," *montage AV. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Geschichte audiovisueller Kommunikation* 4, no. 1 (1995): 125–42.

⁵⁶ Strobel, *Der neue Deutsche Kinderfilm 1970-1989. Kinderfilme der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, 6.

Czechoslovakia, an "enlightened-bourgeois ideal of childhood"⁵⁷ prevailed in the Federal Republic, in which the child was seen as an unfinished adult who could only grow into his role through a bourgeois education. On a practical level, this meant that the choice of child-specific television remained extremely limited for a long time and followed strict pedagogical structures. Second, the ambiguity of the political reality played a significant role. In line with the image of children still prevalent in parts of society, attempts were made to convey a childlike idyll. The escape from social realities and "the retreat to the fairy-tale-like and ultimately completely noncommittal idyll"⁵⁸ became the most significant characteristics of the West German children's film.

The first changes in the general West German film landscape occurred in the 1960s. During the Oberhausen Short Film Festival, several young filmmakers signed the so-called 'Oberhausen Manifesto,' maintaining that "the old film is dead; we believe in the new one."⁵⁹ Under the slogan "Grandpa's cinema is dead!"⁶⁰ they fought against the idyllic film of the Adenauer era, against Heimatfilme (sentimental films in an idealized regional setting), and noncommittal fairy tales. The situation for adult films was now improving, and public attitudes towards them were turning around. Productions for children, on the other hand, remained of lower quality. In its 1977 manifesto "Create Films for Our Children," a coalition of over 100 filmmakers, writers, and educators called for state funding for children's films, still arguing that "our children see Walt Disney and the colorful animal world, gun heroes and supermen: made for adults, approved for children and young people. In German film

⁵⁷ Helena Srubar, "Pan Tau Und Die Märchenbraut: Tschechoslowakischer Kulturimport in Den Westen," in *Die Ära Kreisky in Österreich Und Die Normalisierungsperiode in Der ČSSR: Politik Und Kultur*, ed. Gerald Sprengnagel, Niklas Perzi, and Michal Stehlík, Schriftenreihe Der Ständigen Konferenz Österreichischer Und Tschechischer Historiker Zum Gemeinsamen Kulturellen Erbe, Band 1 (Wien: Lit, 2020), 256.

⁵⁸ Steffen Wolf, *Kinderfilm in Europa* (München-Pullach und Berlin: Verlag Dokumentation, 1969), 70.

⁵⁹ Strobel, *Der neue Deutsche Kinderfilm 1970-1989. Kinderfilme der Bundesrepublik Deutschland - Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, 6.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

production, children exist primarily as droll actors, precocious schoolgirls, and attractive advertising media."⁶¹ Children's film was no more than a first step into the industry for most filmmakers. Moreover, there was hardly any government support, the budget for children's productions was comparatively low, and there was no suitable equipment. It was not until the early 1970s that the public eye turned to this deficit, and it would be several years before a qualitative turnaround was initiated.⁶²

Gert K. Müntefering played a significant role in shaping qualitative children's television relevant to children and aimed for it to be more than simple moralistic finger-wagging. He developed "10 theses" outlining several arguments for better handling of children's television⁶³ and underlining the importance of entertainment in this field. Furthermore, he coined the phrase "children's television is when children watch television."⁶⁴ This sentence underlines his position on children's television as not limited to programs specifically made for children and their education. Rather, children can use any content and incorporate it into their worldview. After Müntefering became head of the department of children's television in the WDR, he started his campaign to create an alternative to the existing program for children, primarily consisting of imported content and low-quality domestic productions.

3.3 The coproduction

Pan Tau existed and was produced between, but also within two fundamentally different political systems. There were financial, political, and personal reasons for the coproduction, and from the beginning, cultural (and political) negotiations were needed for it to succeed. There were multiple reasons for this collaboration and its successful realization,

⁶¹ Ibid., 53.

⁶² Ibid., 7.

⁶³ Dieter Wiedemann, "Kinderfernsehen Zwischen Fantasie Und Anpassung," *TelevIZion* 28, no. 2 (2015): 6.

⁶⁴ Armin Maiwald, *Kinderfernsehen Ist, Wenn Kinder Fernsehen*, Film, 1999.

some of which are examined here. In contrast to the FRG, the CSSR had better opportunities, both in terms of art and infrastructure, for making children's films. In Czechoslovakia, the excellent quality of children's films had a longstanding tradition, technically and in terms of content. They were well funded, and productions for children and adults were similarly prestigious for actors and directors.⁶⁵ This stands in stark contrast to the conservative mainstream beliefs about movies and programs for children in the FRG during the late 60s. Filmmakers did not see children's movies as a future career, and funding was low, so the WDR was on the lookout for alternatives. Consequently, coproductions with countries from the Eastern bloc were a satisfactory solution: The FRG could produce relatively cheap films, and the CSSR had a wealthy partner and could reach wider international acclaim.

Nevertheless, there was more to the successful coproduction of *Pan Tau* than technical benefits. Polák, Hofman, and Müntefering shared the belief that children's films should be directed not only at children but at everyone while at the same time understanding children as persons in their own right. They wanted to create a show that could tell the world "by all accessible means, that [children] have a right to their specific humor, their dreams and their criticism of the adult way of life, and that it is not true when someone tries to persuade them that they are just copies of the grown-ups - all this not declaratively, but imaginatively."⁶⁶ For the West German public, this portrayal of children was unusual, and *Pan Tau* was seen as a revolutionary show.⁶⁷ It was said to embrace the liberalization after the era Adenauer and the 1968 student movements and to finally adopt a more progressive stance on children and children's television while being critical of American television and consumerism.⁶⁸ In

⁶⁵ Strobel, *Der Kinderfilm in der Tschechoslowakei*.

⁶⁶ Werner Paul, "Die Kinder sind keine Kopien der Erwachsenen' - Gespräch mit Ota Hofman," *Kinder- und Jugendfilm Korrespondenz* 28, no. 4 (1986), <http://www.kjk-muenchen.de/archiv/index.php?id=777&suche=Ota%20Hofman>.

⁶⁷ Wiedemann, "Kinderfernsehen Zwischen Fantasie Und Anpassung."

⁶⁸ Spiegel, "Neue Zeit."

this light, it is not surprising that *Pan Tau* has been considered unique in its portrayal of children and childhood.

4 An Analysis of *Pan Tau* and its Concepts of Childhood

Especially considering the series' unique position between reform and counter-reform, political and unpolitical, private and public, and consequently East and West, *Pan Tau* is such a complex and appealing object of analysis. Drawing on Srubar's evaluation of the ambivalence and universality of *Pan Tau*, this chapter maps the different elements constructing the concepts of childhood in the series and then puts them in the political and social context of its target audiences. The three seasons are first examined for their central themes and then further analyzed for their portrayal of children, their interactions with adults, and the world in general. This part explores the various possibilities of interpretation according to the two dominant ideologies but also according to several other traditional and non-traditional value systems.

4.1 The content of the three seasons of *Pan Tau*

A series such as *Pan Tau* is a complex area of analysis. The three seasons consist of 33 episodes and were produced in nine years, between 1969 and 1978. Each season is different, dealing with various themes and conflicts. In 1987 and 1988, a final film called *Pan Tau - the film* was created. It turned away from the original focus on children and was now explicitly aimed at an adult audience and is thus not further examined here. While the first season is still visibly characterized by its experimental nature, the main concepts worked out in the early stories are consistently reused and expanded upon in later seasons. The leitmotif remains the same throughout the series: the conflict between children and adults, or in other words, fantasy and reality.

