

# From Self-Fulfilment to Survival of the Fittest

WORK IN EUROPEAN CINEMA  
FROM THE 1960s TO THE PRESENT



Ewa Mazierska

Berghahn  film

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TO THE PRESENT

EWA MAZIERSKA



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I dedicate the book to my daughter, Kamka.

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# Introduction

I believe that we live at a time when technological and cultural inventions should save the vast majority of people from unpleasant and dangerous labour, and ensure a prosperous life for everyone. I am not alone in this conviction. Eric Hobsbawm writes in his last book, 'Our productive capacity has made it possible, at least potentially, for most human beings to move from the realm of necessity into the realm of affluence, education and unimagined life choices' (Hobsbawm 2011: 12). Yet, these ideals, even in traditionally affluent Europe, appear further away than fifty, forty or even twenty years ago. Unemployment and poverty are growing, and the majority of those in employment are expected to work longer hours and have more years of service before being able to retire on a smaller pension than the generation of their parents. They earn less in relative terms and their work is less stable than their parents' was, as demonstrated by the extraordinary career of the word 'precariat' (Ross 2003, 2008; Berardi 2009; Standing 2011), which blends 'precarious' and 'proletariat'. Young people are especially affected, with the highest level of unemployment, lowest wages and level of security, and the smallest chance, even for those with graduate education, to enter so-called professions.

A desire to understand and assess this paradox lies at the root of this book. I wanted to explore whether there was ever a golden age for work and, if so, did it feel that way then, and when, why and how has the situation changed, and again, how was it experienced 'on the ground': in factories, offices and places where information is processed and art created? Because I regard film as a privileged medium for registering and commenting on changes in society and their subjective meaning, I decided to seek answers by examining cinema in conjunction with histories and theories of work.

The fact that my initial assessment of the social reality was critical and that the book argues in favour of overthrowing the current system affected my choice of films and concepts. I turned to Marxist theories and films that lent themselves to Marxist analysis. I chose Marx for two reasons. First, I regard his criticism of capitalism, as well as that of state socialism – which I treat as a version of capitalism – as still valid, and even more convincing now than forty or fifty years ago. Marxist thought is thus a perfect tool to conduct the ideological critique that is one of the main goals of my study. The second reason is, as Hobsbawm notes, quoting

Jacques Attali, ‘the universal comprehensiveness of his thought. It is not “interdisciplinary” in the conventional sense but integrates all disciplines ... Philosophers before him have thought of man in his totality, but he was the first to apprehend the world as a whole which is at once political, economic, scientific and philosophical’ (ibid.: 12). I am not alone in finding Marx both comprehensive and contemporary. My study should be regarded as one of a number of recent attempts to revive Marxist thought in film studies and cultural studies at large, along with works such as *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema: Histories, Borders, Diasporas* (Wayne 2002), *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (Boal et al. 2005), *Neoliberalism and Global Cinema: Capital, Culture and Marxist Critique* (Kapur and Wagner 2011) or *Music and Marx* (Burckhardt Qureshi 2002), which refer to Marxist thought explicitly or through intermediaries.

As this project proved very wide, I had to be selective, both in relation to the aspects of films singled out for close analysis and the choice of films. I privileged text, because I regard text as the main source of information about the film’s ideology.<sup>1</sup> I paid less attention to the specificity of film production, distribution and reception. However, ‘as every film ... internalizes the conditions of its productions, it makes itself an allegory of them’ (James 1989: 12), these aspects are also implicitly tackled by the way I organise my material, by dividing the history of European cinema into four distinct periods. This division is motivated by my conviction that in each period film production and reception was different from that preceding and following it (with the exception of the 1960s, which I see as a continuation of the 1950s). In the introduction to each chapter I describe the economic and political situation in a given period, in this way presenting and commenting on the production context of the films discussed.

I decided to focus on European cinema for pragmatic and essential considerations. As the vast majority of my research concerns European cinema, I felt competent to tackle this area (as opposed to, for example, South American or African cinema). It was also easier to contain the results of my investigation in a book-length study this way than if I were covering more continents. I chose Europe of the last fifty years or so also because this spatial-temporal entity contains several different political and economic realities: first the Western European version of Keynesian capitalism or ‘embedded liberalism’ and the Eastern European version of socialism or ‘crude communism’, then Western and postcommunist versions of neoliberal capitalism. Consequently, it provides ideal material with which to find out whether and to what extent political and economic

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conditions affected the experience and meaning of work for people living within these systems, and what varieties existed within them, as testified by films made in different decades and different countries. Finally, Europe appeared to me to be the right place to start because this is also where *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* begins, with the words ‘A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism’. I wanted to gauge how much life is left in this distinguished ghost, hoping that I would be able to contradict my countryman and great authority on Marxism, Leszek Kołakowski, who once famously said, substituting a skeleton for the ghost: ‘This skull will never smile again’ (Kołakowski 1999: 418).

My decision to start in the 1960s rather than in 1945 was also prompted by pragmatic and essential considerations. First, adding fifteen years of European cinema and history would greatly extend the size of the book while forcing me to go over, in the case of Eastern European cinema, already well-trodden territory. This is due to the fact that a large proportion of scholarship concerning this period focuses on films about work, which is not the case with studies on later decades. Secondly, in terms of the approach to work, I see the 1960s as a continuation of the 1950s, because in this period Western economy was informed by Keynesianism and the foundations of state socialism were barely questioned, even though some Stalinist policies were rejected and the composition of the ruling elites significantly changed.

Of course, it is impossible to discuss every film about work made in Europe. What were the criteria for my selection? First, I privileged films that show characters engaged in work and those in which their relation to work (working or being unemployed, performing a specific task with joy or suffering due to it) affects the course of the narrative in a profound way. Second, taking a cue from David Harvey (a Marxist author who, after Marx, will be the main guide in my trip through countries and decades), who advises tackling the core (dominant institutions and phenomena), I focused on films that enjoyed significant critical or popular acclaim. A large part of them belong to a canon of European cinema and auteurist tradition, represented by directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni, Lindsay Anderson, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Alexander Kluge, Dušan Makavejev, Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Skolimowski, István Szabó, the Dardennes, Konrad Wolf, Jean-Luc Godard, Miloš Forman, to name just a few. However, I also recognised the fact that the more closely we approach the current time, the more fragmented European cinemas become and the more difficult it is to assess whether a specific film belongs to the canon or not. Hence, my choices might come across as

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increasingly arbitrary. Devoting much space to British and Polish cinema reflects the fact that I have lived in these countries and have taught about their cinemas. Moreover, both Britain and Poland represent very specific economic and political systems. My modest engagement with the cinema of the Soviet Union and later Russia results from my conviction that the country constitutes a liminal case, and its vastness and complexity require a separate study.

I chose a case study approach rather than trying to analyse all the films belonging to a specific wave or author, as this allowed me to look at certain issues in detail and make comparisons between films produced in different countries. I must also add that some key names are missing or represented to a lesser degree than one might expect. However, such omissions are unavoidable in a study covering such a vast area and hopefully will be eradicated in subsequent studies on work in European cinema.

The need to account for the changes in the realities of work between the 1960s and contemporary times and their representation in film is reflected in the structure of my book. The first chapter is devoted to theories of work, which also means in some measure the history of working, the question of ideology and the relationship between work and cinema. This chapter also provides an ideological grounding for the subsequent chapters, by summarising the critique of capitalism offered, most importantly, by Marx and David Harvey. In addition, I briefly discuss the concept and postwar history of Europe. Chapters 2 to 5 focus on four periods in European history: the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s up until now, as each period is characterised by a different situation for workers and their employers. The 1960s is presented as the last decade in which Keynesian principles were implemented in the West, which were meant to lead to the creation of a prosperous, stable and relatively egalitarian society, largely as a means of preventing an economic crisis of the sort that led to the Second World War. In the East, the 1960s were marked by a desire to expand the industrial base, largely as a means of competing with the West and proving that state socialism was a better system. Consequently, this was a period when workers in both Eastern and Western Europe enjoyed some power over their employers and were entitled to welfare. The 1970s is rendered as a turbulent period in the West, when the foundations of Keynesian order were questioned by both the left and the right. In the East it was a period of economic shift from building infrastructure towards producing consumer goods and, in the second half of the decade, a period of economic decline, marking the beginning of the end of the East European version of socialism. In the chapter on the 1980s I

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focus on the victory of neoliberal capitalism in the West and, in the East, on the workers' rejection of state socialism as a system that did not further workers' prosperity and political standing but, on the contrary, rendered them second-class citizens in the supposedly workers' state. The final, fifth chapter, covering broadly speaking contemporary times, discusses the time when neoliberal capitalism matured in Western Europe and was adopted in the postcommunist countries, paradoxically leading to a worsening of the situation for those who fought to overcome state socialism as a regime that was not socialist enough. In each chapter I also look at work from another angle, so to speak, by analysing films about idleness, as in my opinion the shifts in representing this state provide an important insight into the changing attitudes to work.

Writing a book of this kind poses the dilemma of whether to focus on films whose setting is contemporary with the time of their shooting, or whether also to include movies set in the past because, as historians know all too well, historical representations are contemporary, due to reflecting on current events and ideological struggles. After consideration, however, I decided to privilege contemporary films, with one exception. I allocated a small part of each chapter to films about enforced labour set in the past, especially in Nazi concentration camps. This is because camp work is an extreme form of labour; it marks a boundary between the most alienated work and torture and the annihilation of a human. By looking at the changing representation of camp life in film we can detect shifts in the meaning and assessment of 'normal' work. The same dilemma regarding films about the past also concerns films about the future, most importantly science-fiction films. Again, on this occasion I decided to leave them out, planning to tackle them on another occasion.

Each chapter is organised differently, to reveal the aspects of work that best reflect a given period or the work of a specific director. For example, when discussing 1960s films I offer an explanation as to why most of the characters appear blasé or dismissive of their work. I elucidate why characters in the films of the 1990s and 2000s are more pliant and eager to work, despite a significant worsening of their working situation in comparison with their 'cinematic ancestors' depicted in 1960s films. In the chapter about the 1970s I pay special attention to the work of women and ideological struggles around their work, reflecting the rise in the women's movement in the late 1960s and the 1970s. The chapter about the 1980s is in a large part devoted to an analysis of the situation in Britain and Poland as both countries acted as a kind of laboratory for the new, neoliberal order,

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introduced elsewhere in the following decades. When discussing the period after the 1990s, I foreground the condition of workers as akin to what is described as that of ‘bare life’. However, a number of tropes and ideas undergird and are explicitly referred to across all the chapters, most importantly the economic categories of capitalism, socialism and surplus value, as well as alienation and idleness. The result is a study that should allow readers to see certain trends in representing work, which can be mapped onto the changes affecting European societies and cultures at large.

Work is a very broad concept, a fact summarised by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s saying that ‘the world is labour’ (Hardt and Negri 1994: 11). It is objective and subjective; it comprises processes, experiences and ideals of work, its infrastructure and spaces, such as factories and offices, tools, such as bodies and computers, fruits, such as commodities and capital, working relationships, such as cooperation and competition between workers, the politics of work, namely workers’ subjugation by and struggle against those who possess the means of production, ideologies of work, and specific cultures born by work or, increasingly, its lack. Although initially I planned to restrict myself only to some of these aspects, in the end I decided to address all of them, as they appeared to me so connected that excluding any of them would be arbitrary and impoverish my argument. I became especially interested in how macropolitics and macroeconomy are reflected in the representation of experiences of work and working relations, which include work and class struggles (in and about work) and workers’ identities. Equally, I tried to tease out what these experiences and relations tell us about macropolitics and macroeconomy. Thus in my investigation I constantly move between the general and the particular, between macroeconomy and politics on the one hand and the experience of the characters on the other. At the same time, I attempt to account for the fact that I deal with cinematic, not ‘real’ or literary characters, situations, spaces and objects, which are shaped by discourses pertaining specifically to cinema.

While writing this book I noticed that increasingly I write less about work and more about life. Initially I tried to force myself to stop digressing and focus on the main subject of my investigation, but not only did I fail to do so, but I realised that I should not try. This is because the shift in my focus reflects the change in the ‘real’ world and cinema’s response to it, namely that in the period known as neoliberalism, there is less and less work to be done (or paid for), but also that the boundary between home and the factory, life and work, is dissolving. The second

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phenomenon is excellently summarised by Melinda Cooper, who in her book *Life as Surplus* argues that:

*Neoliberalism reworks the value of life as established in the welfare state and New Deal model of social reproduction. Its difference lies in its intent to efface the boundaries between the spheres of production and reproduction, labor and life, the market and living tissues – the very boundaries that were constitutive of welfare state biopolitics and human rights discourse. (Cooper 2008: 9)*

I see my refusal to delineate the realm of work as a political gesture, whose aim is to show work as affecting and being affected by everything else, yet in a way that is obscured by the dominant ideology, which attempts to subordinate work to economy and divorce economy from the needs of a society. This fact was, again, observed by Marx and elaborated by some post-Marxist thinkers, such as, for example Leopoldina Fortunati (1995), but gains special significance in the neoliberal period. I also see my book as a step towards elevating work to a universal category of research in cinema, in the same way that gender, national identity and postcolonialism have become universal categories. The fact that everybody is gendered, belongs to a specific nation and is postcolonial, does not undermine the usefulness of these categories in researching cinema and culture at large. On the contrary, it renders them especially effective in examining the changes in history and human consciousness.

In this book I draw on the work of numerous philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists and historians, especially, but not exclusively those with an interest in work, as well as film histories and theories. I use these various sources and methods as texts. This means that different histories and philosophies serve me to explain films and, conversely, I use film to reflect on given histories and theories. My study thus belongs to the widely understood field of intertextuality (Stam 2000a; Aragay 2005; Mazierska 2011). Authors following an intertextual approach propose to treat film and other texts, such as literature, not as ‘original’ and ‘adaptation’, but as equal partners, existing in a complex and unstable web of relationships with other texts. In common with this approach, my aim is not to decide whether the films chosen for discussion tell us the truth, but whether they adhere to a particular discourse, and to suggest the reasons for their specific ideological positions.

As I indicated at the beginning, for the majority of workers in Europe the conditions of work, which were always far from the Marxist ideal, have deteriorated

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significantly in the last three decades or so, while the rewards of work have diminished. At the same time, as David Harvey and many other commentators observe, the causes for this change and even the very fact that the change is for the worse are obscured by the hegemonic neoliberal ideology, which pronounces that the 'have-nots' are solely responsible for their misfortune and those in a slightly better position have no reason to complain. I regard my book as a contribution to counter this view and propose a recipe with which to overcome the current situation. The recipe is simple, yet difficult to put into practice. It is conveyed by the words from *The Communist Manifesto*: 'Working men of all countries, unite!', where 'working men' are all those whose interests are antagonistic to those of capital. Unity is needed more than ever, yet this unity is undermined by political and legal instruments, such as anti-union legislation, the destruction of spaces such as factories where workers can unite, and dispersing of workers, as well as rendering class divisions less important than those pertaining to other aspects of people's identity such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or age. The challenge is thus, 'to build a political movement at a variety of spatial scales' (Harvey 2000: 52) and use political means to redress the balance of power between capital and labour, and make identity politics work in favour of class politics, rather than against it. For that, however, we need education, especially for those who are about to enter the world of work and I hope this book, even if only in a small measure, fulfils this function.