This part of the analysis shortly deals with the main themes and storylines of the three seasons, offering a crucial framing of the analysis.

4.1.1 Season 1

The first season of *Pan Tau* was broadcasted between 1970 and 1972 and comprises thirteen episodes. Compared to the later seasons, the first season of *Pan Tau* is characterized by its experimental character. The stories are disjointed, with particular storylines and less of

an overarching theme. Pan Tau meets the young student Emil (ep. 1-5), goes on a ship voyage with a young runaway (ep. 6), and travels as a vagabond together with Claudia and her wealthy grandfather (7-11). In the season finale, the children team up after the owner of a lost-and-found place imprisoned Pan Tau to enrich himself through the magic power of the bowler hat (ep. 12-13). While both Emil and Claudia are arguably the main child characters of this season, linking the stories together, most of the series is not primarily about them. Emil is the leading child protagonist in only two out of the five episodes he is in; Claudia plays a crucial role in four out of her five episodes, while they both play side roles in the last two episodes. In this sense, Pan Tau is the only character holding the different stories together. This disjointedness firmly establishes Pan Tau as a supporter of all children against the often oppressive adults, no matter what context.

A central theme is the juxtaposition of consumerism and socialism present in almost every episode and the representation of the two prominent families Pan Tau deals with. Compared to the later seasons, the open anti-consumerist sentiments of the first 13 episodes are more blatant and worked into the fabric of almost every story. In this sense, episodes 7-11 are of particular interest. They depict a small girl's struggle with her wealthy grandfather living in a castle and contrast the life of consumerism and materialism with a romantic fairytale.

Even though it is generally stated by the producer and both screenwriter and director that *Pan Tau* is mainly concerned with everyday private adventures⁶⁹, most episodes are far from portraying the ordinary. Apart from episodes 2 and 4, in which Pan Tau spends Christmas and a Sunday at the chata with Emil and his family, all other episodes either parodically heighten reality or compensate for reality's deficits through stories of wish

⁶⁹ In an interview with the WDR in 2018, Gert K. Müntefering says that Pan Tau should be seen as „der Auslöser für kleine komödiale Alltagsabenteuer, und nicht als der große Zauberer, der wunderbare fantastische Sachen zusammenbaut, sondern nur kleine Alltagsorgen behebt (the catalyst for little comedic everyday adventures, rather than being the great wizard who puts together wonderful fantastic things, but just fixes little everyday worries) “

fulfillment.⁷⁰ The element of parody is portrayed through several musical interludes and dances, the most significant of which is in episode 1, in which Pan Tau provokes a dog catcher who is imprisoning all street dogs of Prague. He is eating while wearing white gloves, and Pan Tau irritates him by standing behind him and following the dog catcher's every move. In the following slapstick comedy, the dog catcher is so confused that the food does not end up in his mouth but in the dogs' cages. This characteristic of season 1 is even further underlined by the fact that all adult male characters of this season are humorists or slapstick comedians.⁷¹

Next to humor, there is also much magic in season 1. Pan Tau brings children who do not have snow in Prague to the mountains, he magics a whole school class to the ski retreat because they missed their bus and lets them go on a safari through the desert on the way there. Those stories can only occur because Pan Tau rips the protagonists out of their daily routine and creates an adventure. There would have been no story to tell in a rational world, yet Pan Tau's magic overrules all these limitations.

The first season of *Pan Tau* is a perfect example of the importance of what is left unsaid. It is a show that propagates everyday life and wish-fulfillment in a way that does not reflect the real everyday struggles and wishes. Life in Czechoslovakia in the early 1970s did not look like the life most of the protagonists and their families lead, and it is essential to consider why the real implications are left out.

Interestingly enough, despite the openly anti-capitalist content and the romanticization of a perfect life, the last seven episodes were banned in the CSSR because of the actors Jan Werich, who played Mr. Viola, and Pavel Landovsky, the taxi driver. They were banned from work for their reformist stances during the Prague spring, and movies with them were not allowed to air.

⁷⁰ Srubar, *Ambivalenzen Des Populären*, 155.

⁷¹ Ibid.

4.1.2 Season 2

The second season is already more connected, with only one main storyline. Pan Tau meets family Urban (grandfather, father, mother, and the two children Kateřina and Rudolf) and their long-lost uncle Alfons who, 20 years after disappearing, comes back home with the help of Pan Tau. Alfons and Pan Tau look precisely the same to complicate matters, leading to misunderstandings between family Urban, Alfons, and Pan Tau. No one but Alfons knows about Pan Tau's existence and his magic powers in the second season. In the beginning, he uses this knowledge to try and get out of exhausting family functions and tasks, but he later starts actively integrating into his family, needing Pan Tau's magic only to make his everyday life run effortlessly. Towards the end of the season, Alfons emancipates himself increasingly from Pan Tau's help and wants to start his life as an adult.

One key aspect of this season is the dichotomy between home and the unknown, perpetuated in Alfons' life as Robinson on an island. When Alfons first understands how Pan Tau's bowler hat works, he uses it to return to his island, trying to go back to the life he knows best. However, once on the island, he starts magicking food from his family's home, the television, and eventually all the furniture from his room in Prague. Nevertheless, even with all the luxury around him, he realizes that nothing can replace his family and human contact. When he actively decides to come back, he accepts the society and all the pressure that comes with it ("zitra jdu do práce"). In this context, Alfons' storyline metaphorically deals with the question of emigration and staying home and freedom and unfreedom and what these concepts mean. His decision to live in Prague and live a life without the help of Pan Tau can be read as the affirmation of the socialist life.

The introduction of Alfons also underlines another central concept of *Pan Tau*: boundaries between adulthood and childhood are not so clear cut. Adults are not always oppressive but instead do have the potential to empathize with children and even occasionally act like them.

4.1.3 Season 3

The last season of *Pan Tau* varies and retells most of the main themes of seasons 1 and 2: the dichotomy between socialist as 'good' and materialist as 'bad' in the form of children versus adults, adults' potential, and the affirmation of childhood. Pan Tau spectacularly appears on the wing of a plane 9000 meters high in the air. From this moment on, he creates a rift between the little girl on board and the adults. While the girl is delighted by the man making faces through the windows, the girl's father and the staff do not understand what is happening. In the following episodes, the third inspector of flight security, Málek, is tasked with capturing Pan Tau for his transgression against the laws of nature. In this pursuit, Pan Tau is again helped by several children, some of whom are Málek's own kids.

Pan Tau deciding to appear on a plane in flight and the resulting chaos alludes to the dichotomy between imagination and technocracy. On the ground, the third inspector of flight security believes that "man on the wing" must be a code for a plane high-jacking and alarms everyone.⁷² All adults are set in their technological and rational worldviews and cannot make room for the fantastical appearance of a man 9000 meters high in the air.

This season is further essential for two reasons: the story of inspector Málek and the transformation of Pan Tau. Málek plays a role, not unlike Alfons, however inverted. On his chase for Pan Tau, he manages to get ahold of the bowler hat and decides to show his boss that there is such a thing as magic. However, his children hear of the plan and exchange the bowler hat for another one. When Málek finds out that he cannot do magic with the hat anymore, he is devastated. When he has gone to bed, Pan Tau enters his room and takes him outside to the street in the middle of the night. Still half asleep, Málek remembers that he

⁷² This topic is an interesting one. Having aired in December 1978, this scene could allude to the "German Autumn" and the hijacking of the plane "Landshut" by the RAF the year before. The terrorists had wanted to force the release of their comrades from prison but when the West German government did not respond to their demands, they killed Hanns Martin Schleyer in retaliation (see: Christina Gerhardt, *Screening the Red Army Faction: Historical and Cultural Memory* (New York London Oxford New Delhi Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).). Even the possibility to read this into the episodes makes clear, how fragile the idea of unpolitical television is in reality.

himself used to play with Pan Tau as a child. Utterly delighted, he plays with Pan Tau the whole night until the morning when he takes the bowler hat to the planned demonstration with his boss. To the horror of his colleagues, he enters the plane, and at 9000 meters in height, he uses the bowler hat to reappear on the wing. This makes Málek the only adult to completely reembrace what Pan Tau stands for and introduces the notion that the beginning of *Pan Tau* was by no means the first time he had helped children.