# Homo Faber and the Work of Cinema

## Discourses on work from Plato to Marx and Engels

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Everybody seems to know what ‘work’ means, but this concept is difficult to pinpoint. As Maurice Godelier observes, in Indo-European languages, general terms such as the English verb ‘to work’ and the French ‘*travailler*’ entered dictionaries relatively late, replacing words that referred to varied types of activities, for example agricultural work and artisanal work. In most languages there are still two words used for similar activities; in English these are ‘work’ and ‘labour’. The word ‘labour’, derived from the Latin ‘*laborare*’, imparts a sense of pain. Work does not have negative connotations; work is regarded as ennobling, as in the phrase ‘right to work’. Labour is associated with physical effort, with toil and giving birth, while work can be manual, skilled, intellectual or artistic (Godelier 1980: 164–69; see also Arendt 1958: 79–174). Labour tends to be measurable, while work is not. Phrases such as ‘voluntary work’ and ‘charity work’ are common while ‘voluntary labour’ and ‘charity labour’ are extremely rare, suggesting that we equate labour with ‘paid employment’, while work can be both paid and unpaid. However, since the age of industrialisation, ‘paid employment’ is the dominating connotation of both work and labour (Joyce 1987: 1). Labour is also shorthand for ‘those who labour’, just as capital is shorthand for ‘those who live from their capital’.

People need work to survive materially and socially, and to transform their environment – to exist and progress. However, the questions of how much work is needed, who should undertake the required tasks and how they should be organised are a matter of debate, conveyed in religious systems, philosophical works, folk tales and proverbs, as well as legal documents, economic treaties and managerial manuals. Although many of them present themselves as neutral, technical documents, all of them are informed by certain values and promote a certain work ethic. It will be impossible here to account even for the main views on the value and meaning of work,<sup>1</sup> but I shall begin, as many historical studies tend to begin, with Plato, who, prefiguring the Marxist concept of alienation, maintains in *The Republic* that manual work not accompanied by intellectual effort degrades men. The life of a person who is sentenced to such work is that of ‘clumsy ignorance, unrelieved by grace or beauty’ (Plato 1974: 176). Yet withdrawing from

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physical work is not healthy either – the ideal would be to balance physical and mental activities (ibid.: 174–76). Somewhat contradictorily, in the same book Plato argues that different people are born for different occupations, a view pertaining to the dominant ideology in Ancient Greece, whose inhabitants were divided into slaves and owners of slaves with the latter working for pleasure rather than out of necessity. This opinion was shared by Aristotle, who in *The Politics* proclaimed that some people are born to be slaves, others to be masters and citizens, and the use of slaves ‘hardly differs from that of domestic animals’ (Aristotle 1962: 34).

The idea that people are born for different occupations and some are born to be idle is a thread woven into most philosophical and political theories, helping to produce and normalise social inequalities. Nevertheless, work has increasingly been seen as a norm, while idleness an aberration. Following Max Weber, Herbert Applebaum argues that the turning point was the sixteenth century and the teaching of Martin Luther, who regarded work as the universal base for organising societies (Applebaum 1992: 321). Although every century contributed to the study of work, it began properly in the nineteenth century in Europe. In 1931 Adriano Tilgher observed that:

*The nineteenth century was the Golden Age for the idea of work. It saw the acceptance of universal conscription in the army of labour, the spectacle of the whole race toiling. But even more characteristic and more important for our inquiry was the attitude toward work in the century’s leading thinkers, of its philosophers, who exalted the idea of work to a position far beyond anything it had held in religion or ethics, making it the cause of all human progress, material, intellectual and spiritual. (Tilgher 1931: 90)*

Tilgher begins his presentation of these philosophers with Kant, who pronounced that ‘to know is to do, is to act, to produce – to produce order and harmony’ (ibid.: 91), thus suggesting that praxis is a key to knowledge, an idea that would be central to Marx. Tilgher also mentions Hegel, Fichte, Saint-Simon, Fourier, Marx and Engels. To this list we shall add, at least, James Maitland, 8th Earl of Lauderdale, David Ricardo, Adam Smith and Thomas Carlyle.

According to Michel Foucault, David Ricardo is of special importance in this context because of his discovery that ‘labour is the source of all value’, and ‘henceforth the theory of production must always precede that of circulation’ (Foucault 2002: 277). Foucault also observes that about the same time as Ricardo

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created modern political economy, namely in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, modern biology as a science of life was created by Cuvier (ibid.: 287). This is not an accident – political economy, as discussed by Foucault, is a ‘life science’. ‘Labour – that is, economic activity – did not make its appearance in world history until men became too numerous to be able to subsist on the spontaneous fruits of the land’ (ibid.: 279). In Foucault’s conceptualisation the nineteenth century is crucial, because during this period men discovered – and Ricardo and Marx articulated this discovery – the limits of the Earth as provider of a means to subsistence, hence the limits of their work, their individual existence and history (ibid.: 272–86).

Marx and Engels’s contribution to the discourses on work exceeds those of other nineteenth-century thinkers and, indeed, their successors, which is one reason why my book is especially indebted to their investigation. They rewrote human history as the history of work. For Marx and Engels, man is essentially a homo faber: he was created through work. The first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history, is that:

*men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history’. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely to sustain human life.*  
(Marx and Engels 1947: 48)

Likewise, society was created through work: ‘From the moment that men in any way work for one another, their labour assumes a social form’ (Marx 1965: 71). Individuals and societies develop in step with the invention of tools of production and means of organising work, predominantly by increasing division (specialisation) of labour.

Although Marx saw human history as beginning with work, he envisaged its end as marked by its lack, or at least by work that is greatly reduced in proportion to the available pool of people to perform it. He envisaged such a scenario irrespective of whether capitalism maintains its power or gives way to a new system: communism. This is a consequence of the growth of capitalism, which brings with it the development of machinery and the rationalisation of production,

and consequently replacing the work of people with the work of ‘general intellect’ (Marx 1973: 690–95).

### **Paradoxes of capitalist economy**

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Although Marx and Engels provide a fascinating insight into the economic organisation of feudal society, they are best known for documenting and theorising work and life under a capitalist system. For Marx and Engels, the capitalist era dates from the sixteenth century, but its advanced form coincides with industrialism. They themselves bore witness to this form of capitalism by living in England in the second half of the nineteenth century, by the time the most industrialised country in the world, and researching conditions of work in Lancashire cotton mills. Together they offer a comprehensive explanation of the relationship between labour and capital, most importantly in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1977), *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 2009), *Grundrisse* (Marx 1973) and three volumes of *Capital* (Marx 1965–66). In these works they (although the input of Marx greatly exceeds that of Engels) examine such concepts and phenomena as use value and exchange value of commodities, the fetishism of commodities, the role of money, the conversion of surplus value into capital and the role of machines in accelerating the production of capital. They also provide an explanation of the capitalist crises and examine the relationship between capitalism and colonialism. Capital, the crucial term in Marx’s discourse, is an accumulated labour – it is created by labourers, yet expropriated from them by capitalists, who use it to create more capital, by investing it in industry, trade or lending it at interest.

The most important discovery of Marx concerning capitalism is that it is based on bad mathematics and immoral behaviour. The equation at the centre of capitalist economy is  $A + B = A + B + C$ , where ‘A’ refers to the means of production, such as the materials, buildings, machines, ‘B’ to the wage labour (variable capital) and ‘C’ stands for the surplus value, realised as the capitalist’s profit at the moment of sale of a commodity. In a healthy mathematics  $A + B$  cannot equal  $A + B + C$ , where  $C$  is more than 0. This means that consumers cannot pay for the total sum of commodities more than they earn or, simply, society cannot afford to buy what it produced. Production of the total supply of commodities in a capitalist system thus always exceeds the effective demand in this system. The supplementary

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value needed to buy everything that is on sale in a given moment can only be produced in the future. The full cash value of today's product can therefore be provided only with the assistance of money advanced against the value of future commodities. The surplus value created at one point requires the creation of surplus value at another point. These points, separated in space and time, are bridged by the credit system, which involves the creation of fictitious capital, put into circulation as capital without any material basis in commodities or productive activity. The whole capitalist system thus, as theorised by Marx, comes across as somewhat irrational. Nevertheless, when the surplus value is contained and there are still new markets for capital to conquer, capitalism functions reasonably well for capitalists. When capital over-accumulates, namely cannot reinvest its surplus with profit or even reproduce itself, it leads to a crisis, manifested in a massive devaluation, destruction of the surplus products and ruin of livelihoods, not only of workers and their families, but also of businessmen. This destruction (in extreme cases through war) can be seen as healthy, as it leads to the introduction of new products and ways of production; the most famous propagator of such an idea in the post-Marxist period is Joseph Schumpeter (1961).

There is a similarity between capitalism and cinema as both feed on the past yet are future oriented – both project. Capitalism is accumulated (dead) labour, but projects (assumes) future profits; borrowing from these hypothetical profits allows it to survive in the present. Cinema, as André Bazin argued, is a descendant of the practice of embalming the dead (Bazin 1967: 9), but is made for future projections. Both also involve colonisation – moving to new countries and new markets; this, at least, refers to Western cinema. Expansion of cinema is facilitated by being a visual medium and, unlike theatre, painting or sculpture, a medium of reproduction, in which, in principle, there is no difference between a copy and the original. This property, as Walter Benjamin argued, helps it to conquer a mass audience (Benjamin 2007).

'C' in the aforementioned equation also represents the surplus labour unjustly expropriated by the capitalist from the labourer. A large 'C' equals a high level of exploitation of labourers. There is always, in the Marxist model, an antagonism between capitalists and workers, leading to class division and class struggle. Capitalists strive for the highest 'C' possible, workers for lowering it and having higher wages. To achieve their goal the capitalists do not hesitate to replace more expensive male workers with cheaper women and children, prolong the working day, use the shift system, and introduce tools that reduce a need for work or

require increased effort from the worker during a particular unit of time, and increase competition among workers, which allows for lowering their wages. The general rule is, as Marx and Engels stated in *The Communist Manifesto*, that:

*In proportion as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of machinery, etc. (Marx and Engels 2008: 43)*

To describe the sum of exploitation and suffering of a worker under the capitalist system Marx uses the term ‘alienation’ (estrangement). The term conveys the fact that the worker becomes lonely in the world he created – this world is alien to him and the more he produces, the more alienated he becomes. Alienation has several dimensions, reflecting four types of relations of man: to his productive activity, his product, other men and the species. Alienation towards one’s labour is the most important as it is a root of all other forms of alienation. What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour, asks Marx and replies:

*First, the fact that labour is external to the worker i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else’s, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates on the individual independently of him – that is, operates*

*as an alien, divine or diabolical activity – so is the worker’s activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.*

*As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. (Marx 1977: 71)*

The only limit to the exploitation of workers by the capitalist system is a need to renew the workforce: ‘The cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires for maintenance, and for the propagation of his race’ (ibid.: 43). Consequently, the wage the labourer receives is always a minimum wage. In a situation where there is no limit to the workforce (which is usually the case), the capitalist has no incentive even to ensure that his labourers, real and potential, will physically survive. Labourers under capitalism are thus always at risk of becoming human waste:

*The labouring population produces, along with the accumulation of capital produced by it, the means by which itself is made relatively superfluous, is turned into a relative surplus-population; and it does this to an always increasing extent ... This surplus population ... forms a disposable industrial reserve army that belongs to capital quite as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates, for the changing needs of the self-expansion of capital, a mass of human material always ready for exploitation. (Marx 1965: 631–32)*

The situation of a ‘free labourer’ is thus worse than that of a serf precisely because he is ‘free’; all the guarantees of existence afforded his predecessors by a feudal system disappeared, together with his own means of production (Marx 1965: 715). This also means that a capitalist is not interested in a worker as a person or, indeed, in the quality of his product. In a mercantile world of capitalism the exchange value of a palace can be expressed in a certain number of boxes of shoe-blackening, and the greatest work of art is equal to a certain quantity of manure (Lifshitz 1973: 93).

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An economy based on the pursuit of the highest possible surplus value leads to degradation of the environment, as well as the worker. This is because, as Engels noted:

*individual capitalists, who dominate production and exchange, are able to concern themselves only with the most immediate useful effect of their actions. Indeed, even this useful effect – inasmuch as it is a question of the usefulness of the article that is produced or exchanged – retreats far into the background, and the sole incentive becomes the profit to be made on selling. (Engels 1934)<sup>2</sup>*

### **How capitalism won the world**

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The question that arises is how such an irrational and cruel system, in Marx's view, has won over such a large part of the world? Capitalism appears to be on many accounts a superior system over those that preceded it. Unprecedented technological inventions, including in transportation, communication and medicine, the building of modern cities, and the material enrichment of the white middle classes act as proof of that. Marx himself in *The Communist Manifesto* writes that capitalism is responsible for 'wonders that far surpass Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, Gothic cathedrals' (Marx and Engels 2008: 37).<sup>3</sup> However, all this was achieved at the heavy price of the suffering of workers and colonised people, reduced to the position of wage labourers.

The cooperation of workers with the capitalist system is ensured by three means: physical force, economic instruments and ideological tools. The state and its apparatus, the army and police, serve the capitalist class, both at home and in the colonies. 'Politics', writes Marx, 'is in principle superior to the power of money, but in practice it has become its bondsman' (Marx 1978a: 50). When the hegemony of capitalism is questioned, war breaks out. Wars during the period of capitalist hegemony are thus capitalist wars. In his article on the American Civil War Marx wrote:

*The whole movement was and is based, as one sees, on the slave question. Not in the sense of whether the slaves within the existing slave states should be emancipated outright or not, but whether the twenty million free men of the North should submit any longer to an oligarchy of three hundred thousand*

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*slaveholders; whether the vast Territories of the republic should be nurseries for free states or for slavery; finally, whether the national policy of the Union should take armed spreading of slavery in Mexico, Central and South America as its device. (Marx 1964)*

Yet in his times, when workers were ‘free’, and hence could move, as if of their own accord, in pursuit of employment, the main tools for ensuring creation of surplus value and accumulation of capital were economic, the previously mentioned surplus population, the Reserve Army created by the extension of the scale of production and the technological changes, such as machinery and means of transport. The low wages and high prices force labourers to seek work – without it they would perish, and compete for work with their fellow labourers. This competition gains in speed with the development of capitalism. The unemployed compete for available jobs among themselves and with those who are employed, men compete with women and children, immigrants with the indigenous population, ordinary workers compete for the positions of supervisors of fellow workers and so on (Marx 1965; Burawoy 1985).

Capital and capitalists are also successful robbers of the world’s poor because of the character of capitalist production. As Michael Burawoy observes, unlike feudalism, when it was easy to see when labourers engaged in necessary labour and surplus labour respectively, because these two types of effort were temporarily and spatially separated (part of their working time they spent on the lord’s demesne, and part on the piece of land they rented to create their own means of subsistence), under capitalism it is difficult. This is because there is no separation in either time or space between necessary and surplus labour: the worker works the whole day in the factory (or nowadays often in front of the computer), for a specific wage. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that capitalist production is complicated, with different teams of workers responsible for specific fragments of production. Consequently the distinction upon which a Marxist theory of labour process rests, does not appear as such at the phenomenal level – all labour under capitalism comes across as equally necessary. Moreover, unlike under feudalism, when the lord decided what the rate of exploitation was even before the work of his serfs started, under capitalism it can only be done retrospectively, when the produced commodities are sold. The price fetched by a particular commodity is usually beyond the control of the individual capitalist. The size of the profit therefore appears to be determined by market forces, not by the amount

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of unpaid labour time. Although there is a relationship between price and the labour time embodied in a commodity, it is obscured. Therefore, profit is not only realised in the market; it also appears to originate there (Burawoy 1979: 20–30).

By founding its success on the promise of profit for the capitalist, capitalism bases it on the worker's hope that he will reduce the distance between himself and those who possess capital by serving the capitalist slavishly or becoming a capitalist. The rare cases when it has happened, immortalised in stories of 'rags to riches', help to preserve the status quo. This leads me to the third important reason why capitalism attains its dominant position – the power of ideology. In *The German Ideology* it is stated:

*The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (Marx and Engels 1947: 64)*

The ideological power of the ruling class grows with the development of technology, such as print (Benedict Anderson uses the term 'print capitalism'), television and, recently, the internet. The function of capitalist ideology, in Marx's view, is to conceal from common knowledge the true character of surplus value: its origin and its function. One example of such concealment is cutting out from political economies the history of what in a bad translation of Marx is described as primitive accumulation (and should be rather described as 'original accumulation') – of creation of capital. Marx writes:

*This primitive accumulation plays in Political Economy about the same part as original sin in theology. Adam bit the apple, and thereupon sin fell on the human race ... In times long gone by there were two sorts of people: one, the diligent, and, above all, frugal elite; the other, lazy rascals, spending their substance, and more, in riotous living ... In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play great part. (Marx 1965: 713–14)*

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In his discussion of ideology Marx relies on proto-filmic metaphors (Stam 2000a: 22). The world projected for mass consumption by the ruling classes is the world ‘upside down’, as in a camera obscura (Marx and Engels 1947: 14), hence not different from a film projection.<sup>4</sup> But as Marx was aware, and as post-Marxist philosophers have demonstrated on many occasions, ideologies of the dominant class are always accompanied by counter-ideologies, and even the dominant ideology can be hijacked and used subversively by its class enemies. If it were not the case, there would be no point in me writing this book, as the character of the films could be deduced solely from the dominant political and economic situation of the times.

### **The concept of class**

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Burawoy observes that unlike political, legal and ideological institutions of feudalism, whose role in preserving the feudal system was transparent, under capitalism, these institutions mystify the productive status of workers, capitalists, managers and virtually everybody involved in producing capital:

*Thus, the political, legal, and ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state transform relations among agents of productions into relations among citizens, sexes, races, and so on. Moreover, the capitalist state, because it is relatively independent of the economic in a way that the feudal state is not, can assume a variety of forms – dictatorship, fascism, parliamentary democracy, apartheid, etc. (Burawoy 1979: 25)*

A crucial aspect of the capitalist ideology is to play down the existence of class antagonism. This is done by rendering the antagonistic classes as living in harmony, or even as one class, due to the absorption of the working class into more privileged classes, rather than the other way round, as is the case. Recently I found such an opinion in the British right-wing tabloid, *The Daily Mail*, based on the self-perception of the majority of the adult population of Britain. The title of the article said it all: ‘Seven in ten of us see ourselves as middle class’ on grounds such as owning a cafetière rather than drinking ‘working class’ instant coffee (Doughty 2011: 26). Such an approach to class is not new. Harry Braverman observed that in many polls conducted in the 1940s, in which the population was

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classified into ‘upper’, ‘middle’ and ‘lower’ classes, the vast majority identified themselves as ‘middle class’. But when the questionnaire included the choice of ‘working class’, this suddenly became the majority choice category of the respondents (Braverman 1974: 28). During the 1950s some sociologists began to write about a ‘new working class’, which was undergoing the process of *embourgeoisement* by being assimilated into the middle class thanks to universal welfare services, better educational opportunities and new residential patterns. This trend of seeing the working class as merging with the middle class continued in the following decades (Bottomore 1974).

Nevertheless, terms such as ‘working class’, ‘class struggle’, and even ‘labour’, have assumed a particularly archaic inflection in the last two decades. They have even been avoided by the British Labour Party. While in the past academics had privileged class and ignored other categories of resistance, many sociologists and historians have become wary of class as a category of analysis (Rowbotham and Beynon 2001: 3). For David Harvey the rejection of this category in current debates is a means of obfuscating the class character of neoliberal politics: ‘Class is the foundational inequality necessary to the reproduction of capitalism. So the answer of existing political power is either to deny that class exists, or to say that the category is so confusing and complicated (as if the other categories like race and gender are not) as to be analytically useless’ (Harvey 2010b: 231–32). Harvey’s argument espouses a wider idea, eloquently presented by Pierre Bourdieu: ‘The struggle of classification is a fundamental division of class struggle’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 138).

Although Marx and Engels based their theory of capital and labour on their knowledge of the reality of labour in Lancashire factories, they did not regard working in a factory either as a necessary or sufficient condition of being working class. The criterion of discerning capitalists from labourers is their different relationship to capital, not the job they perform, the level of their education or a state of their consciousness. In short, people are divided into classes by their wealth and, accompanying it, political power. In *Capital* Marx asks the question ‘What makes wage-labourers, capitalists and landlords constitute the three great social classes?’ and answers: ‘At first glance – the identity of revenues and sources of revenue. There are three great social groups whose members, the individuals forming them, live on wages, profit and ground-rent respectively, on the realisation of their labour-power, their capital, and their landed property’ (Marx 1966: 886).<sup>5</sup>

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The idea that the type of work performed by a person is not a decisive factor in discerning his or her class belonging was reiterated and developed by such Marxist thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, who wrote:

*The working class does not consist entirely of industrial workers; nevertheless the entire working class is destined to end up like the factory proletariat, as a class that has no property in its possession and is mathematically certain never to have any. Therefore, the Socialist Party addresses the whole of the working class – the clerks, the poor peasants and the small land-holders. It popularizes its doctrine – Marxism – and shows the working people, both manual and intellectual, how they will all be reduced to the state of the working class; how all those democratic illusions about becoming a property-owner are precisely illusions, puerility and petty-bourgeois dreams. (Gramsci 1977: 167)*

If we follow this line of reasoning, then the university graduate working in a call centre or an academic working in a neoliberal university also belong to the category of working class, even if their habits and tastes are distinctly ‘bourgeois’ and their pensions (often against their will) are invested in the stock market. Equally, the supposedly frugal lifestyle and proletarian taste of many present day billionaires do not make them less of a capitalist than if they drank champagne and ate caviar. If anything, it makes them marginally more capitalist, as it allows them to invest more and extract more surplus value from the working class. The asceticism of many of the richest capitalists plays an important ideological function, by sending out the message that there is little difference between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, hence no need for the ‘have-nots’ to oppose the status quo. Nevertheless, it is worth acknowledging that the concept of class is indeed complex, making it difficult to draw boundaries between classes. In particular, the term ‘middle class’ in the current usage stretches very wide, although not because of *embourgeoisement* of the working class, but rather proletarianisation of the middle class. The previously mentioned term ‘precariat’, which encompasses a large part of what was designated by ‘middle class’, excellently captures this shift. I am myself unable to do away with the term ‘middle class’ and its wide connotations without encountering the same problems that appear when one uses it. Hence rather than trying to replace it with new terms, I will attempt to analyse what it means in each specific case.

## Marxist and ‘real’ communisms

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Marx’s contribution to the study of work also consists of arguing in favour of overthrowing capitalism and introducing a different system – communism – which would abolish the antagonism between capital and labour and overcome alienation. Under communism people will not have to work for money, hence for physical survival, but only for pleasure and self-fulfilment. However, Marx gives remarkably few details about how communist society would function and those he provides are largely borrowed from the utopian socialist, Charles Fourier, as in the famous passage about the well-rounded individuals of the future who will be ‘hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon’ (Marx and Engels 1947: 22). Marx also predicted that communism would follow capitalism and come into existence through revolution, rather than evolution.

Agreeing with the Marxist analysis of capitalism encourages but not necessarily entails becoming a communist or, to put it in different terms, not every Marxian has to be a Marxist (and there are probably as many types of Marxists as there are readers of his works). One might accept that capitalism, as described by Marx and Engels, is a sham and an immoral system, but still believe that this is the best system humanity invented, as much from an economic as from a moral perspective. I believe that this approach prevails today: while we find few die-hard apologists of capitalism, even fewer people opt in favour of its alternative: communism. That said, capitalism comes in different forms and some of them appear to be closer to communism as envisaged by Marx than the extreme version of capitalism, discussed by him in *Capital*. After Karl Polanyi, I argue that the main difference between different forms of capitalism lies in the level of embeddedness of the market system in the given society, the size of social life that is protected from the rule of profit generation and the spread of social benefits of the economy among the whole society (Polanyi 2001). European social democracies, particularly in Scandinavia, such as Denmark and Norway, with their high taxes and well developed welfare state, until recently were regarded as approaching this ideal, despite privately-owned means of production.

On the other hand, the countries in which the means of production were nationalised, beginning with Soviet Russia in 1917 (which I will describe as Eastern Europe or simply the East, irrespective of their actual geographical position), came across as far from the Marxist ideal, indeed worse, from the perspective of ordinary workers, than capitalist ones. This opinion informs practically all memoirs written

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by socialist dissidents (for example Norman 1955; Djilas 1966). In a book published in 1955, Daniel Norman argues that:

*[a] British worker's opposite number in the USSR (where 'the system of wage labour and exploitation has been abolished', as Stalin pretended) earns less, works longer hours, has much less variety of goods on which to spend his money, has trade unions which exist only to squeeze more and more work out of him, is tied to his particular factory, and has the prospect of being sent to a forced labour camp if he makes a mistake or protests against his lot; yet he, according to Muscovite 'Marxism', represents the most 'advanced, emancipated and free' worker in the world. (Norman 1955: 8)*

Michael Burawoy and János Lukács summarise this situation even more succinctly: 'The dictatorship of the proletariat became the dictatorship over proletariat' (Burawoy and Lukács 1992: 146). Such opinions were echoed, albeit in a diluted form, in official socialist media. For example the famous Polish economist, Oskar Lange, in an article published in a journal *Samorząd Robotniczy* in 1965, admitted that in his country:

*Workers, as a result of obstructions in the development of workers' self-government, among other things have not felt their social advancement to the full. They are not sufficiently aware that they are effectively participating in managing the economy. They have the impression that they are on the lowest rung in the social hierarchy of the factory. (quoted in Conquest 1966: 9)*

The fiasco of the system usually described as real socialism, Bolshevism, state socialism or 'crude communism', has many reasons. The most important is its lack of democracy, especially in regards to the use of surplus product or surplus value, as pointed out by the aforementioned authors. The central appropriation of surplus laid the foundation for a new dominant, bureaucratic class, popularly known as *nomenklatura*. This class secured for itself excessive bonuses and privileged access to scarce goods (Burawoy and Lukács 1992: 146–47). Those who introduced and upheld this system proclaimed that it was based on the principles of Marxism – a claim that divided Marxist scholars, as well as ordinary people living under crude communism. I am myself among those who are unwilling to see crude



communism as Marxist. Marx himself warned against such a system, pointing to its similarity to capitalism:

*[For crude communism]the community is simply a community of labor and equality of wages, which are paid out by the communal capital, the community as universal capitalist. Both sides of the relation are raised to an unimaginary universality – labor as the condition in which everyone is placed and capital as the acknowledged universality and power of the community ... The first positive abolition of private property – crude communism – is therefore only a manifestation of the vileness of private property trying to establish itself as the positive community. (Marx 1977: 95)*

However, as a counter-opinion I shall mention Michel Foucault, who argued that rather than seeing in Stalinism an error, an aberration of Marxism, one should search in Marx's texts for an answer to the question of what made its horrors, which Foucault terms 'the Gulag', possible (Foucault 1980: 135). I disagree with such an approach, in the same way as I would be unwilling to make Jesus Christ personally accountable for the crimes of the Inquisition. Nevertheless, Foucault's approach to Marxism prevailed in the unofficial yet dominant discourses in Eastern Europe. This made it even more difficult to think about an alternative to the system offered to that which replaced it and which, as Burawoy and Lukács argue in relation to Hungary, turned out to protect many features of the old regime, especially its uneven distribution of wealth and power (Burawoy and Lukács 1992: 155).

### **Discourses on work after Marx and Engels**

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The legacy left by the writings of Marx and Engels is so huge in its scope and volume that one could not imagine one person or even one discipline developing all its main strands, either in agreement or opposition to them, especially in an age of, to use Marxian terminology, increased division of labour. Accordingly, after Marx and Engels the discourse on work fragmented into many, albeit connected, disciplines.

One strand is a philosophy of work developed by authors such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Thorstein Veblen, William Morris and the English arts and crafts

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movement, Paul Lafargue, Henri Bergson, Hannah Arendt, Georg (György) Lukács, Theodor Adorno, Antonio Gramsci, Herbert Marcuse, the Situationists, Deleuze and Guattari, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno, Leopoldina Fortunati, Fredric Jameson and a number of my countrymen: Stanisław Brzozowski, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Pope John Paul II, Zygmunt Bauman and, if we regard her as Polish, Rosa Luxemburg. Due to a shortage of space it will be impossible to present the views of any of them separately, but it is fair to say that they all start their investigation from the Marxian premise that work is a crucial factor in shaping history and human identity. They seek an answer to the question of how work engenders societies, cultures and individuals, and what happens to people to whom work is denied. Overtly or covertly they deal with the question of good versus bad work, useful and useless, as seen from different perspectives, most importantly by workers themselves and those consuming the fruits of their work.

All these authors engage with the question of ideology and class, but the most influential authors in this area are Antonio Gramsci (1977), Louis Althusser, especially in his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (1971) and Georg (György) Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* (Lukács 1971, especially 46–82). They underscore the fact that being in a specific relation to the means of production or possessing or not possessing capital does not determine having a specific class consciousness. Therefore to overcome capitalism the working class has to bridge the gap between being a class *in itself* to being a class *for itself*, aware of its true interests. This means seeing in the dominant ideology an instrument of preserving the status quo by projecting a false image of reality.