Just as Pan Tau is helping adults embrace their childhood, he is also going through a transformation in season 3. He spends his time learning how to talk, do math, and participate in human social life. In the course of this transformation, he starts using his magic less and less, a process culminating at the end of the series. After the demonstration, Málek underestimates the power the bowler hat has on the people around him, so when the plane lands and he tries to throw the bowler hat back to Pan Tau, all the people waiting on the ground start clambering and fighting to get ahold of this magical artifact. Instead of succeeding in getting ahold of it, they destroy it. While Málek still tries to help Pan Tau get the hat back, Pan Tau is already walking away from the plane, leaving everything behind. In this last scene, he is deprived of the symbol that was his main characteristic for the whole series - his magic.

Consequently, he also loses his way of returning home and his role as the protector and helper of children. Even though this ending can be interpreted as tragic, it also puts an end (or a beginning) to Pan Tau's transformation and integration into society that he goes through in the last season. Alternatively, the ending could also be seen as positive or full of potential. Everything in *Pan Tau* is building up to a world where magic is not needed to be a good person – the children, Alfons, Málek, and the magicless Pan Tau are all still there and arguably the same even without the magic bowler hat.

4.2 Concepts of Childhood in *Pan Tau*

A cursory summary of the essential ideas in the three seasons has already unearthed several important themes concerning childhood that are to be further investigated. Children in *Pan Tau* are firmly portrayed as ‚good‘: innocent and untainted by the world, breaking the

boundaries and having imagination, and defying authority. These ideals and conceptions of childhood will be further analyzed in this part.

On a more metaphorical level, children are the future of a nation, and childhood is an element that should be preserved in every adult. The different elements that make up the concepts of childhood in *Pan Tau* are elements that should ideally also be found in adults. In this context, *Pan Tau* should not only be analyzed in its socialist or capitalist context but in a clear line with Czechoslovak tradition and mythmaking before the Second World War.

4.2.1 The figure of Pan Tau

It has become clear by now that the focus of *Pan Tau* does not lie on children or even their roles in society. The subtext seems to be built on underlying cultural concepts constituting the two different worlds of children and adults. Pan Tau, however, exists in the margins between those two worlds and defies all logical conclusions. Other than the children and adults, he exists outside of time and space as a catalyst for change and the plot's driving force.

There is a timelessness to his character. He wears a Stresemann suit, a carnation in the buttonhole, carries an umbrella, and a bowler hat. The name of this suit alludes to the Chancellor of the Weimar Republic, Gustav Stresemann, who is said to have invented this style of suit. This setup is reminiscent of the time of the early 20th century and the First Czechoslovak Republic, placing him outside of the socialist reality. Pan Tau breaks the rules of the rational world; he can make himself big and small and act like a human and a puppet. Moreover, he does not talk, which makes him appear even more out of the ordinary. Adults are often overwhelmed by his otherness and magic, while children love Pan Tau right away.

He helps the powerless and weak against their 'oppressors,' which underlines the polarization of the childlike innocence and values of sincerity, friendship, and imagination with the 'bad' modern adult world and its values of vanity, egotism, and materialism. However, he himself is never part of the conflict and always helps everyone. This neutrality is most memorably shown in the first scene of the first episode, in which Pan Tau decides to

come to Prague. The episode starts with real footage of the launch of several rockets from Earth. It then cuts to Pan Tau in his old-school spaceship, who gets increasingly frustrated when he almost collides with a satellite. Right after, he hears a child crying and follows the noise down to Prague. This scene - especially when considered in its historical context of 'space mania' and the space and arms race between the Western and Eastern bloc - establishes Pan Tau from the first moment on as someone outside of human conflicts and places him firmly on the side of the children. In this sense, Pan Tau can be seen as the personification of a childhood that should be. He helps right the small wrongs and makes suppressed wishes come true. His character's fantastical and utopian elements make him even more of an abstract idea than an actual person. Ota Hofman once described him as having come out of "our eternal childhood,"⁷³ which underlines his universal and timeless character and provides a link to the concept of an ideal childhood.

However, season 3 shows that Pan Tau is not eternal. Without his magic, he is only one of many. Whenever his hat is stolen or lost, he is only human. He is not infallible or undestroyable and needs the children's help as much as they need his. At the same time, Pan Tau's magic seems to run deeper than the actual magic he can do. The fantastical part of his magic lies within his bowler hat, which can be lost or stolen. Nonetheless, what really sets him apart from other characters is the fact that he is fundamentally good. His metaphorical magic lies in his humor and unconditional support of the children. He is a feasible alternative to the typical adults in the show. This underlines that everyone has the potential to be like Pan Tau and gives hope for a future in which Pan Tau stays himself even without his hat, particularly when considering that most adults in *Pan Tau* are redeemable.

4.2.2 The construction of adults

Even though this analysis focuses on the concepts of childhood as represented in *Pan Tau*, it is clear from the beginning that the children are not the focus of the show. The children's positive characteristics emerge only against the background of the deficient adult

⁷³ Paul, "Die Kinder sind keine Kopien der Erwachsenen' - Gespräch mit Ota Hofman."

counterparts, which makes the adults the actual protagonists. In fact, in *Pan Tau*, childhood is constructed through the contrast with the adults. Accordingly, *Pan Tau* is a children's television show where adults play the leading role. This seems surprising at first glance but makes sense considering that the leitmotif is the struggle between children and adults, while one of the main principles is the unconditional validation of children. In this sense, only the adults are the flawed characters that have to learn a lesson and are thus focused on.

Pan Tau offers a variety of adult characters, constituting several types of adults. The two most distinct types are the 'good adult' and the 'bad adult.' The first type is the children's friends, notably Alfons and Pan Tau. These people fill special roles in the series and are by no means common. Alfons is a half-child himself, and Pan Tau exists completely outside the social system's hierarchy. Another man who could be considered 'good' is Mr. Viola in the later episodes of season 1. He is an unconditional source of support for Claudia, does not belittle her, and tries everything to help her find the puppet of Pan Tau. This type of adult could maybe best be described as the ideal adult according to the world of *Pan Tau*. The relationship with the children is marked by solidarity, support, and genuine joy in interacting with one another.

The other type of adult is the villain. Those men are portrayed as greedy, jealous, and irredeemable in the eyes of everyone, including Pan Tau. Some examples of that are the lost-and-found man who imprisons Pan Tau in season 1, the circus director, or the men who abduct Alfons' weather frog in season 2. Many of these irredeemable villains are from abroad, speaking with very distinct accents in the Czech version of *Pan Tau*. The German version does not make a distinction in this regard. This notion of the villain as the 'capitalist' is thus not as present in the German version as in the Czech original but visible enough in the characterization of those villains. However, instead of being critical, the West German media was almost euphoric in their welcoming of *Pan Tau* and its criticism of consumption. The

films were seen as a counterbalance to entertainment-hostile German and commercial American children's television.⁷⁴

The last type of adult is the most complex one, the 'redeemable adult.' They are oppressive adults who take the role of antagonists, most notably Alfons' brother Mr. Urban and Inspector Málek. No matter how mean they might act, those men are ultimately not bad people. They try to be dominant figures, Mr. Urban within his family and Inspector Málek in his job. Instead, they are ridiculed and made fun of by their families and often portrayed as well-meaning but unable to express themselves. Characters like them can be read as having a certain room for change and transformation, and they are portrayed as more than the pure antithesis of children. In every episode, they are the ones who must either change themselves or be punished for the way they are acting.