Marx and Engels's works, especially *Capital* and *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, can also be seen as precursors to sociology and the cultural study of work, namely investigation of the conditions, experiences and meaning of work for different groups of people in specific historical circumstances. A very important figure in this area is Max Weber, the author of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, published for the first time in 1904–05 (1976). As Anthony Giddens observes, 'Weber stressed the need to examine economic life within the context of the historical development of culture as a whole' (Giddens 1976: 1). Weber came to the conclusion that Protestantism, unlike any other religion, awakened the 'spirit of capitalism'. Whether this is true or not is a matter of a debate (ibid.: 8–12), but what is beyond doubt is that by pointing to this connection, Weber also dignified capitalists, presenting them as people with a special vocation, even

providing them with an aura of martyrdom, unlike Marx and Engels, who perceived capitalists as selfish, greedy and hypocritical. Take these words, following Weber's presentation of the views of the 'ultimate Protestant', Benjamin Franklin:

*The peculiarity of this philosophy of avarice appears to be the ideal of the honest man of recognised credit, and above all the idea of a duty of the individual towards the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end of itself. Truly what is here preached is not simply a means of making one's way in the world, but a peculiar ethic. (Weber 1976: 51)*

Furthermore, unlike Marx, who played up the difference between workers and capitalists, regarding the latter and their agents (managers) solely as extractors of surplus labour, Weber regarded capitalists as no less workers than physical labourers, vulnerable to overwork and alienation (Weber 1976; on the difference between Marx and Weber's ideas of capitalism see Giddens 1985: 122–47).

Sociologists and philosophers writing in the second half of the twentieth century responded to the new situation of labour and capital, marked by further advances in technology, which together led to the undermining of the industrial working class, blurring the division between manual and non-manual labour, reducing the need for labour, and applying the criteria of productivity and profit to workers in all sectors. The seminal book about workers using their intellect is C. Wright Mills's *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951). Daniel Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1974) pronounced, as its title suggests, the arrival of a new type of society, for whom non-material production would play a greater role than a material one. They were followed by authors such as Ross (2003), Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), Lazzarato (2006), Berardi (2009) and Gregg (2011), who pointed to a high level of exploitation and insecurity of non-manual workers, which renders them not very different from the Marxist proletariat. I already used the term 'precariat', coined by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, to describe this phenomenon. Negri, Hardt and Virno use the term 'multitude' to reflect the shrinking of the industrial working class, the melting of the boundary between manual work and intellectual, creative work, and account for, on one hand, the social and cultural heterogeneity of contemporary workers and, on the other, their similar class interests (Virno 2004; Hardt and Negri 2006, especially 97–157).

Probably there are more books and articles devoted nowadays to unemployment than to employment (Seabrook 1988; Reich 1991; Sennett 2006)

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and to intellectual, creative and managerial work than to factory work (McKenzie 2001; Liu 2004; Ho 2008; Gregg 2011). To account for the new realities of work many authors have to borrow methods from performance studies, because work under neoliberal capitalism, in places such as banks and corporations, which sell nonexistent or at least virtual goods, has much to do with theatre and image creation (Mangham and Overington 1987; Lowe 1995; McKenzie 2001).

Another important theme in recent studies of work is delineating a difference between work and nonwork, because the spaces and periods dedicated solely to work and solely to leisure have shrunk. Work is performed in spaces of leisure, in bedrooms, on beaches, in cafés and places of transition, such as airports and trains, and fewer people work from 8 to 4 or 9 to 5 than those who work both inside and outside these hours. Work thus appears to be everywhere and nowhere. Philosophers of work also grapple with the question of finding alternative meaning to human life than that offered by work, and finding a criterion to differentiate useful and harmful work.

Much recent scholarship, in a large part inspired by Foucault and feminist thought, has been also dedicated to ‘body work’ (Shilling 1993; 2005: 73–100; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Wolkowitz 2006). This reflects such phenomena as professionalisation and financialisation of many types of physical work that were previously performed at home, such as caring for old people. Moreover, image creation, so important in contemporary economy, demands working on one’s body: ‘cultural body work’ (Shilling 2005: 74), which requires professional assistance of fitness trainers and beauticians. The turn to body can be also attributed to the loss of confidence in the previously established categories, such as society or culture. In the extremely fluid, neoliberal and post-Fordist world, where all referents are destabilised, the body appears somewhat more stable (Lowe 1995: 14; Harvey 2000: 97), although the body is also always in a state of flux: an unfinished project. The body also attracts special attention because for a growing number of people, those who are labelled ‘superfluous’ or ‘human waste’, the body is practically their only possession, which they have to exploit ruthlessly to survive, for example by selling its parts or accepting to be used in medical experiments (Cooper 2008; Yates 2011).

The vast majority of studies under the rubric ‘sociology and cultural study of work’, openly or tacitly refer to the concept of alienation, by asking questions such as whether work allows its performer (Marxist’s seller of labour power) to survive physically, economically and morally in the given circumstances and how to

counter or alleviate alienation. A notable example is Robert Blauner's study *Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and His Industry* (1964), which attempts to find out what alienated work means in industrial practice, and comes to the conclusion that 'alienation exists when workers are unable to control their immediate work process, to develop a sense of purpose and function which connects their jobs to the overall organization of production, to belong to integrated industrial communities' (Blauner 1964: 15). Blauner observes that in modern employment control, purpose, social integration and self-involvement are all problematic. However, not all features of the modern factory are equally prone to creating an alienated worker. The separation from ownership of the means of production and the finished product, and the inability to influence general managerial processes matter less for workers than the lack of control over conditions of employment, such as the ability to influence their work rhythm and being responsible for a large span of the production process (ibid.: 15–34). Blauner concludes that 'non-alienated activity consists of immersion in the present; alienated activity is not free, but compulsive and driven by necessity. In non-alienated activity the rewards are in the activity itself; in alienated states they are largely extrinsic to the activity, which has become primarily a means to an end' (ibid.: 27). Although Blauner based his conclusions on observing the working of a capitalist factory in the period of industrialism, they are useful to measure alienation in different contexts, such as a socialist factory and working in the postindustrial age.

Among the most ambitious and influential anthropological studies of work are *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974) by Harry Braverman and Michael Burawoy's *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (1979) and *The Politics of Production* (1985). Their authors ask the question why workers work as much as they do: so little in the case of Braverman and so much in the case of Burawoy. Due to censorship these works do not have many official equivalents in the socialist world, but such studies fill a large chunk of literature produced by dissidents and Western visitors in the East (for example Norman 1955; Djilas 1966) and they mushroomed after the collapse of communism.<sup>6</sup>

Another strand of the study of work became management or business studies, which concerns itself with the optimisation of work processes, an idea to which Marx devotes a large part of his *Capital*, drawing on writers such as Andrew Ure and Charles Babbage (regarded as a pioneer of computerisation), as well as Adam Smith. Frederick F. Taylor and Henry Ford are regarded as its twentieth-century pillars.

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Preoccupied with the problem of labour slowdowns, Taylor timed basic work actions, developed programmed task instruction cards for employees, recommended factory planning departments, and devised wage scales based on piece work, such that a productive worker would share in the extension of output, but would fall below a subsistence wage and be forced to quit when he proved inefficient (Maier 1970: 29). He included the results of his study of labour discipline and workshop organisation in *Principles of Scientific Management*, published for the first time in 1911. Henry Ford, an American industrialist specialising in automobile production, in his factories replaced predominantly craft-based production with large-scale manufacturing processes, of which a crucial element was converging assembly lines, using less skilled labour. In this way he achieved dramatic gains in productivity, which led to price cuts in Ford cars: from \$780 in 1910 to \$360 in 1914. Fordism thus involved standardisation of a product and manufacturing it by mass means at a price so low that the common man could afford to buy it (Harvey 1990: 125–28).

The principles of Fordism and Taylorism were applied not only in capitalist countries but in the socialist world as well, underscoring the similarity between capitalism and crude communism. In his first months of power, Lenin openly endorsed Taylorism as a means of reinforcing Soviet power (Maier 1970: 50). According to anecdotes, Soviet planners were even more ardent followers of Taylorism and Fordism than their American counterparts, of which a symbol was hairdressing salons in Magnitogorsk organised as assembly lines, with hairdressers doing the same cut to hundreds of customers. Taylorism and Fordism are typically represented as ideologically neutral, scientific methods of improving work, but they are ideology-driven. Their chief goal, the highest possible productivity of work, and the means to achieve it by increased division of labour and disciplining the body of a worker, contradicts the Marxist ideal of creating a full, balanced personality by nonalienated work. Although Taylor was of an opinion that the workers should benefit from the fruits of their work and achieve more than the minimum wage if they were efficient, he did not believe that pay should rise in the same proportion as output; smaller increments would force the worker to remain ambitious (Maier 1970: 31) and allow the capitalist to amass and reinvest his wealth. Taylorism is thus, both in its inception and execution, ultimately a means to increase surplus value, expropriated either by an individual capitalist or, in the case of socialist countries, by an authoritarian state.

The study of work, created by Marx, also led to macroeconomics, namely a theory of the performance, structure and behaviour of the entire economy: that

of a nation, a region or even an entire human population. Its beginning, according to Michel Foucault, dates back to the eighteenth century (Foucault 1991b: 98–100), but it developed most spectacularly in a response to the great crisis of the 1920s and 1930s, a tragedy that the ‘scientific management’ of Ford and Taylor was unable to prevent or contain. The most famous macroeconomist of the twentieth century became John Maynard Keynes; the most profound, in my view, Karl Polanyi. Keynes argued for an active role of the state in planning and stimulating the economy, the existence of a large public sector, alongside a private sector, promoting full employment and welfare state, the centralisation of capital that curbed intercapitalist competition and union collaboration with management to raise productivity in return for wage gains that stimulated effective demand (Lekachman 1967: 150–255; Harvey 1990: 121–40; Hardt and Negri 1994: 23–52). Keynes died in 1946, but his ideas outlived him for many decades. The political economy in the West in roughly the first three decades after the Second World War followed his ideas. Not dissimilar ideas were tested in Eastern Europe. There the leading economists were Poles Michał Kalecki, an economist who reached similar conclusions as Keynes with regard to economic cycles before Keynes, Oskar Lange and Czesław Bobrowski. From the 1970s they were rejected by the ruling elites in favour of neoliberalism or monetarism, espoused by, most importantly, Milton Friedman, who argued against state intervention in planning and stimulating the economy, criticised the existence of a welfare state and advocated limiting state economic activities to monetary policy. Friedman’s ideas achieved hegemonic position in the West in the 1980s and, after the collapse of communism, in many countries of the Soviet Bloc. Like Keynes, who had his equivalent in Polish Kalecki, Friedman has his equivalent in Leszek Balcerowicz, the chief architect of Polish economic reforms after 1989.

Karl Polanyi who, like Keynes, witnessed the U.S. stock market crash in 1929, the failure of the Vienna Kreditanstalt in 1931, which precipitated the Great Depression, and the rise of fascism, looked for the economic roots of these human tragedies and found them in nineteenth-century liberalism, which introduced the gold standard as a means to achieve a self-regulating global market. Yet Polanyi shows in his magnum opus, *The Great Transformation*, published in 1944, that when the gold standard was widely adopted in the 1870s, it had the ironic effect of intensifying the importance of the nation state. Its dramatic consequences were sharp declines in wages and farm income, increases in unemployment, and a rise in business and bank failures. So almost as soon as the gold standard mechanism

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was in place, entire societies began to collude in trying to offset its impact by introducing protective tariffs and rushing to establish colonies in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Polanyi saw the rise of fascism and the two world wars as a product of the conflict between the drive towards free trade and people's desire to protect themselves against the uncertainty it brings, even, as in the case of fascist states, at the price of sacrificing freedom. Polanyi's overall conclusion is that 'market liberalism makes demands on ordinary people that are simply not sustainable' (Block 2001: xxxiv). In its place he offers a democratic alternative, which does not reject the market entirely, but accepts that not everything should be measured in money and exposed to the pressure of market forces. Land, labour and money, which he describes as fictitious commodities, should not be sold at the market, as much for moral as practical reasons. Polanyi's work, as Joseph Stiglitz and Fred Block observe, has particular relevance in contemporary times because of the global dominance of neoliberal order, fuelled by the same utopian vision that inspired the gold standard (Block 2001; Polanyi 2001; Stiglitz 2001).

Finally, Marx's work influenced many practising politicians, most importantly the leaders of the main revolutions of the twentieth century, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Maoist revolution in the 1940s and the Cuban Revolution of the 1950s, Lenin, Mao and Fidel Castro, to name only the most important. They proclaimed that workers are treated unfairly under capitalism, and promised that under communism they would no longer be exploited by capitalists and would benefit from the fruits of their labour proportionally to their effort and in step with the development of technology. Marxist theory also affected, albeit indirectly, those Western politicians who after the Second World War followed Keynesian logic and opted for a compromise between capital and labour, of which prime examples are Harold Wilson in Britain and Olof Palme in Sweden; the latter becoming an epitome of Scandinavian social democracy or even socialism.

Publications of the last thirty years or so belonging to these subfields, be it manuals for managers or people looking for work, or sociological studies concerning work practices in specific regions, reveal an important shift from treating work as a 'given' or 'passive' element in economic equations, to its conceptualisation as an active element, no less active than capital. This shift reflects a profound ideological change in approach to work, which occurred during this period and coincides with the development and implementation of neoliberal theory across the world. Thomas Lemke, drawing on the works of the economists from the Freiburg School (known as *Ordo-liberals*), who influenced the so-called

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Chicago School of economy and its critique by Michel Foucault, characterises this shift in such terms:

*[Neo-liberalism] does not proceed from objective-mechanical laws, but takes its starting point in an appraisal of subjective-voluntarist calculations: how do the people performing the labour use the means at their disposal? ... For a wage labourer the wage is by no means the price for selling his/her labour power, but instead represents an income from a special type of capital. This capital is not capital like other forms, for the ability, skill and knowledge cannot be separated from the person who possesses them. This 'human capital' is made up of two components: an inborn physical-generic predisposition and the entirety of skills that have been acquired as the result of 'investment' in the corresponding stimuli: nutrition, education, training and also love, affection, etc. In this model, the wage labourers are no longer the employees dependent on a company, but are autonomous entrepreneurs with full responsibility for their own investment decisions and endeavouring to produce surplus value; they are entrepreneurs of themselves. (Lemke 2001: 199)*

The idea of human capital can also be found in the works of authors such as Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979; Wacquant 1993) and Daniel Bell (1974). Yet adopting this concept does not preclude accepting a Marxist view of the history of work relations. Marx himself engaged polemically with the concept of human capital, stating in *Grundrisse* that regarding workers' vital forces (labour power) as his capital does not change anything in seeing the interests of workers and capitalists as antagonistic (Marx 1973: 293–97). The advocates of the concept of human capital, which includes physical, cultural and social capital, acknowledge that its size is closely linked to the size of one's material capital. People with huge material means tend to have large human capital – they can sell themselves dearly; those without or with modest material means have modest human capital. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron observed in 1964 that 'A senior executive's son is eighty times more likely to enter a university than a farm worker's son' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1979: 2).

The areas of post-Marxist thought (in terms of drawing on Marx or being formulated after Marx) that I outlined here, in practice overlap. Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Pierre Bourdieu and Zygmunt Bauman can be classified as sociologists or philosophers of work. Michael Burawoy's studies, as well as *The New Spirit of*

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*Capitalism* by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005), although ostensibly belonging to sociology and anthropology of work, offer distinct philosophical positions on work. Polanyi can be regarded as both a macroeconomist and philosopher. Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Stalin and Mao were professional politicians but also hold distinct views on the meaning of work. Equally, although my own book belongs primarily to the anthropology of work, it could not avoid an assessment of the macroeconomic situation, offer a certain philosophy of work and engage in politics.