The processes of change in *Pan Tau* can be loosely put into two categories: the antagonistic adult embracing their childlike characteristics and the childlike adult accepting his adult life. The first transformation can be observed in several characters, even though none seems to finish this transformation fully. Mr. Viola recalls the importance of imagination and games through his adventure with Claudia, and Inspector Málek remembers his own childhood with Pan Tau. Mr. Urban, on the other hand, never truly changes at all. This underlines that the above-mentioned room for change has its limits. It evokes the feeling that embracing too much of these childlike qualities would constitute a total reversal from an adult to a child, an undertaking that is not at all desirable.

Alfons, who starts his transformation in such a childlike state, realizes really fast that living as an adult is necessary to survive outside of his island. Living on an island for years and escaping his responsibilities have made Alfons keep his childlike characteristics and general innocence. When he first returns home from the island, he seems less integrated than the actual children, not understanding the most superficial social cues. He takes his goat out for a walk and lets her eat a rare orchid. In this context, *Pan Tau* shows that there is not a

⁷⁴ Spiegel, "Neue Zeit."

clear line separating adult and child from one another, but rather an overlapping field that is constructed according not to age but to behavior and the ability to imagine. In other words, childhood is not a time period but a state of being. It is theoretically possible for an adult to 'be a child,' however unlikely that is within the existing society.

In this sense, season 2 is ultimately about Alfons integrating into the adult society and leaving many of his childlike characteristics behind. He is misunderstood and ostracized for having retained his childhood, for being an adult whose main characteristics still consist of childlike qualities and innocence. Consequently, in order to fit in, he needs to assimilate. At the end of season 2, Alfons and Pan Tau say goodbye, with Alfons wanting to integrate into the adult world. It remains unclear what kind of adult he will ultimately be, which makes his transformation from a social outcast into a 'normal' adult leave room for both affirmative and subversive interpretations. In a sense, Alfons' storyline can be seen as an allusion to the escapist tendencies and the mass emigration following the events in 1968. Realizing that fleeing does not help him and accepting that it might have been a mistake to leave in the first place, he returns home and starts his life as a responsible adult, with his family forgiving him for his transgression. At the same time, his reintegration into society has a defeatist quality. It is not clear whether this life is really what Alfons wants or just what needs to be done. He cannot be happy on his island, but that does not automatically mean that he can be happy in Prague. Like the overall ending of *Pan Tau*, this ending has tragic overtones. The audience witnesses someone grow up and leave his carefree attitude behind in a world that does not accept him as he is.

This makes the concept of childhood a matter of the past but also a hope for a better future, and thus a problem of the present. *Pan Tau* shows that childhood is not about age but a certain constitution that people do have an influence on. It can be seen as an infinite possibility, while static adulthood is a limited reality. This underlines a central goal of *Pan Tau*: the reclaiming of a childhood paradise or, as Jindřich Polák puts it, "Pan Tau land."⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Srubar, *Ambivalenzen Des Populären*, 73.

4.2.3 Agency and Subjectivity

Child characters are less diverse in their portrayal and only exist in their interplay with the adult world and Pan Tau. They are firmly portrayed as 'good,' and everything they do is justified. There is never a situation in which a child makes a mistake that has to be severely punished. Of course, they play pranks and fight with their families, but their curiosity and imagination are always affirmed. Instead, it is the adults' behavior that is criticized as the inability to understand the children or their imagination. The children are not necessarily different from each other, having characteristics that only correspond with an abstract ideal and only being portrayed as 'good.' At first glance, this is an unusual way of telling children that they "have a right to their specific humor, their dreams and their criticism of the adult way of life,"⁷⁶ as Ota Hofman emphasizes. However, it is worth investigating whether children in *Pan Tau* might actually play a more intricate role than that of the 'good' child.

Justifying children's actions and unconditionally supporting them moves the question of agency away from the adults, and therefore "the child decides herself about her world and thus repudiates the adult monopoly of truthfulness and realism."⁷⁷ In this regard, it is precisely the portrayal as 'good' that makes children into agents. However, agency, as an expression of autonomy, is naturally linked with individuality.⁷⁸ This makes the idea of an abstract ideal child with agency paradoxical.

It is exactly this paradox that is apparent in the socialist concepts of childhood. Socialist ideology establishes children as the agents who "actively engage in building a bright socialist future."⁷⁹ socialism "aimed to create new, morally, and psychologically superior human beings whose consciousness would be re-oriented away from materialism and

⁷⁶ Paul, "“Die Kinder sind keine Kopien der Erwachsenen’ - Gespräch mit Ota Hofman.”

⁷⁷ Winkler, "Czechoslovakia."

⁷⁸ Kenton Bell, "Agency," in *Open Education Sociology Dictionary*, 2016, <https://sociologydictionary.org/agency/>.

⁷⁹ Millei, Silova, and Gannon, "Thinking through Memories of Childhood in (Post)Socialist Spaces," 1.

individuality."⁸⁰ Czechoslovak socialist children's culture thus placed great significance on the collective. Children represent the possibility of modernization and cultural transformation towards a more collective and equal socialist society. Elements of this can be read into the relationships between adults and children in *Pan Tau*. Children are mostly collective agents against flawed adults. Especially season 1 underlines the power children have together, placing emphasis on their group effort to free Pan Tau. Furthermore, while only some children are known by name, there are regularly others who have heard of Pan Tau and want to help.

At the same time, in Czechoslovakia at least, "the concept of the individual was still essential – increasingly so from the early 1960s on."⁸¹ Children in *Pan Tau* may not be fully formed characters, but they are individuals, nonetheless. Not all, but certainly a few episodes deal with not collective but individual conflicts of single children, like Emil, who is afraid of heights and bad at math. Furthermore, *Pan Tau* demonstrates a way to emancipate oneself from the 'bad' adult world and thus offers an alternative to the existing situation. This ascribed agency necessarily includes a certain amount of individuality without which it is impossible to be more than just a copy of an adult. In this sense, children are both collectively 'good' and individuals with their own dreams and wishes.

Another significant aspect pertaining to both adults and children is the fact that characters in *Pan Tau* are overwhelmingly male. Of course, there are some women – the mothers or prospective wives – only ever the children's supporters or, in the case of the family, the bridge between the men and the children. This seems to be a very traditional and arguably bourgeois picture of the family: the authoritative father, the appeasing mother, and the oppressed children.

In the case of children, the situation is more complex. It has been established that the focus of socialist characters was primarily on the collective and not on individuals. According

⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁸¹ Winkler, "Reading Mateřídouška," 15.

to this, the children's genders should not be of any importance. This notion holds true only to a certain degree; there is no moment in which the girls are told that they cannot do something or that a boy is better at something. However, boys are still the more active actors in *Pan Tau*. While there are never any situations in which gender is explicitly brought up in *Pan Tau*, there are definitely some scenes in which the masculine/feminine dichotomy is alluded to.