### Harveyan Marxism

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I believe that Marx's diagnosis of the conditions of work under capitalism and relations between labour and capital is still valid. Contemporary work is a scene of exploitation of the workers by capital no less than in the nineteenth century, although the means to exploit them have changed. This is because demand for work is lower, the surplus population is expanding and the enclaves of relatively nonalienated work, performed by so-called professionals, such as doctors, academics and artists, are shrinking as a result of integration of their work into a regime of profit generation. Equally, the ideas of the ruling class are no less ruling ideas than they were in Marx and Engels's times. In the current situation, when people tend to work separated from each other, it is even more difficult to communicate and build common class consciousness than in the nineteenth century. Consequently the greatest, along with Marx, influence on my discussion, were the works of David Harvey, presented chiefly in his *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), *The New Imperialism* (2003a), *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (2003b), *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), *The Limits to Capital* (2006a), *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (2010a), *The Enigma of Capital* (2010b), his introduction to *The Communist Manifesto* (2008) and numerous articles.

What is the thrust of Harvey's argument and how do I use it? Like Marx, he is appreciative of capitalist vitality, its ability to 'melt' what existed before and create amazing objects and ideas. He thus concedes that capitalist work is often, from the perspective of the users of its fruits, good work. And yet, like Marx, he argues that these material, intellectual and artistic achievements come at too heavy a price: pauperisation and the destruction of lives of entire communities, destruction of the natural environment, everyday hardship and alienation of the majority of

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those who work, and the sense of uselessness of those who are unemployed. The author of *The Enigma of Capital* also maintains that the relationship between labour and capital in the post-Second World War world, as in Marx's times, is antagonistic and this antagonism has increased in the period marked by neoliberal hegemony, which in his description has many points of correspondence with Polanyi's vision of the world after adoption of the gold standard. Harvey perceives neoliberalism as a system whose main objective is the consolidation of power of the capitalist class, achieved by 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2005: 160–62). This is an extremely unjust and volatile system, which, like an enemy army, leaves behind scorched earth.<sup>7</sup>

Following Fredric Jameson (1984), Harvey conceptualises modernism and postmodernism as cultural formations pertaining respectively to Fordism-Keynesianism and neoliberalism. While he acknowledges the continuing overlap of modernism and postmodernism, he points to the early 1970s as a period of transition between these formations. He cites specifically Charles Jencks, who somewhat humorously marks the exact moment of the transition of modernism to postmodernism as 15:32 on 15 July 1972, 'when the Pruitt-Igloe housing development in St. Louis (a prize-winning version of Le Corbusier's "machine for modern living") was dynamited as an uninhabitable environment for the low-income people it housed' (Harvey 1990: 39). This was also the year that Venturi, Brown and Izenour's *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) was first published, which insisted that 'architects had more to learn from the study of popular and vernacular landscapes than from the pursuit of some abstract, theoretical, and doctrinal ideals' (ibid.: 40). The first event, namely destruction of the housing estate for low-income families, today I read as symbolic of the destruction of an imperfect, yet bearable place for working class people. It was meant to be replaced by a better environment for its earlier inhabitants and for some it was, but at the heavy price of high debt (hence enslavement) and insecurity, practically unknown in the first three decades after the end of the Second World War. For many it meant simply moving to even worse areas. Similarly, the shift from rational, planned, abstract, rigid high modernism to a Las Vegas style of unplanned, fragmented, popular postmodernism today does not encapsulate democratisation of culture, but rather subordination of all its spheres to the menacing forces of capital, which excuse their excesses by claiming that they add to cultural diversity.

The conclusion of Harvey's historical and theoretical work is his rejection of capitalism. Most eloquently he expresses this position in relation to and

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accompanying various crises of capitalism and social unrest, characteristic to recent decades, which he sees as an opportunity to overcome the current regime. In connection to the so called ‘Greek crisis’ of 2011 he says:

*Austerity measures and increased loans to pay back other delayed loans is NOT a cure for an economic crisis; these are mass thievery on a large social scale. And so the suggestion to default on the loans instead of stealing money from the people is scientifically valid, morally sound, and politically appropriate. The only obstacle is that there is no one in power in Greece who has a conscience and a sense of patriotism or sense of justice strong enough to do the right thing. If the popular mobilisations against the austerity measures succeed, politicians might be forced to do the right thing. Or, if the mobilisations go even further and the movement actually seizes power, the historical moment may open up the possibility for even bolder steps: abolition of Capitalism and a Socialist reconstruction of the country’s political economy. A post-Capitalist economy based on collective public ownership and control of the means of production and natural resources based on people’s power, plus direct democracy at the workplace, the neighbourhood, schools and services, will ensure that we can rebuild the country with an economy that will be immune to the kinds of crises that we are facing now. (Harvey 2011b)*

Harvey argues that each major postwar capitalist crisis has been worse than the last one, and more difficult to surmount. He accepts that capitalism, with all its resilience and inventiveness, is capable of overcoming the current crisis too, but now is a good moment for a revived anticapitalist movement to put forward a socialist alternative to capitalism. At the same time, being a ‘realistic revolutionary’, he proposes some intermediate goals, such as, on the one hand, a limit to capital and, on the other, improved conditions of labour. In one of his interviews, which concerns his own involvement in a campaign for the ‘living wage’, he maintains:

*Marx was very well aware that if people are working 18–20 hours a day, 7 days a week, they are not going to be very revolutionary in their consciousness. They are going to be so damn tired, that they are not going to have time for anything, and therefore, creating spaces and possibilities for people to think of other possibilities is a precursor to a more general transformation. That is one of things that I certainly found out in the living wage campaign in Baltimore.*

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*People working two jobs, working 80 hours a week, and they do not have time to organise, they hardly have time to have a life, let alone be active in community organisations, and active as political organisers. It is very difficult to do that when you are in that situation. (Harvey 2006b)*

My discussion is inspired by Harvey's model of combining historical with geographical investigation. I will cover over fifty years of the history of Europe and its cinema and almost twenty countries. I would like the reader to view my book as an argument in favour of the program Harvey offers, although it will be based primarily on evidence created by film and film history, rather than on economic theories and data and political views. However, before I turn to cinema as a means to learn about the history of work, I shall say something about the other topic mentioned in the title of my book: European history.

### **The concept of Europe and Europe's postwar history**

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Twentieth-century European history is the topic of numerous studies, some specifically devoted to this subject and others dealing with world history or histories of specific countries. Of great use for this study were *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (1995) by Eric Hobsbawm, *Europe: A History* (1996) by Norman Davies, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (1998) by Mark Mazower, *Postwar* (2005) by Tony Judt and *Twentieth-Century Europe* (2006) by P.M.H. Bell.

Although each of these books is different in accentuating specific traits of European history (with the majority of them specialising in Western history) while playing down others, they share a specific idea of Europe and its postwar history. Firstly, most of the quoted authors agree that 'Europe' is a fluid concept, depending not only on geography, but also on politics and culture. P.M.H. Bell observes that today most people answer the question 'What is Europe?' by saying 'The European Union' or even the 'euro-zone' (Bell 2006: 1). Such answers point to the concept of Europe as united and economically and culturally homogenous. This is of course a controversial statement. Bell himself draws attention to the stories of three countries, whose belonging to Europe is problematic: Russia, Britain and Turkey. Russia is in and out Europe due its tradition of political absolutism, its enormous size, part of which is outside Europe in Asia and its sense of having a

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separate and superior civilisation. British culture, including cinema, belongs to the European mainstream, but politically Britain attempts to distance itself from Europe and especially the 'European project' of homogenisation by accentuating its uniqueness and close links with the United States. Turkey is geographically mostly outside Europe. The Ottoman Empire, of which it is the successor, had been the principal enemy of Europe. Moreover, although it is secular, it is populated mostly by Muslims, while Europe is seen as Christian. Yet Turkey participates in the European movement towards unity with greater zeal than Great Britain (ibid.: 4–7).

Even if today's Europe comes across as united, this was not the case after the world wars, which afflicted this continent in the twentieth century. By and large, Bell and others identify conflicting forces in European history: towards unity and disunity, the second resulting, most importantly, from nationalism, which:

*has operated in two directions: the demand for the union of peoples of the same nationality in a single state (for example, the unification of Italy and Germany in the nineteenth century); and the demand for separation by national groups living within an existing state (for example, the nations which once formed part of the Habsburg Empire, the Irish seeking independence from Britain, or the Basques from Spain and France). (Bell 2006: 8)*

Bell observes that in the first part of the twentieth century, the divisive force of nationalism proved stronger than the cohesive sense of European unity. Nationalism was an important factor in both world wars. After the convulsions of the Second World War it seemed for some time that the force of nationalism was spent. The period after the Second World War up to the fall of communism at the end of the 1980s is thus marked by a drive toward unity and homogeneity, although within two different blocs: Western and Eastern, capitalist and socialist. In the West the project of achieving unity has been accomplished by setting up the European Community – an arrangement to integrate the economies, and to some extent the legal systems of a number of independent nation states. This process began in 1957 and still continues through various treaties, of which the Maastricht Treaty, signed in 1992, which led to creation of the European Union and the single European currency, has been a particular success. In Eastern Europe, the predominance of the Soviet Union and communist ideology appeared to iron out many of the differences between separate countries. An embodiment of the idea

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of cooperation within Eastern Europe was the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON, CMEA, or CAME), set up in 1949 as an economic organisation under the leadership of the Soviet Union. Although, as R.J. Crampton notes, until the mid-1950s, COMECON had little real effect, employing no more than nine officials in its Moscow headquarters, it was successful in coordinating the national economic plans of member states (Crampton 1997: 240) and creating the impression that the Eastern countries belonged to one 'body'.

The idea that after the Second World War we observe a drive towards integration is also reflected in the structure and content of my book, as I focus more on the similarities within Europe than the differences. I also foreground the East-West divide rather than any other divisions within Europe. However, in contrast to most historians of Europe, perhaps with the exception of Norman Davies, as well as of historians of European cinema, I also draw attention to the similarities and connections between Eastern and Western Europe. In particular, I see state socialism or crude communism, adopted after the Second World War in countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, as having more in common with capitalism than with communism, as envisaged by Marx.

Europe's history is regarded as paradoxical: since 1945 the continent has been politically weak, yet prosperous. The prosperity that came after the great losses caused by the Second World War is seen as little short of a miracle, especially in the country particularly affected by the war – Germany. Since the 1950s Europe has thus not been a 'dark continent' as Mazower suggests by the title of his book, but mostly a 'sunny' place, at least in comparison with several less prosperous continents. As Mazower himself remarks, the first half-century claimed over sixty million European lives, the second half-century less than one million lives (Mazower 1998: 404–5).

Europe's weakness results from its dominance by two empires that were entirely or partially outside Europe, namely the United States, dominating Western Europe and the Soviet Union, dominating Eastern Europe until the end of the 1980s. In the West this prosperity is often linked to the Marshall Plan, consisting of economic help coming from the United States to many countries of Western Europe in the years 1948–52. The actual monetary value of the help, namely 13 billion U.S. dollars, of which over nine million were in gifts and the rest in loans (Bell 2006: 152) was not high. However, the assistance was important because it helped the citizens of the recipient countries to believe that there was a way out of their economic difficulties (ibid.: 152). Moreover, Marshall Planners tried to

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encourage European policy-makers to boost consumer spending in order to reduce social discontent and the likely spread of the ‘communist virus’ (Mazower 1998: 299). To put it differently, the Marshall Plan helped the Keynesian order to take root in postwar Europe, which I regard as the main cause of European postwar prosperity.

After the fall of communism one can observe two seemingly contrasting, yet in reality complementary tendencies. On the one hand in the West there was a tendency towards further integration, as reflected in adopting a single currency in 1992. In the East, there is or was a revival of nationalism, as reflected in the emerging of many new nation states in the place of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and the separation of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. However, in most cases the revival of nationalism has been accompanied by a desire to join the West, which in practice meant adopting the version of capitalism that dominated in Western Europe at the time, namely neoliberalism. Many postcommunist countries, such as Estonia and Romania, turned to the neoliberal project with an even greater zeal than the old democracies and happily joined the queue to be accepted into the European Union and euro-zone. The overall result is thus a Europe of many countries (about forty in the mid-1990s as opposed to twenty-two in 1914), yet almost of all of them following the same economic path of privatisation of public assets, financialisation of all spheres of human life and flexible employment. Paradoxically, in many cases the revival of nationalism and war helped neoliberalisation, as it allowed for acceleration of privatisation of old communist states, often by dividing them among various war lords and their supporters.

Europe at the end of the twentieth century is seen by its historians as a somewhat vanishing continent. Its military power has gone. As Bell observes:

*it seemed virtually impossible for a European army to defeat Asian or African opponents ... Economic power moved away from Europe, so that a decision made by a Japanese car firm or the collapse of a North American company could settle the fate of European workers and investors. In 1900 the population of Europe made up about 28 per cent of the total world population. By 1995 that had fallen to about 12 per cent. Moreover, the European population was ageing and failing to reproduce itself. (Bell 2006: 9; see also Mazower 1998: 405)*



The same author observes that Europe is less ‘European’ than it used to be due to the influx of immigrants from other continents, and that ‘Europeans became ashamed of their former empires and no longer claimed any superiority for their civilisation. Christians often became hesitant and uncertain in their beliefs and claims’ (Bell 2006: 9).

However, I do not regard all these new developments in Europe as negative and some I propose to see in the context of wider, even global changes. Taking into account the tragic consequences for Europeans and peoples of other continents of European confidence in its military power, I am glad that Europe no longer trusts its military might. This distrust is at the core of the peace it has enjoyed for most of its postwar history. Equally, I am glad that Europe is proportionally less populated than other continents, as large population leads to a higher proportion of humans considered to be waste. Taking into account that the need for work is quickly vanishing, it is better to live in a place where the queue for new jobs is shorter rather than longer. Furthermore, it does not bother me that European Christians are less confident than they used to be, again in the context of the misery caused by conflicts between Christianity and other faiths, as well as among different types of Christians. It is certainly true that economic power has moved away from European states, but this is also the case for non-European countries. However, this fact reflects not so much the changing inter-continental dynamic, as the decline of national sovereignty and a shift of power from democratic institutions to unelected bodies and the previously mentioned privatisation drive of publicly-owned assets, a theme to which I will devote a large portion of my book.

Most authors writing about European history argue that it means more than a shared territory. Tony Judt put it most explicitly in his book by giving his last chapter the title ‘Europe as a Way of Life’ (Judt 2007: 777). In my discussion of postwar Europe I also suggest that many European countries and nations had something important in common: a drive towards socialism, by which I mean at the least a desire to curb the ‘capitalist beast’ and provide all their citizens with a decent standard of living. This affinity for socialism was reflected in many different ideologies and political programmes, such as state socialism (Marx’s ‘crude communism’) in the East, social democracy in the West, self-management in Yugoslavia. Many of these attempts were flawed and were eventually abolished, to give way to ‘crude’ capitalism in the form of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, the very variety of these socialist experiments, and Europeans’ reluctance to give up

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on socialist privileges and ideas, as Judt argues, suggests that on this continent it has more chance than elsewhere.

### **Cinema, the realities of work and its place in film studies**

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The suitability of cinema to represent or bear witness to the realities of work is a subject of controversy. On the one hand, we find opinions that it is a perfect tool for representing work due to its ontological properties and industrial and institutional set-up, most importantly being a mechanical, mass and industrial art. Karol Irzykowski in one of the first theoretical works on cinema, *Dziesiąta Muza* (*The Tenth Muse*), published in Polish in 1924, maintains that cinema's true mission is to 'show human struggle with matter' (Irzykowski 1982: 7) – thus what Marx describes as labour. Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' from 1936, argues that the special value of film lay in its ability to capture ordinary human behaviour (Benjamin 2007: 235–36). This argument is developed by many proponents of realism, most importantly André Bazin (1967), and recently Alain Badiou (2009), who proclaims cinema to be an 'ontological art' – art of reality, either because film allows us to see through it to the real world, or because it provides perceptions or illusions of the real world (Currie 1996).

The opportunities offered by montage, of connecting distant places and times, and objects seen from different perspectives, render film a privileged means of linking micro with macroeconomy, personal experience with politics, work's history with its present day and future. Such opportunities were discussed not only by philosophers and film historians, including Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno (Hansen 2004: 16), but also by author-filmmakers, such as Sergei Eisenstein, Alexander Kluge and Jean-Luc Godard.

Moreover, filmmaking, unlike other types of art production, such as writing novels or painting, has more in common with industrial labour, which is seen as a privileged type of labour. While there are different forms of industrial and postindustrial production, so there are many ways of making films. Filmmaking can be labour and capital-intensive, as well as cheap and artisanal; it can utilise new technologies or use the old ones. The history of cinema can thus be viewed as a laboratory for new technologies and modes of working and a museum of old forms of labour. Jonathan Beller goes as far as labelling cinema the 'capital of the twentieth century'. According to his argument, in the twentieth century the

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hegemonic position of Paris, the old capital of modernity, became replaced not by a particular physical site, but a mode of production – the cinematic mode of production. Due to the industrialisation of processes of perception and social organisation, cinema, as perceived by Beller, substitutes for Benjamin’s nineteenth-century Paris (Beller 2006).

The counter-argument, that cinema fails to represent work, is based on similar premises, namely that cinema can show reality convincingly and that is closely entangled with industrial production and its economic and political framework. For these reasons it is prone to being used by dominant ideology to misrepresent work. Jean-Louis Comolli, the veteran critic and filmmaker, points to the fact that the first known film, *La sortie des usines Lumière* (*Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory*, 1895) by the Lumière brothers, shows workers leaving the factory, not entering it or working there. In his view, it fails to account for the true, living experience of work:

*When it shows work, cinema is drawn to its spectacular dimension, the dance of body and machine that obscures salaried labor’s oppressive nature. This is the typical fodder of the kind of films that companies make about themselves which concentrate on work’s choreographed gestures to the exclusion of its duration, its harshness, its wear and tear of the worker, and its fatigue. (quoted in O’Shaughnessy 2012: 156)*

However, Comolli’s argument is based on some problematic assumptions. First, he equates work with ‘alienated work’, or even work performed in a factory. But work, as I already argued, does not need to be treated solely in such terms – work can be pleasant and fulfilling. Secondly, in a manner evoking Marx and his metaphor of an ideology as ‘camera obscura’, he equates cinema with the cinema that serves the dominant ideology (Comolli and Narboni 1992: 685). In reality, its connection with the dominant ideology tends to be less straightforward, because films operate on many levels, transmitting meanings that are activated differently by different types of audiences. Potentially thus every film, even one made to serve the dominant ideology, can be hijacked by its enemy, and there are many instances of such subversive use, for example by the Situationists or feminist artists. Similarly, subversive films can be put into the service of the dominant class, this being even regarded as an important feature of postmodern culture (Fisher 2009).

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Comolli himself admits that filming work is not an impossible task, but an artist who wishes to engage with this topic, has to ‘film against cinema’, or find ways of filming that refuse to be drawn to the spectacular surface (quoted in O’Shaughnessy 2012: 156) and, in a wider sense, refuse to comply with the dominant aesthetic and its ideological tenets. This plea can be regarded as a variation of Jacques Rancière’s request to create political art as art that disturbs the ‘distribution of the sensible’, where the ‘distribution of the sensible’ can be equated with the dominant ways of seeing and doing things (Rancière 2006: 12). What is at stake for Comolli is the filmmakers’ ability to break away from the institutions and apparatuses of power.

Other authors are not so sceptical about film’s ability to show work as Comolli, but point to various limitations of certain types of film in this respect. For example, John Hill argues that the commercially-driven, mainstream narrative cinema is unable to represent the work and the plight of the worker adequately because it is centred on an individual character rather than a group and is bound by the rule to provide a resolution to conflict (Hill 1986: 53–66). Hill thus suggests that the avant-garde, non-narrative or auteurist cinema is better equipped to represent truly the realities of work.

The power of films to reveal the truth about work depends on the cultural context of their reception. In this respect the problem of representing work is similar to that of representing other aspects of human life. Kristin Thompson, while discussing the reception of Roberto Rossellini’s films, especially *Roma, città aperta* (*Rome Open City*, 1945) observes that when Rossellini’s neorealist works first appeared, he was seen as the creator of an entirely new and superior realist aesthetics. Later however, his reliance upon traditional devices of melodrama – identification with the film’s central characters, manipulation of the audience’s emotional responses to dramatic situations, an edifying conclusion offering hope of improvement, the use of children to evoke a sentimental response in the viewer – has been cited as proof that Rossellini’s film did not render reality as adequately as it was believed (Thompson 1988: 62). Robert Stam, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis and Robert Burgoyne generalise this argument by claiming that realism is a question of intertextuality, namely of the position of a cinematic text against other texts (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 184–221). Only through comparing the film in question with other texts (principally other films) are we able to decide how realistic it is. This also means that if we look for a full and unbiased representation of work, we will not find it and this is not only, as Comolli and others claim, because cinema serves the dominant ideology, but because

representations untainted by ideology do not exist.<sup>8</sup> Of course, the realism debate is not limited to cinema, but persists in discussions of other types of art as well, and many of the arguments concerning film sound like repetitions of older arguments concerning literature and plastic arts (see, for example, Zusi 2004). However, the discussions of film differ from those about literature in, on the one hand, emphasising cinema's potential to be more realistic than any other art, largely due to its mimetic character and, at the same time, its difficulty in fulfilling this potential due to being mass, relatively expensive and of special importance to the dominant class.

Seeing work on screen is also a question of the viewers' ability and willingness to discern work from the complexity of themes proposed by any, even a seemingly simple film. The privileged viewers, critics and film historians appear to overlook work on screen. Its representations received little coverage in critical studies of cinema; although the situation is gradually changing (for example Beller 2006; Hediger and Vonderau 2009; Gorfinkel 2012; Mazierska 2012a). I believe that it is overlooked because it is present in practically every film, either by being on screen or being off screen, yet providing a context for everything that is represented. The process of labouring might not be shown, but work is mentioned in dialogues, and affects the construction of characters and setting. When reading even rudimentary synopses of films, we learn that the character is a factory worker, a clerk, an artist, a politician or a housewife. We divide films into specific genres, such as westerns, gangster, police and war films, science-fiction films and biopics on the basis of the occupations of their main characters. Films take place in factories, offices, scientific laboratories or private homes (social factories) where housewives and maids work. The whole human-made part of the *mise-en-scène* represents accumulated labour. Furthermore, if we interpret certain genres metaphorically, then we can argue that they provide a deep insight into issues such as the labour-capital division and effects of work on people's psychological wellbeing. A case in point is horror, with its iconic figures of a vampire and a zombie, where the former can be seen as a capitalist and the latter as an alienated worker.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, even when work is treated as a central issue in an analysed film, it is often not obvious from the title of a given article or film. For example, the book that I regard as exemplary in its treatment of the complexities of work, Martin O'Shaughnessy's *The New Face of Political Cinema: Commitment in French Film Since 1995* (2007), does not even have 'work' in its title, although the author examines the politics of contemporary French cinema by choosing films focused on work and paying

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special attention to its representations. We can also find valuable reflections on work in publications concerning politics, emigration, technology, art, gender, youth, auteurism and self-reflexivity.

To sum up, 'work films' do not constitute a genre from the perspective of using specific visual or aural conventions. Neither do they employ particular types of actors or have their own stars. This, however, I see not as a reason to dismiss 'work' as a tool to investigate film, but rather to elevate it to a universal category, in the same way that 'gender', 'national identity' and 'postcolonialism' have become universal categories. The fact that everybody is gendered, belongs to a specific nation and is postcolonial, does not undermine the usefulness of these concepts in researching cinema and culture at large. On the contrary, it renders them especially effective in examining the changes in history and human consciousness.

## CHAPTER 2

# The 1960s

## In Search of Self-fulfilment

### **The age of affluence**

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The wide consensus is that the 1960s were good for work and good for European cinema. Although ‘miracles’ and ‘small stabilisations’ (after clearing the rubble and rebuilding what was destroyed in the Second World War) began in the 1950s, the social benefits came largely in the 1960s (Booker 1969; Marwick 1998: 8; Mazower 1998: 296–316; Judt 2007: 324–59). At this time the income per capita went up and standards of living improved across practically the whole of Europe. As Christopher Booker reminisces: ‘There was suddenly more money around than would have seemed imaginable to any previous generation, and every year that passed seemed to bring yet more technical marvels, more change – transistor radios, jet airliners, motorways, new kinds of architecture in steel, concrete and glass’ (Booker 1980: 7). For the first time in history politicians were talking not about the difficulties and problems resulting from shortages and inequality but about ‘the miracle of growth’ (Mazower 1998: 296) and the ‘challenge of prosperity’ – such words are even uttered in one of the most famous British films of the decade, Tony Richardson’s *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*. The 1960s look even better against what Eric Hobsbawm describes as the ‘disturbed seventies and traumatic eighties’ (Hobsbawm 1995: 257), although of course those living in the 1960s could not have known this.

There were many factors contributing to this European golden age. One was peace in Europe or at least only the Cold War, as opposed to any ‘hot’ ones. Another factor was American help in the form of the Marshall Plan (see Chapter 1). What also contributed was the application by the majority of Western governments of Keynesian economic policy. Its main rules, based on the ideas of John Maynard Keynes, were an active role for the state in planning and stimulating economy, the existence of a large public sector, alongside the private sector, promoting full employment and a welfare state, the strong centralisation of capital that curbed inter-capitalist competition and the unions’ collaboration with management to raise productivity in return for wage gains that stimulated effective

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demand (Lekachman 1967: 150–255; Harvey 1990: 121–40).<sup>1</sup> As this system subordinated economy to the needs of society, it is labelled ‘social liberalism’ (Hobsbawm 1995: 274) or ‘embedded liberalism’ (Harvey 2005: 11), the second term being a reference to Karl Polanyi’s ideas of embeddedness (Polanyi 2001), as well as ‘Keynesianism’.

David Harvey emphasises that embedded liberalism ruled in Western Europe irrespective of which party was in power. ‘Gaullist in France, the Labour Party in Britain, Christian Democrats in West Germany, etc. – engineered both stable economic growth and rising material living standards through a mix of welfare statism, Keynesian economic management, and control over wage relations’ (Harvey 1990: 135). Consumption and a relatively high living standard of the masses was helped by mass and standardised ways of producing goods, as pioneered by Henry Ford in the 1920s (see Chapter 1). Fordist approaches also dominated outside the sphere of commodity production, in the state institutions and trade unions. To reflect the domination of Keynesian and Fordist rules, Harvey uses the term Fordism-Keynesianism (Harvey 1990: 124; on the link between Fordism and Keynesianism see Pribac 2010).

One consequence of this regime was a division of the markets into ‘monopoly’ sectors and ‘competitive’ sectors, which also led to dividing workers into two groups: privileged, ‘affluent workers’, in industries such as car production, with strong unions and other, less well-treated workers (O’Connor 1973: 13–17; Harvey 1990: 138). Access to privileged employment was affected by factors such as gender and ethnicity; white men tended to have better paid jobs in a monopoly sector; women and immigrant workers ended up in low-paying jobs in a competitive sector (O’Connor 1973: 14). It is thus no accident that a well-known sociological study, *The Affluent Worker* (Goldthorpe et al. 1968), was based on male employees in traditional male industries, such as motorcar and ball and roller bearing production. The unions, anxious to preserve the privileges of ‘affluent workers’, tended to neglect the grievances of the underprivileged workers, such as women, with dire consequences in the 1970s for the whole of the working class (see Chapters 3 and 4), demonstrating that circumventing the principle of universality is ultimately fatal for the working class.

The picture that I have sketched did not cover the whole of what we tend to identify now as Western Europe. Spain and Portugal during this period were under fascist regimes, which rendered the positions of workers there more precarious in comparison with countries such as France, Britain or Germany. Italy, on the other



hand, is regarded as a country that experienced the greatest economic and cultural transformation, from a backward, largely peasant population, to a modern, urban, industrialised and consumerist society (Ginsborg 1990: 210–53; Drake 1999–2000: 62; for a repudiation of this claim see Agnew 1997: 39–40).

Eastern Europe, after the unfortunate technological and economic experiments of Stalinism and political purges, also enjoyed a relatively prosperous time in the 1960s, marked by greater political freedom and higher standards of living (Hobsbawm 1995: 259; on Poland see Davies 2005: 440–50). Although in the official propaganda the economic systems of the West and the East were entirely different, in practice during this period they had much in common, not least because the embedded liberalism included many elements of socialism, such as the active role of the state in the economy and a full-employment policy.<sup>2</sup> Governments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union retained many elements of capitalism, such as wage labour, and in some countries private ownership of land and small enterprises. The societies under what Marx would describe as crude communism were not classless or egalitarian, but preserved and even increased many inequalities pertaining to the capitalist system (Lukes 1974; Burawoy and Lukács 1992: 146–47).

In some socialist countries attempts were made to bring the economy closer to the market system (Sutela 1990). In Hungary the government encouraged the development of a legal second economy that would supplement wages and at the same time counter the rigidities of the state sector (Burawoy and Lukács 1992: 149). Following the break with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia opted in 1950 for self-managed socialism: a system of autonomous cooperative enterprises (Allcock 2000: 76–78). In one way this system was closer to the Marxist ideal than other types of crude communism by allowing workers more power at the factory level but, in another way it was closer to capitalism, by accepting unemployment as an inevitable by-product of an efficient economy (Kirn 2010). Yugoslav filmmakers, working as freelance professionals rather than – as in other socialist countries – being chained to the centrally funded studios, confirmed this reading of Yugoslav socialism as quasi-capitalist (Levi 2007: 15).