One possible explanation for these overlapping values is offered by Libora Oates-Indruchová in her unique autoethnography on growing up a girl in Czechoslovakia. She theorizes that, by declaring the family private, state socialism did not manage to "bring aspects of emancipation in gender relations into the private sphere, unlike the restructuring that occurred in the public sphere."⁸² Consequently, women had to fulfill distinct roles in private and public spheres, which broadened the number of possible female positionalities and gave them multiple roles to fill. They needed to play their roles within an officially egalitarian and also persistently patriarchal society.

One episode that seems to deal with this ambiguity primarily is season 1, episode 7, in which Claudia is first introduced. The story is so bound up with its criticism of consumerism that it is entirely possible that the way Claudia is portrayed as a girl is nothing more than a slight towards consumerist societies. The episode opens with a muddled Claudia playing alone with a bow and arrow in the park and hiding from her nannies. When her grandfather asks to see her, the nannies take her away to make her presentable. This scene is accompanied by a musical number praising the "well-brought-up child" with lyrics such as "a good child does not defy authority," is "clean like a lily," has "golden hair," or is "always well-behaved."⁸³ In another scene in that episode, Mr. Viola lets her know that she should stay

⁸² Libora Oates-Indruchová, "The Void of Acceptable Masculinity During Czech State Socialism: The Case of Radek John's Memento," *Men and Masculinities* 8, no. 4 (April 2006): 428–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X04265988>.

⁸³ These quotes are translated from the Czech version of this song. In the German version, these expressions are substituted through "diligently doing all duties" "like an angel" "it does not hurt to be good".

with him longer and justifies this decision with the words: "I especially like to eat in the company of beautiful women."⁸⁴ Consequently, Claudia is barely more than another decorative piece in the vast castle. It is obvious from the beginning that she suffers in this atmosphere. She does not enjoy being dressed up or playing with dolls and just wants to go outside and have fun with someone.

The way Claudia is portrayed in episode 7 - the nannies dressing her up, singing about well-behaved children, and then taking her out on a boat tour - is more reminiscent of the 19th-century aristocracy doomed to fail than of Czechoslovakia in the 1970s. Furthermore, the overall setting of the story characterizes Mr. Viola as someone profiting from international trade, consumerism, and luxury instead of the good socialist life. Only when he has started changing is Claudia 'permitted' to be a real child, and her portrayal is much more genuine in the later episodes. All of this indicates that Claudia's girlhood in this episode is used to further criticize capitalism and women's roles in the West and present an alternative to the traditional way of treating children.

At the same time, the underlying principles of the well-behaved and dutiful child are not only a Western phenomenon. They shine through in other episodes. There are two storylines in which a girl is in love with a boy her father does not approve of. Emil and his friends, when they do interact with girls in their class, are brash and unfriendly. When a girl asks to help them break into their teacher's drawer, Emil rudely tells her to go outside. Furthermore, when he meets Claudia at the end of season 1, the two fall into a dynamic that is entirely traditional in their distribution of roles. Emil takes the lead, making the decisions and being tough when Claudia is afraid. He even starts flirting with her.

Even though this portrayal seems to paint Claudia as the „typical girl“, wearing skirts and being milder mannered than Emil, she dreams bigger and has more exciting adventures than Emil has. Where Pan Tau goes to school with Emil and does his homework for him, he

⁸⁴ Original: „já totiž velmi rád obědvám s krásnými ženami“

helps Claudia and her grandfather have an adventure all over Europe. This is an interesting mixture between traditional bourgeois and official socialist values of family and gender.

Differences in the portrayal of gender identities are there, but they are simply not the primary focus of *Pan Tau*. Oates-Indruchová concludes that "some traditional binaries could not be politicized,"⁸⁵ and that also holds true for *Pan Tau*: the central dichotomy is not masculine/feminine but child/adult. Several traditional concepts of gender, femininity, and masculinity can be found in the series, but they take a back seat to the conflict between fantasy and rationality and the struggle between children and adults.

4.2.4 Authority and Power

The relationship between children and (male) adults is well demonstrated in the field of authority. There are two realms in which authority and authority figures play a role: the private and the official. Both are treated humorously and ironically, underlining how unnecessary power relations based on discipline and fear are. The ideal adults (Alfons, Mr. Viola, and the women) do not need to exert authority or force to communicate with their children. Accordingly, the antagonists are portrayed as very forceful and not able to connect without trying to exert power over others. One example of this is Mr. Urban, who tries very hard to be respected by his family but only creates the opposite effect. He tries to micromanage everyone's lives, acts sick in order to get his family's attention, and makes everything about himself. However, his own family understands what he is trying to achieve and makes fun of him for it, even treating him like he is another child. Official figures of authority are made fun of in the same way. In season 2, Alfons and his nephew mock the policeman several times, once by dressing the goat up like a dog.

⁸⁵ Libora Oates-Indruchová, "A Dulled Mind in an Active Body: Growing Up as a Girl in Normalization Czechoslovakia," in *Childhood and Schooling in (Post)Socialist Societies*, ed. Iveta Silova, Nelli Piattoeva, and Zsuzsa Millei (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 56, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62791-5_3.

Consequently, the show makes fun of authority in every regard, using humor to make oppressive authority obsolete and laughable. In this sense, the humor in *Pan Tau* has a social function, "in the sense of a relief or a defense mechanism against existing repressive conditions."⁸⁶ However, the authoritative characters are not vilified but end up being endearing to the audience. This shows again how a person like Mr. Urban has redeeming qualities. Oppression is often followed by release and/ or a scene where the antagonist does something that makes up for their mistake. When Mr. Urban throws his daughter out after he finds out she was seeing her boyfriend without having asked first, he is so worried at night that he cannot sleep and ends up searching for her, which leads to him being locked out of the house and trying to climb back in through the window and falling down into the garden.

This is fundamentally different from the unredeemable villains. On the one hand, there is the greedy taxi driver in season 1. He is horrible to Claudia, throws her out of the car when she does not have enough money, and does not give her back the Pan Tau puppet even though he knows that it is in his car. Consequently, Pan Tau teaches the taxi driver a lesson that seems to change the man's heart. He follows Claudia to give her back the Pan Tau puppet. On the other hand, there are the foreign criminals who try to steal the weather frog Julinka from Alfons in season 2. They do not go unpunished, but they do not learn anything either. In this story, there is no possibility for redemption at all.

Scenes like this underline how *Pan Tau* works with several approaches to authority. It subverts the traditional role of the authoritative father and the obedient child without entirely abolishing the notion of authority itself. Kids can make fun of their fathers or teacher as long as they stand by them when it counts. At the same time, they can unite against the evil men who imprison Pan Tau. However, familial and societal power structures are not openly challenged. *Pan Tau* does not propagate a life without rules; it criticizes how the adults enact their power over their children and offers alternatives by contrasting various kinds of adults.

⁸⁶ Lothar Mikos and Claudia Töpper, "Internationales Kinderfernsehen. Das Beispiel Tschechien," *TV-Diskurs* 15, no. 4 (2011): 7.

Where Mr. Urban is authoritative and tries to be strict, Alfons is fun and loving with his two adopted sons, earning their loyalty with this behavior better than his brother does.

In this regard, it is not surprising that it is not the children but either circumstance or magic punishing the adults. However unfair Mr. Urban is to his daughter, and even when he throws her out, she ultimately respects his authority and does not contradict him directly, and neither does her mother. He is punished for his behavior, in the end, encountering a whole series of unfortunate events, but it never comes to an actual confrontation. Consequently, traditional authority is criticized and made fun of by how the authority figures behave, but it is never actively challenged by one of the characters, especially not the children. This way of making fun of authority underlines how the children can challenge the existing hierarchy but simultaneously shows their limits. Children have a high level of organizational and emotional agency, solving their own problems. They do not need an adult's help to free Pan Tau or teach him how to speak and write. However, they are clearly not portrayed as completely independent or disrespectful of all authority figures, especially their parents.