In the course of the 1960s the economic trajectories of the East and the West not only came closer together, but also started to diverge. In the West, industrialisation reached its peak and started to decline. In the East, the factory remained the privileged site of creation of the country's wealth. There, the overwhelming majority of former peasants were directed into labour-intensive

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mining and industrial manufacture. There was a tendency towards excess, to ‘Magnitogorsk mentality’ (the term taken from the rapid development of the town, which was a flagship of Stalin’s Five-Year Plan) or ‘investment fetishism’, which manifested itself in big enterprises, often employing thousands of people (Cohen 1985; Dyker 1990: 56; Bunce 1999a: 24; Allcock 2000: 72; Davies 2005: 440–50). In the short run the industrial emphasis of the command economies appeared impressive (not least to many Western observers), but in the long run Eastern Europe had become ‘one large museum of the industrial revolution’ (Bunce 1999a: 21).

Europe during this decade was on the move, literally and metaphorically, with millions of people leaving the countryside and moving to the city to climb the social ladder (Judt 2007: 327–28). This vertical movement was facilitated by an expansion of university education and the growing power of youth. Intellectual ferment was felt everywhere, and led to lasting developments in philosophy, literature, art and cinema, even today strongly affecting European culture and society (Diski 2009). This period is also marked by an unprecedented cultural exchange between these two ‘blocs’, with Eastern European artists fêted in the West and Western European cultural personalities travelling to the East (French 1982: 218). Despite these movements in all spheres of human life, this decade, in an important sense, still belongs to ‘solid modernity’, as defined by Zygmunt Bauman, because institutional power was centralised and there was a broad agreement about what constitutes social progress – increased prosperity coupled with equality (Bauman 2000a). However, there is also wide concurrence that the 1960s mark the endpoint of modernity as understood in such terms.

The cultural changes that occurred in the 1960s attracted much more attention than the economic developments, although they were closely connected. Nowhere was this more visible than in Britain, where in the 1960s the music industry brought more income to the country’s economy than the motor industry. The 1960s are regarded as being contaminated by the media to such an extent that some authors argue that it is impossible to distil the ‘real 1960s’ from the weight of their representations (York 1980: 182).

The question of when the 1960s began to be conceived in such positive terms is rarely discussed, because there is a continuity of political, economic and cultural trends from the mid to late 1950s to the late 1960s, and in the West even from the end of the Second World War until the late 1960s. By contrast, at the end of the 1960s many dramatic political events happened in Europe, finishing in political

‘springs’ and ‘thaws’. For most observers the political endpoint of the 1960s is May 1968 in France, marked by widespread strikes and radicalisation of left-wing intellectuals (see Chapter 3). But in East Germany, the happy 1960s had already reached their end in the middle of the decade, due to the thwarting of cultural liberalisation with the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961. In Poland, the 1960s were closed by anti-Semitic purges following Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War of 1967. In Czechoslovakia, the armies of the Warsaw Pact crushed the Prague Spring in August 1968, leading to the introduction of a neo-Stalinist regime. In terms of living standards, the ‘good’ 1960s in the West finished some time in the early to mid-1970s. Hobsbawm lists such signs of its end as the collapse of the Bretton Woods international financial system in 1971, the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 and the general ‘overheating’ of the world economy in 1972–73 (Hobsbawm 1995: 286).

Cinema of the 1960s is remembered as the period of new waves, heralded as a pinnacle of cinematic modernism. The fact that the term ‘new wave’ is used to describe the cinema in France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland suggests that in the 1960s the differences between European countries decreased. The term ‘new wave’ connotes breaking with the old precepts of filmmaking. Indeed, the waves brought new, young characters and less tightly structured stories, often shot on location. Cinematic modernism is often defined by privileging space by using spatial devices to challenge the supremacy of narrative causality (Thompson and Bordwell 1976: 42; Heath 1976: 73). For this reason Michelangelo Antonioni is regarded as a model modernist director. The new waves’ allegiance to modernism is also based on their self-reflexivity. Filmmakers reflected on what it meant to be an artist, including whether this was a fundamentally different occupation to working in a factory or an office.

As work in the 1960s was relatively stable and ‘placed’ (people worked in the same place for many years and their social position was defined by belonging to this place), in this chapter I will focus on the topography of work. Space and, especially architecture, as I mentioned, was an obsession of 1960s cinema, to a large extent reflecting the embeddedness of the 1960s economy. This chapter is also embedded in the first volume of Marx’s *Capital*, which is preoccupied with production and consumption.

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## Work in the countryside

In the West in the 1960s, films about agricultural work became a rare species, which reflects the previously mentioned demographic transformations and the diminishing role of agriculture in Western Europe's economy after the Second World War. Especially in British cinema there was a sense that agriculture belonged solely to the past. This was because the processes of economic marginalisation of the countryside had begun a long time ago, during the industrial revolution. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, published for the first time in 1845, Engels wrote that:

*The increased demand for cloth raised the wages of the weavers and so led the peasants who had worked at the loom in their spare time to give up their work on the land in order to earn more money by weaving. We have seen how the growth of large farms forced the peasants off their holdings, turned them into wage-earners and then in some cases drove them into the towns. (Engels 2009: 88)*

For Engels, this process was unfortunate because towns (he refers to the 'great' English towns of London, Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds) were crowded and polluted (ibid.: 30–87).

In postwar Britain the acceptance of Engels' diagnosis came hand in hand with an unspoken agreement that the clock could not be turned back. Almost all British films showing work on the land are set in the past and imbued with nostalgia for premodern life, such as *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1967) by John Schlesinger. In British New Wave films, such as Karel Reisz's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), Tony Richardson's *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962) and Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting Life* (1963) the countryside is evoked as a place of brief escape from the constraints of urban life, not a place to build one's new life. In both *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* and Peter Watkins' *Privilege* (1967), we hear the hymn 'Jerusalem', with words by William Blake. This is the most popular patriotic song in England, where the 'dark, satanic mills' of the Industrial Revolution are contrasted with the 'green and pleasant land' of the earlier period. The fact that this song is appropriated by all main political parties in England (a fact ironically evoked by Watkins in *Privilege*) is a sign that living on and from the land at the time when these films were made was regarded as an ideal

that everyone could subscribe to without risking the test of reality. However, it shall be mentioned that what was true about cinema did not apply to British television or radio, with *The Archers*, set in rural England, being the world's longest-running radio soap opera.

The situation was different in Eastern Europe, where many people in the 1960s still lived on the land, especially in countries such as the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia and the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia and, at the same time, industry was privileged in economic plans and edified in cultural discourses at agriculture's expense. Such a view reflected Stalin's conviction that farm life is necessarily backward and inferior to city life and the countryside is a bastion of resistance against communism. Stalin claimed that under communism agrarian-industrial associations will gradually emerge; agriculture will combine organically with the industrial processing of its produce and the kolkhoz villages will grow into amalgamated urban communities, leading to elimination of socio-economic and cultural distinctions between town and country (Stalin 1971: 209–96). Agriculture's inferior position in relation to industry is subtly conveyed in one of the most familiar Soviet images: the statue of Vera Mukhina, 'The Industrial Worker and Collective Farm Girl'. In this statue the secondary role is assigned both to agriculture and a woman by allocating the sickle to the woman, the hammer to the man (Waters 1991: 238). Even if the vast majority of the population of Eastern Europe did not assimilate Stalin's scornful attitude to rural life, by the late 1950s the countryside economically lagged so much behind the towns that it was only natural to regard it as a place to run away from. This also applies to Yugoslavia. Although it broke with the Soviet Union and Stalinism in 1948, from the 1950s resources, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, were pumped out from the countryside to generate development in industry and to develop towns (Dyker 1990: 59). Consequently, Eastern European films tend to render agriculture as a relic of the past or at least question its relevance to modern life, as in *Sami swoi* (*Our Folks*, 1967), directed by Sylwester Chęciński, Štefan Uher's *Slnko v sieti* (*Sunshine in a Net*, 1962) and *Kad budem mrtav i beo* (*When I am Dead and Pale*, 1967) by Živojin Pavlović.

Although *Our Folks* is set shortly after the Second World War, I am discussing it here because at the time of its release and until the 1970s it was regarded as the ultimate portrayal of rural life in postwar Poland. Chęciński's comedy presents two families, the Pawlaks and the Karguls who, following Poland's change of borders, relocated from the East (*Kresy*), which in 1945 was given to the Soviet Union, to

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what was previously the Western part of the German Reich, now called the Regained Territories (*Ziemia odzyskana*). The source of much of the film's comedy are the families' traditional ways of working and living, contrasted with the more advanced agricultural techniques exercised by the Germans who lived there previously, as testified by the machinery they have left behind. The Poles, who do not know how to use it, get rid of it, replacing it with their old and primitive tools. Kazimierz Pawlak and Władysław Kargul, the patriarchs who decide how things will be done, are both elderly. Their power ensures that little will change there in the years to come. That said, *Our Folks* presents the village as a lively place of genuinely communal working and living, even if marked by a continuous conflict between the Pawlaks and the Karguls. This is because, paradoxically, in Poland after the war the majority of the land remained in private hands; agriculture thus offered the possibility of nonalienated work and Kargul and Pawlak encapsulate it better than any other characters in Polish cinema of this period. They are prepared not only to work from dawn to dusk on their pieces of land, but even to die for it. The use of long shots, emphasising the beauty of the Regained Territories, not unlike John Ford's westerns, adds to the sense of the nobility of their pursuit. This is all the more surprising as they do not work on land on which their ancestors lived, but on new land. One wonders how great would be their dedication to work if they were not put in the position of migrant workers. Pawlak and Kargul's attitude can also be seen as a measure of opposition by the Polish society at large against crude communism, introduced in Eastern Europe after 1945.

Štefan Uher's *Slnko v sieti* (*Sunshine in a Net*, 1962), one of the earliest examples of the Czechoslovak New Wave, is set partly in Bratislava and partly on a cooperative farm in the country. Even more than in *Our Folks*, all regular farm workers are old, showing socialist agriculture as lagging behind industry. Unlike Chęciński's film, which casts as main characters people who know no other life than on a farm, *Sunshine in a Net* adopts the perspective of an outsider, Fajolo, a teenager who comes to the countryside from the city to work in a youth brigade, volunteering to help the agricultural workers. Undoubtedly such a perspective is more conducive to presenting agricultural work as a vestige of the past. This is indeed the case; Fajolo challenges the farm foreman about the outdated, deficient machinery the brigades have to use and, in a wider sense, points to the negligence towards machinery under communism. The young volunteers' objections might also be seen more obliquely as referencing the new, technocratically inclined Czechoslovak economists who were at the time seeking to revise the outdated

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‘machinery’ of socialist production methods. If this is the case, then *Sunshine in a Net*, as Jonathan Owen argues, allegorises the very debates that kick-started the Prague Spring reform drive, focused on the importance of technological development and the growing inadequacy of traditional labour- and capital-intensive production (Owen 2012: 194).

One aspect of *Sunshine in a Net* points to the difference between farming life in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. In Poland, as Chęciński shows us, the farmers’ work is nonalienated because they own the means of production. In Czechoslovakia, this is not the case: the land and the machinery belong to the state, the ‘universal capitalist’, as Marx put it, from which they feel estranged. This aspect is first illuminated by exposing the sham nature of ‘volunteering’ to work in the youth brigades. Fajolo’s enrolment in the brigade is undertaken for the sake of his father’s ‘file’, as a means for the latter to regain his standing in the eyes of the regime. In this sense *Sunshine in a Net* already typifies the Czechoslovak New Wave’s association between work and the false and mercenary (ibid.: 193). Both in the country and in the city work is performed badly; the negligent farm foreman has his equivalent in the lazy superintendent at the apartment block where Fajolo’s girlfriend Bela lives. Yet on the other hand, the scenes of the brigades working outside, half-stripped and sun-tanned, have an idyllic, erotic quality, and Fajolo’s work facilitates his sexual initiation. This work has no obvious political or regime-supportive aim and even involves theft of state property. Nevertheless, it reveals itself as a source of dignity and pleasure. At such moments, as Owen observes, Uher is able to extract meaningful work from both the Stalinist ideological discourse he eschews and the mercenary motives he cannily underlines (ibid.: 194–95).

Such an assessment of agricultural work cannot be made about *When I am Dead and Pale*. The countryside as represented by Pavlović has all the negative characteristics of its counterparts in Chęciński’s and Uher’s films, but none of their redeeming features. Villages are shown as poor and in decay and there is no solidarity to be seen, as was so pervasive in the two films discussed previously. Furthermore, the Yugoslav countryside suffered from unemployment – this being a consequence of the previously mentioned self-management – which led to passing a large part of the duties of the socialist state towards the citizens themselves. Such representation provides a contrast with the situation in Slovak films, where the countryside is so poor in labour that it has to import it from the city. As Gal Kirn argues, the central opposition between village and city is

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epitomised in the recognition and production of music. The folk music of the countryside with its gypsy sounds could not be reconciled with the urban sounds of rock 'n' roll. This fissure is reflected in the city audience's rejection of the performance of a folk song by the film's young protagonist. For Kirn, the countryside's decay and rejection of folk music demonstrates the failure of self-managing socialism in creating a united, cohesive Yugoslav society (Kirn 2009), a conclusion with which I agree.

### **Western factories and their alternatives**

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In the 1960s employment opportunities for Europeans increased beyond the traditional manufacture, agriculture and trade. As a result, manual work in factories started to look backward. This affected its cinematic representations: throughout the 1960s there was a decline in the number of films about factory work. Nowhere is this more visible than in British cinema, where the beginning of the decade was marked by an upsurge of films set in the industrial North and the second half by 'Swinging London' films, set among the metropolitan celebrities. Working class characters do not accept factory work with gratitude, but begrudge it. In this sense, they are different from their predecessors in Italian neorealist films or Eastern European socialist realist films, who had to fight for material necessities and regarded a regular wage as a sign of good luck. Another feature is adopting the perspective of an outsider to factory life. This might happen by choosing as a main protagonist somebody who does not work in a factory, or by employing cinematic techniques that put the viewer in the position of an unsympathetic voyeur, observing working class life as if it were something repulsive yet fascinating. Such an approach pertains to British films of the early 1960s (Hill 1986: 136; Leach 2004: 55). Yet, although the narrative function of the factory diminished in 1960s cinema, visually it increased. Some 1960s films are so dominated by images of factories that their characters, as Seymour Chatman wrote in relation to Antonioni's films, look 'like mannequins in architectural models' (Chatman 1985: 102).

I begin my discussion with films made in Britain, the country where the industrial revolution began. Reading histories of British cinema one might conjecture that when it diverts from depicting the working class, it betrays itself. The most sophisticated version of this argument and its critique are presented in the seminal book by John Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963*

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(1986). Hill argues that in contrast to wartime cinema, which attempted to project a sense of collectivity on the screen, the cinema of the late 1950s and early 1960s is individualistic, as confirmed by its marginalisation of work (Hill 1986: 138). Playing down work and accenting individualism, in Hill's view, reflects the fact that the films' authors, despite their declared leftism, ultimately adhered to bourgeois values. It also attests to the difficulty of presenting work within the confines of narrative realism (ibid.: 139). I would like to qualify Hill's arguments by pointing out that individualism became a value cherished in the 1960s by all sections of British society, including the working class; it became a working class value, even if choosing it testified to the 'false consciousness' of its adherents. Regarding the issue of insufficient focus on work, as I noted in the introduction, this argument was made many times before and after Hill. However, we cannot say whether it is valid because we lack a standard for a film that represents work in a 'right' way.