Because of the humorous way power is treated and how the children's plight is validated, there is almost no situation in which the children are genuinely afraid. The only scene that comes to mind is during Claudia's and Mr. Viola's world trip when they lose Pan Tau in France, have to sleep under a bridge, and are attacked by thugs. Claudia's grandfather establishes himself as a protector from the outside dangers and is soon helped by Pan Tau. Nevertheless, no adult figure and villain within Czechoslovakia is ever portrayed as scary to the children, with or without Pan Tau at their side. Establishing a binary of good and bad spaces and people further marks the outside world as fraught with dangers and home as safe.

Holding back on showing evil and cruelty in Pan Tau was also an active, creative choice. Ota Hofman underlines that he is

"not trivializing anything, but I admit: Precisely because children aren't and aren't allowed to be copies of adults, we, Jindřich Polák, Karel Kachyna, and I, don't want to show in our films the whole register of human cruelty that exists in art for adults.

The children's view largely excludes these aspects, it is unusually compact, and it would only be good if it could serve as a corrective to the adult view."⁸⁷

In this context, *Pan Tau* establishes children as agents who, at least to a degree, can challenge the existing power dynamics without experiencing any harmful repercussions for their actions. The child is freed from certain experiences of reality, of the "whole register of human cruelty," and is thus able to dream of a better future. In a way, it is a tragic story. *Pan Tau* and his magic are a buffer between reality, and the created bubble children live in. It has a temporary character, and the subtext is obvious: everyone has to grow up at some point – even *Pan Tau*.

4.2.5 Imagination and the fantastical world

Imagination plays a central role in how childhood is created. The world in *Pan Tau* is built on magic and the children's imagination, combining fairytale elements with the real contemporary world of the time.

Imagination and fantastical elements have a longstanding tradition in Czech storytelling. Fairy tales, as collective stories, are firmly woven into the cultural fabric. In socialist Czechoslovakia, they played a unique role between official state ideology and subversion. On the one hand, folklorist and classical stories were supposed to be used to educate the masses, but on the other hand, "the metaphorical images [...] enabled the filmmakers to disguise their critiques of the state, create ambivalent messages, and convey

⁸⁷ Original: "Ich verharmlose nichts, aber ich gebe gerne zu: Gerade weil die Kinder keine Kopien der Erwachsenen sind und sein dürfen, wollen wir, Jindrich Polák, Karel Kachyna und ich, in unseren Filmen nicht das ganze Register der Grausamkeit des Menschen vorführen, das in der Kunst für Erwachsene vorkommt. Die Sicht der Kinder schließt diese Aspekte weitgehend aus, sie ist ungewöhnlich kompakt, und es wäre nur gut, wenn sie als Korrektiv zur Sicht der Erwachsenen gelten könnte. In: Werner Paul, "Die Kinder sind keine Kopien der Erwachsenen" - Gespräch mit Ota Hofman," *Kinder- und Jugendfilm Korrespondenz* 28, no. 4 (1986), <http://www.kjk-muenchen.de/archiv/index.php?id=777&suche=Ota%20Hofman>.

their dissent through satire."⁸⁸ During Normalization, the dramaturgic group under Ota Hofman produced not only classical fairy tales like *Tři oříšky pro Popelku* (1973) or *Malá mořská víla* (1975) but also many modern fairytales that break the rules of reality and combine the real and fantastic world.

Many fantastical stories and their movie adaptations, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) or *The NeverEnding Story* (1984), create a different world for children to escape to. These worlds often reproduce the societal structures and roles of the 'real world,' The most notable difference is that the children are the story's heroes, either having to save the world or playing a significant role in it. As opposed to the world they come from, they now have the agency that was prior reserved for the adults. Magic or imagination lets them change their location and flee the adults' cruelty (e.g., to Narnia or Fantasia), where they then learn how to take their space in this society without the interference of adults. The children necessarily have to reintegrate into the adult world at the end of the story, now in a different position than before. In a sense, the fantastical world can be described as a "liminal space," as defined by Victor Turner.⁸⁹

In *Pan Tau*, this structure of the typical fantastical children's story is inverted in two significant ways: firstly, the magical world in the form of Pan Tau comes directly to the children and their families. Secondly, not the child but the adult goes through a transformation.

During Normalization, the most commonly used fantastical elements in films were not those of the parallel world the children could escape to. Instead, they centered around characters from a fantastic world coming to the 'real world' and deciding to stay, e.g., *Dívka na koštěti* (1971) and *Arabela* (1979-1981). *Pan Tau* is constructed similarly. While we never know where exactly 'Pan-Tau land' is or if there are more people like Pan Tau, he enters the

⁸⁸ Jack Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 263.

⁸⁹ Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Symbol, Myth, and Ritual Series (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1977), 95.

human world and falls in love with it. But just like Saxana in *Dívka na koštěti*, Pan Tau does not remain part of the fantastical world he came from. Instead, he learns how to speak and write and gives up his bowler hat in the end. He grows up, and it gives the impression that living like a social outcast is not sustainable. This transformation can be interpreted as a foreshadowing of what is to come for everyone, the imminent end of their childhood and the end of the liminal space.

Most stories in *Pan Tau* follow a similar pattern: Pan Tau accidentally ends up with a child or a family and helps them solve their problems (above all else between children and adults) before he leaves again to go somewhere else. The fantastical elements validate the children and make the adults the ones lacking a crucial part of life: imagination. Adults have plans, and specific visions for what life should look like, be it a day at the chata or the concept of what a person should and should not do. Mostly, Pan Tau brings magic and chaos into everyday life, prompting the adults to leave their comfort zone and validating children's imagination and fantasy⁹⁰ instead of pressuring them into societal norms. Only one episode breaks the pattern of the modern fairy tale, season 1 ep. 7, in which Pan Tau transforms Mr. Viola's castle and everyone in it into something right out of a classical fairy tale, without electricity and running water, only medieval clothes and a horse carriage instead of a car. Mr. Viola has to give up his luxury and modern technology to live in a world of the past that his granddaughter longs for. Pan Tau only lifts the spell when Mr. Viola remembers the importance of Claudia and decides to do right by her. It turns the traditional order on its head, making the adult and not the child enter a liminal space and transformative experience.

Not everyone can see Pan Tau and learn of his magic; he often decides never to show himself to people. Most of the time, only the children can see and understand Pan Tau

⁹⁰ In modern English, fantasy is a very conflicting concept. It can be a “story or situation that someone creates from their imagination and that is not based on reality” but also “the activity of imagining things,” in which case it is synonymous with imagination. (see: “Fantasy,” in *Collins English Dictionary*, accessed June 24, 2022, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/fantasy>.)

As both Czech and German use the word “fantasy” only in its second meaning, I am employing the second definition as well, thus using “fantasy” and “imagination” interchangeably.

because they still believe in his magic, while the adults are concentrated on logical conclusions and rationalism. However, Pan Tau does not fill the role of an invisible friend for a child. He can choose not to show himself to some people, but that is by no means limited to children. In fact, the only person in season 2 who knows about Pan Tau is Alfons, and some antagonists find out about him before they are punished for misusing the bowler hat. Consequently, everyone can see Pan Tau and do magic, but only those with imagination and creativity can enter Pan Tau's world without punishment. In this sense, imagination can be seen as a variation of reality, not an antithesis. "Fantasy is an element that partly determines the perception of reality."⁹¹ In the course of *Pan Tau*, fantasy becomes a reality and thus an undeniable part of it.⁹² An underlying supposition like this validates children and clarifies that "fantasy also reigns in reality."⁹³ As a result, even though imagination is not needed to see magic or Pan Tau, it is still portrayed as one of the most critical elements missing from the adults' life.

On a meta-level, the show in itself can be seen as escapism in the form of magic. In a world where children do not face any repercussions, anything could happen because Pan Tau is there to help. By focusing on the adults and giving children complete validation, *Pan Tau* makes childhood seem eternal and frozen in a perpetual state. However, the absence of any change in children's characters does not mean that they will never transform in the future. In a way, childhood is a temporary reprieve from the 'real world' and from growing up. The same goes for Alfons and his time on the island. He once fled to an island to escape the pressure from society, and it seems like he could have stayed there forever. Nevertheless, once reintroduced to his family, he is unable to go back to his island and be happy there. This

⁹¹ Tamara Bučková, "Die Zeit Verändert Sich, Die Phantasie Bleibt Oder Pan-Tau-Geschichten in Der Kindheit von Gestern Und Heute.," in *Kindheit Zwischen West Und Ost: Kinderliteratur Zwischen Kaltem Krieg Und Neuem Europa*, ed. Gunda Mairbäurl and Ernst Seibert, European Literature for Children and Young Adults in an Inter-Cultural Context, 02 = Europäische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur im interkulturellen Kontext; 02 (Bern ; New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 127.

⁹² Ibid., 130.

⁹³ Stewen, *The cinematic child*, 49.

demonstrates that escaping is acceptable for a while but can never last. This feeling of temporality it evokes, makes *Pan Tau* have dream-like qualities, an escape from hardship towards a small utopian world.

Pan Tau does not take place in fairytale land; it barely even leaves Czechoslovakia, but the world it plays in is without cruelty, repercussions, and real oppression. It is a world in which children have agency, and adults can be children. It is a world without real problems or tragedy. This is, of course, playing with the notion of utopia; More than that, however, *Pan Tau* incorporates uchronian elements. Uchronia is traditionally known in literature as alternate history, based on historical facts but concerned with *What if?* scenarios. In the field of Oral History, Alessandro Portelli has shown that the notion of uchronia can also be applied to historical narratives that often contrast "the existing world against a desirable one"⁹⁴ and "emphasize not how history went, but how it could, or should have gone, focusing on possibility rather than actuality."⁹⁵ In this sense, *Pan Tau* could be called uchronian in both cases. It is a fictional story keeping the feeling of childhood and innocence alive. Instead of happening in a perfect alternate world, the story takes place in a Czechoslovakia that could be. *Pan Tau* tells the story of potentials, families that could be, and adults who can change if they want to. Pan Tau himself impersonates this potential and makes it possible. Linking Pan Tau not only to children but also to "eternal childhood" clarifies how the ideals of childhood innocence are also linked to adults and never entirely out of reach.

4.2.6 The innocent child and its romanticization

The innocent, romanticized, and natural child has a long tradition. One of the first scholars to move the perception of childhood away from religion was Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Émile* and *On education* (1762). He rejected the Christian doctrine of the Original Sin and

⁹⁴ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*, SUNY Series in Oral and Public History (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1991), 100.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

connected children with inherent innocence and nature, only corrupted through their experiences in the world. In this context, childhood represents a possible New Order and becomes a symbol of a future society that is to be modeled on nature. Following Rousseau, the Romantics adopted this idealized view on childhood, making it immensely popular throughout the following centuries. The child was now seen as the "poetic genius,"⁹⁶ who had not been tainted yet, full of imagination and able to see all the wonders of this world. (This term can be traced back to poet William Blake, who uses it to mean "unlimited, unfettered, infinite imagination. The capacity of the mind to enter everywhere, the characteristic of mind which is universal penetrancy and inquisitiveness.")⁹⁷ Classical children's literature and later films, such as *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (1980), transmit these idealized children's values such as innocence, goodness, openness, and imagination. In them, children regularly restore the moral understanding of adults and society.

Pan Tau perpetuates a very similar view on childhood: The imaginative and innocent child against the corrupted and rational adult. It validates children and gives them the time to be children while punishing the adults who have left the world of fantasy and imagination behind to live in a universe of rules and regulations, or "experience," as Jindřich Polák puts it. In light of this, "instead of progress, maturation is understood as deterioration,"⁹⁸ and childhood is seen as a state of paradise, without any bad consequences or genuine cruelty. "A traditional romantic concept of childhood as a time of innocence and truthfulness [is] combined with a humorous appeal to take children more seriously."⁹⁹ Consequently, *Pan Tau* does not portray childhood as a phase through which one has to go to become a real adult but as something cherished and even desired. Perhaps even more than imagination, this

⁹⁶ "Object 4". All Religions are One. "The William Blake Archive," accessed June 19, 2022, <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/aro.a?descId=aro.a.illbk.04>.

⁹⁷ "William Blake - 'Poetic Genius,'" *The Allen Ginsberg Project* (blog), August 1, 2018, <https://allenginsberg.org/2018/08/w-a-1/>.

⁹⁸ Daniel Thomas Cook, ed., *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Children and Childhood Studies* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2020), 330.

⁹⁹ Winkler, "Czechoslovakia."

conception of childhood innocence presumes that children exist in a liminal space, a space outside of the real world and in need of protection from the harsh realities of the adult world. This romanticization of childhood in *Pan Tau* stands in contrast to the "enlightened child" in which children "are only legitimized by being linked to the prospect of future maturity."¹⁰⁰

This can be observed in the portrayal of Claudia and her unhappiness. She lives in a castle and has the most modern toys that money can buy but receives no love or warmth from her grandfather. It seems like she is parked there until she is old enough to participate in her grandfather's world. Consequently, she only wants to do whatever pleases her, leaving all the luxury behind and spending time with her grandfather. She dreams of re-enchanting the world. As opposed to Weber's "Entzauberung der Welt," literally the disappearance of magic from the world, *Pan Tau* plays with the idea of re-enchantment, of bringing magic back into people's lives. Especially Mr. Viola goes through a transformation of re-enchantment. He is incredibly wealthy, with a castle and a helicopter, and does not think it strange that a travel agency worker can bring his massive bed on a world trip and serve him cold wine even in a haystack. However, throughout his adventures with Claudia, he realizes that his way of life and his enthusiasm for unconditional technological progress might stop him from enjoying life. In this sense, *Pan Tau* deals with the "emotional drawbacks of a modern society"¹⁰¹ and offers a glimpse into a world that has rediscovered its magic.

Of course, this story could also be understood as inherently socialist and critical of consumerism instead of in a traditionally romantic way. Mr. Viola symbolizes a social system that children, as the architects of the "bright socialist future,"¹⁰² cannot tolerate. In this context, Claudia plays the symbolical role of a socialist child, suffering in her materialist life.

¹⁰⁰ Jürgen Zinnecker, "Kindheit und Jugend als pädagogische Moratorien. Zur Zivilisationsgeschichte der jüngeren Generation im 20. Jahrhundert," December 4, 2013, 41, <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:8442>.

¹⁰¹ Winkler, "Czechoslovakia."

¹⁰² Millei, Silova, and Gannon, "Thinking through Memories of Childhood in (Post)Socialist Spaces."

Combined with Jindřich Polák's dream "to one day find Pan-Tau land,"¹⁰³ *Pan Tau* appears almost nostalgic. The filmmakers romanticize childhood and family life in a way that suggests they also want to take part in it. Pan Tau's goal is not only to help children but, above all, to 'free' the adults from the restraints of their adult life and make them rediscover the wonders of childhood. One of the most memorable nostalgic moments in *Pan Tau* is the last scene between Claudia and Mr. Viola. They have just come back from their travels, and Mr. Viola is directly accosted by several men in suits. Claudia is alone in the park again, while Mr. Viola sits through a meeting when the window opens, and all the papers on the table are whirled around the room. While the men desperately start collecting their documents, Mr. Viola takes one of them, folds a paper plane, and lets it sail out of the window and towards his granddaughter. Another moment that stands out is Inspector Málek's sudden transformation when he remembers Pan Tau from his childhood. The severe inspector suddenly becomes a man who plays doorbell pranks in the middle of the night while still wearing his pajamas. He appears never to have been happier. It is visibly an allusion to a time when everything was better, and life had no restraints. Neither Mr. Viola nor Inspector Málek will keep acting like this; those moments are reprieves from the realities they find themselves in. Childhood has become less of a fixed concept connected to children themselves but to a time long past.

The question that arises is what *Pan Tau* is nostalgic for. On the one hand, a well-used topos of socialist storytelling is that of childhood innocence and childhood as a state of paradise, which links with communist utopianism. In this sense, the innocent and romanticized child can be seen as timeless. It is an ideal of the past but also of the present and future, simultaneously nostalgic and hopeful. But again, there is also a temporary character to it. Certain stages in a child's development cannot be reversed. Innocence is one of those things: Once innocence is lost, it cannot be regained, just as Inspector Málek's night with Pan Tau seems to be more of a fever dream than reality. This adds a new layer to the decision not to show real cruelty in *Pan Tau*. The children are frozen in a state of innocence,

¹⁰³ Paul, "Die Kinder sind keine Kopien der Erwachsenen' - Gespräch mit Ota Hofman."

sheltered from the real world. However, what is this 'real world' that is so cruel that Hofman made the active decision not to show it? Keeping this in mind, the nostalgic feeling that arises when watching *Pan Tau* could be directed at an actual past. Just as adults want to protect children from the world's cruelty, conflict and oppression, they want to be protected as well, not in television but in reality.

In a way, this corresponds with the national feelings towards the First Czechoslovak Republic. Socialist rhetoric is "closely connected with the methods of defining Czech identity in the preceding century."¹⁰⁴ There is a continuity between Normalization, the time before the communist takeover in 1948, and the First Republic, in which the small country was young and 'innocent,' but at the same time independent and significant. There is a continuous mystification of values connected to childhood as an idyllic state in Czech storytelling, dating back to the period of national revival. It offers motifs portraying the Czech lands as small and oppressed in the Habsburg Empire until it finally rose to significance; themes of young versus old and 'old world' versus 'new world' are common.¹⁰⁵ If the loss of innocence, be it children or a young nation's loss of independence, can never be restored, then nostalgia is an inevitable part of series such as *Pan Tau*. Of course, this paints an extremely defeatist picture of nostalgia for a time that can never be found again. But *Pan Tau* is not necessarily resigned; it can also be interpreted as hopeful. It shows how much there is a need for a transformation. By portraying adults as redeemable, *Pan Tau* leaves room for hope for a better future.

Pan Tau is known for protecting children's innocence, taking them seriously, and protecting their imagination. However, even more importantly, two out of three seasons show the process of integrating into the adult society. While the children are protected and sheltered, Alfons and Pan Tau go through the process of losing their innocence. Alfons decides to leave his island, join his family and go to work. He leaves his escapist fantasies

¹⁰⁴ Vladimír Macura, Hana Píchová, and Craig Stephen Cravens, *The Mystifications of a Nation: "The Potato Bug" and Other Essays on Czech Culture* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 20.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

behind and faces reality. Pan Tau walks away from his destroyed bowler hat, barely able to form words. At first glance, this directly opposes what *Pan Tau* should be about. It seems at first glance that both Pan Tau and Alfons make their decisions voluntarily. However, their transformations are not brought to a natural end, and it is unknown what becomes of them, whether they are happy or ultimately regret their decision. At the same time, the choices they make are not necessarily made freely. If Alfons wants to be with his family, he must give up his former life. If he wants to earn money to support his family, he needs to work. Ultimately, he realizes that he cannot live in both worlds at the same time, so he makes a decision. In this regard, it is a tragic story and one that once more underlines the temporary character of innocence.

Consequently, there is a looming threat over seasons 2 and 3 of Pan Tau, an inevitable process that can be interpreted as more than just growing up. It can be seen as a free decision to enter the 'real world,' cruelty included. It can also be a resignation, two outcasts having no other choice but to integrate into a normalized world.

5 Conclusion

I have argued throughout this thesis that there are various underlying concepts of childhood in the story of *Pan Tau* that contribute not only to a better understanding of the show itself but also of (socialist) childhoods in a transcultural context. The notions discussed in this thesis – agency, imagination, innocence, authority, and the romantic ideal – exist in an intermediate field, affirming, subverting, and rejecting different concepts of childhood. They follow a continuity within a wider historical and cultural context, and thus corresponding to families across the Iron Curtain alike. Accordingly, these notions make up a conception of childhood that can be interpreted ambiguously. *Pan Tau* loosens the binary ideas of the internal and external, redeemable and irredeemable, by offering room for negotiation and ambiguity in their interpretation.

Pan Tau is renegotiating ideals of 'good' and 'bad' in the juxtaposition of children and adults and making this renegotiation a problem for society at large. It focuses not only on children but also speaks to an adult audience. The children are constructed mostly in contrast with the flawed adult figures. This aims to validate children as 'good' and show adults in a more ambivalent way, some as redeemable and others as purely bad. Children are agents in *Pan Tau*; they exist outside of a world in which their actions have consequences and are allowed to follow their imagination to the fullest. A portrayal such as this makes childhood appear removed from reality and timeless. This notion of 'good' eternal children is reached through a romantic ideal of childhood as innocent and uncorrupted by the rational adult world.

Of course, this is not the only way to see adults. *Pan Tau* also introduces the idea of solidarity between children and adults, not only unsolvable conflicts. By presenting childhood as a potential for adults, it transcends the notion of childhood in its traditional meaning as a phase in a person's life and instead focuses more on childhood as a constitution. In this sense, childhood can be both presented as timeless and temporary. Childhood, as a potential for change, can offer the possibility of escaping the rational and organized world and thus a better future. At the same time, childhood as a time of innocence implies its consequential loss and serves as a nostalgic reminder of a time long past or an imminent end.

Pan Tau includes both utopian and uchronian elements. It is an alternate version of life, a better world, in which children can be children without facing any repercussions. It is a world where even people with magic want to stay. It is an ideal, a could-be that can be seen as purely utopian and never realizable, an active possibility for the future, or a nostalgic idealization of the past.

Due to the many different concepts in *Pan Tau*, my interpretations are only one avenue of research that could be expanded upon. Particularly the conflicting topics are worth pursuing further; above all, the question of individuality and agency (both individual and collective), and authority (both laughable and unquestionable). Do the analyzed concepts vary between productions of the same director and those not co-produced with the West?

Consequently, the multiple concepts of childhood that I have explored in *Pan Tau* are sometimes overlapping and sometimes contradictory but relevant all the same. They correspond to the dominant socialist ideals, can seem entirely unconcerned with politics, and can be read as subversive. Above all, however, the ambivalence of television lets it combine these different ideals into a new notion of childhood. In this context, my work underlines how binary views on East-West cultural transfer are not maintainable. Instead, television is necessarily ambivalent and constitutes different realities for everyone who watches it.

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