In three classic British New Wave films, also known as 'kitchen sink films', *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), directed by Karel Reisz, *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), directed by Tony Richardson and Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting Life* (1963), true to Hill's claim, we do not see much work being done, as is implied by their titles. However, the question of job opportunities for the working class characters plays a crucial role in their narratives, and without the factory scenes, as Stuart Laing argues in relation to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, we will not gain insight into the inner lives of the characters (Laing 1986: 120–21). I will begin, chronologically, with *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, set in Nottingham. Its protagonist, Arthur Seaton, is an 'angry young man', a type summarised by Penelope Houston as 'a young man in a provincial lodging, precariously poised between working-class origins and professional future, openly derisive of the "system", the Establishment, taking out his frustrations in buccaneering talk and a raw social and political awareness' (quoted in Spicer 2001: 150). Arthur works in an engineering factory, operating a machine producing axles, and is paid by the piece. He is presented as an appendage to the machine: its rhythm defines his rhythm. The factory hall is noisy and cramped; he works in close proximity to other workers and eats his sandwiches in the same place where he works. Cinematography adds to the impression of confinement: long shots are avoided and it feels as if the camera is unable to isolate Arthur from other workers; somebody else is always pushed into the frame. In an internal monologue he confesses that he regards his work as hard and boring and he is never paid in proportion to his effort. He is aware that his work benefits those above him

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disproportionally: the capitalists, managers and foremen. However, Arthur neither engages in political action to fight this perceived injustice nor attempts to find a 'room at the top', as is the case with a young accountant in the film of this title by Jack Clayton (1959). Instead, he tries to make his life inside and outside the factory enjoyable enough to bear his everyday hardship. One strategy consists of 'making out': pretending to make more pieces than he does in reality, or producing them below the required standard. He does not lose any opportunity to upset his superiors and co-workers, such as planting a rat in a pile of pieces made by a fellow female labourer. What he regards as an innocuous joke can be seen as a sign of the resentment of male British workers towards competition from female workers (in subsequent decades this is combined with resentment towards foreign workers). The supervisor tells Arthur to avoid such jokes, but there is no real sanction; Arthur feels secure at work, taking his employment for granted. This might be a reason why, although he is visibly angry and restless, he does not leave his job.

Immediately after leaving the factory Arthur mounts his bike and rushes home. True to the tradition that started with *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895) by the Lumière brothers, we see the factory building when the workers leave it, not as they enter it. Unlike the episodes showing Arthur at work, his journey by bike is presented in a long shot, which underscores his after-work freedom. His movements are wide, as if he wants to fill half of the road; there are no cars in sight so it appears that the road belongs to the workers. The use of a long shot showing Arthur in his free time foretells that soon working class history would be more the history of non-work (leisure and unemployment) than of work.

When not working, Arthur is out of his house, fishing with his miner friend, visiting a funfair, walking with his married lover, Brenda, or his new girlfriend, Doreen. Arthur also goes to the pub, but the pleasures of fresh air are more to his taste. He needs to detach himself from the confinement of the factory and be able to return to work. His behaviour conforms to the notion of 'free time' as elucidated by Theodor Adorno: 'Free time must not resemble work in any way whatsoever, in order, presumably, that one can work all the more effectively afterwards ... Time free of work should be utilised for the recreation of expended labour power ... precisely because it is a mere appendage of work' (Adorno 1991: 164). As if to confirm this opinion, wherever Arthur goes, we see the factory in the background. Showing Arthur's life after work also allows Reisz to present improvement in the living standard of the British working class, marked by new fancy clothes and numerous pints of beer, which Arthur can easily afford.

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The most conspicuous sign of Arthur's rebellion is his affair with Brenda, the wife of Arthur's foreman, Jack. In the process of his social climbing Jack, who is also of working class origin, aged prematurely and lost his virility, of which the ultimate proof is the ease with which Arthur cuckolds him (Spicer 2001: 153). Jack is not even able to avenge his humiliation personally. To teach Arthur a lesson, he gets two soldiers to beat him up and asks Arthur to leave his family in peace. He has neither desire nor power to punish Jack at work, not least because the private and the public spheres of their lives are separated; the factory life is governed by bureaucratic rules, not personal preferences (Zaretsky 1976: 78–127). Arthur's pride in his masculinity is thus one reason why he wants to remain an ordinary worker. Such a link between the working class and sex was an important element in the self-perception of the British working class after the war (Hoggart 1957: 97–101) and, perhaps even more, constituted the way the upper classes viewed British proletarians (Booker 1969: 145). The narrative of working class super-virility can be seen as a specific ideological tool – what I will term a 'compensation narrative'. For working class men it was a means to help them to come to terms with their low social position, and for those on the higher rungs of the social ladder to render the status quo as natural, reflecting different types of human capital represented by those at the top and bottom. The idea that those who spend long hours as appendages to the machine are extra virile is at odds with Marx, who regarded industrial workers as severely debilitated.

Reisz suggests that the life of the British working class is improving, as demonstrated by the new housing estate built on the outskirts of the town, which Arthur looks at with his girlfriend Doreen. He throws a stone in its direction, which some critics interpreted as a sign of his continuing rebellion. For me, however, it is rather a sign that Arthur accepts the status quo, but is unwilling to admit it, because conformity does not agree with his self-perception. For him, being working class means being angry and rejecting cooperation with the authorities, including the state engaged in providing affordable housing for the working class. Doreen criticises his gesture, since one day the house might be theirs – his gesture is thus a symbolic one of self-harm.

While Arthur does not want to test an alternative to the life of working in a factory, the main character in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* is offered such an alternative and the protagonist of *This Sporting Life* actively seeks it. Colin Smith in Richardson's film comes from a working class family and ends up in a borstal as a result of breaking into a bakery and stealing money. There his athletic

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pro prowess is discovered by the borstal governor and he is given a chance to move away, physically and metaphorically, from the confinement of the other working class delinquents. He is allowed to undertake unsupervised training in preparation for a cross-country race. The governor promises him that if he wins the race, his privileges will multiply and the victory will pave his way to further opportunities, even taking part in the Olympics. Sport is thus presented to Colin as a fast track to joining the higher classes and achieving personal fulfilment. Yet only the fast runners succeed and it is an opportunity open only to individuals, not the masses. Colin, however, blows his chance by purposefully losing the race to a boy from a public school. He does so to stay 'true to himself': nonconformist and hostile towards the Establishment. 'Truthfulness to oneself' is also an important concept in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and in other British New Wave films (Leach 2004: 56). Typically, the films' authors are sympathetic to this value, which can be regarded as a sign of their leftist respect for the ways of the working class. Yet equally they show that being merely 'true to oneself' leads to stasis, as in the case of Arthur, or defeat, as in the case of Colin. We see it at the end of the film, when



**Figure 2.1** Sport as an escape from working class life in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*

Colin is demoted from the position of the governor's favourite to the manual job of assembling gas masks. Ultimately, irrespective of whether he is a rebel or a conformist, Colin continues to serve the governor and the system – he has no choice but to do so. He is even more at the mercy of the system after his rebellion than he would have been if he were a successful runner, as underscored by the military connotation of the work with gas masks. Such an analysis is supported by sports historian John Hughson, who, quoting Paul Willis's well-known sociological study on the career paths of rebellious working class 'lads' (Willis 1977), argues that they paid for their nonconformity by poor educational results that destined them to futures in unskilled jobs, such as those in which their fathers had been employed (Hughson 2005: 46). Rebellion of the kind performed by Colin thus not only failed to subvert the system, but ultimately strengthened it.

Colin is contrasted with his mother who, like Doreen in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, openly cooperates with what Colin perceives as their enemy – the capitalist class. She accepts compensation from the management of the factory following an accident resulting in the death of Colin's father, and spends it on shopping. Colin regards her behaviour as disgraceful, because it indicates her acceptance of the way the management measured his father's life and death. Yet his way of challenging such reckoning is an internal emigration – a strategy that suits the capitalists and alienates Colin from his own working class milieu.

*This Sporting Life* offers a portrait of another working class character, a Yorkshire miner called Frank Machin, who rejects the predictable existence of a labourer in order to find a better life through playing rugby league. What attracts Frank to rugby is money and power; he decides to be a professional player upon noticing that ordinary workers are not allowed into a night club, while sportsmen and sport managers are welcomed. Yet Frank does not want to break with the working class milieu entirely, only to improve his lot. He continues renting a room from a poor widow, Mrs Hammond, even when he earns enough money to move out, and he attempts to gain her heart by buying her clothes and taking her and her children for excursions. He also provocatively rejects upper class ways by keeping his distance from his boss and his snobbish wife and behaving in an ostentatiously 'working class' manner in an expensive restaurant.

Rugby league has working class connotations (on sport and class distinction see Bourdieu 1978), not least because muscular strength is more important in this sport than technical skill. Anderson underscores the working class character of Frank's play by focusing on the moments of greatest brutality, when the players are injured.

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There is thus an analogy between the injury-prone labour down the mine and on the rugby pitch. Both Mrs Hammond's husband and Frank were seriously injured during their careers and the men themselves were accused of self-damage. Both the factory and the rugby pitch are controlled by people from the middle class, who direct those on the shop floor and the pitch from behind the scenes. In the case of rugby, the important decisions are made in hotels and private houses. Nevertheless, there is a limit to this analogy as Frank is paid many times more as a sportsman than when he was a miner and Mrs Hammond's husband loses his life during his work, while Frank only loses his teeth. The work and death of Mr Hammond is off-screen. Frank's work, by contrast, is part of a spectacle; without an audience it loses its meaning. Anderson criticises the way factory work is hidden and sport is displayed, by pointing out that because nobody saw how the miner died, Mrs Hammond was refused compensation, and by rendering the rugby match as a gladiatorial contest, in which spectators revel in the pain suffered by the combatants. At the same time, Anderson is complicit in representing work and sport in such a way because he does not offer us any alternative.

Frank's desire to remain in a working class milieu while enjoying the economic and social privileges of belonging to a higher class remains unfulfilled. One reason is that to his managers he is disposable. He is paid well as long as he plays well on



**Figure 2.2** Frank and Mrs Hammond in *This Sporting Life*

the pitch, producing surplus value, and off the pitch he behaves in the way that is expected of him, but when he loses his talent and indulges in alcohol, his status diminishes. At the same time, Mrs Hammond, who gradually warms to Frank and even has sex with him, ultimately rejects him, as she believes that once Frank is a rich man, there will be a class division between them and she could not be his partner, only his paid 'slut', justifiably despised by her neighbours. There is a chance that Mrs Hammond's prejudice might be overcome by the sheer power of Frank's devotion, but this chance is shattered by her illness and death, which leaves Frank devastated. Such a tragic solution, however, saves the author and the audience from a moral assessment of the character who successfully transcended class boundaries.

If we look at other sources, then we notice that successful transitions from the working class to higher social positions via sport happened in the 1960s and even more so in subsequent decades. The 1960s was a period when sport and especially football in England started to pay very well, according to Jeffrey Richards, to the detriment of the standards of behaviour of the sportsmen and their fans. The best documented example was the great star of the 1960s, George Best, as well as such bad boys of soccer as Rodney Marsh and Stanley Bowes, who, according to Richards, 'drank, gambled, womanised and drove fast cars ... squandered their talent and lived for the moment', unlike the 'classic footballer of the 1940s and 1950s, a player never cautioned or sent off, a symbol of respectable working-class Englishness – modest, well-behaved, honourable, decent, skilful, cool and sensible, gentlemanly on and off the field' (Richards 2004: 102). The difference between the sombre mood of *The Long Distance Runner* and *This Sporting Life* on the one hand and the more cheerful 1960s stories of the real sportsmen of working class background on the other ultimately testifies not to the difference between the reality of the working class in this period and its cinematic representation, but to the then-dominant discourse of the British working class. This discourse, as espoused by the previously quoted Richard Hoggart, projected it as cohesive, anti-individualistic, reconciled with its place behind the machine and at the kitchen sink, and threatened by the development of mass media. His argument had its equivalent in other countries. Even such an unconventional thinker as Michel Foucault construed the French industrial class in a similar way and, like Hoggart, mourned its media-induced decline (Foucault 1975).

In the three British films the focus is on male members of the working class, never on a woman, despite the fact that women presented in the films are factory

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workers (Doreen, Colin's mother) and look after small children, often on their own (Mrs Hammond, Colin's mother). There is a sense that a man is punished by working in a factory, while for a woman it is a privilege, so she has no right to complain about her predicament. Sympathising with male workers at the expense of female workers can be interpreted as a sign of accepting a Keynesian logic (supported by the trade unions and the Labour Party) with its division of labour force into working in the privileged, male 'monopoly sector' and the 'competitive' sector, dominated by female workers. Furthermore, women in these films are associated with (over)consumption, being presented as either ardent consumers or agents of corruption of the male workers. The latter refers to *This Sporting Life*, where Frank is the main spender, but the main reason for his recklessness with money is a need to impress Mrs Hammond by showering her with expensive gifts.

Discourses activated by these films point to the tension between the old and new concepts of the working class that circulated in the 1960s. In a wider sense, they demonstrate that the working class as, indeed, any class, is always in the process of making. On this occasion, there is a tension between the working class as united, homogenous and happy to remain 'true to itself' and one consisting of individuals pursuing their own consumerist desires. The filmmakers could not ignore the individualistic mindset, but equally found it difficult to accept, either because of their left wing, anticapitalist views or, if we read their films less sympathetically, due to their unexpressed hostility to the upward mobility of some members of the working class. This is one of the reasons that their films convey a sense of both movement and stasis.

The three films, together with some others of this period, such as *A Taste of Honey* (1961) by Tony Richardson and *A Kind of Loving* (1962) by John Schlesinger, belong to the most celebrated examples of realism in British cinema and, at the same time, the seminal depictions of working class life in this country. This raises the issue of the relationship between realism and the representation of the working class, including work as its defining feature. In Britain, the opinion prevails that realism is more conducive to such representation than non-realistic styles. My position is that realism is a question of intertextuality, namely of a position of the cinematic text against other texts (Stam, Burgoyne and Flitterman-Lewis 1992: 184–221). Only through comparing a film at hand with other films are we able to decide about its realism or non-realism. If the film appears to capture work accurately, this is because of its position within film history, rather than due to its essential qualities. As if to confirm this view, Christopher Booker notes that 'Karel

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Reisz's "neo-realistic" style of film-making was to serve him to equally good purpose in making television commercials, his "hard" and "realistic" photography and "exciting" choice of angles being equally effective whether used to glamorise the smoky skyline of Nottingham or a bowl of cornflakes sparkling in the sun' (Booker 1969: 145). John Hill reaches a similar conclusion. He argues that ultimately British New Wave films attested to the difficulty of presenting work within the confines of narrative realism and defends films such as the *Carry On* series and *The Kitchen* (1961), directed by James Hill, which thanks to their episodic structure and eschewing of a central character offered a new model of realism, more appropriate to capture the experience of the working class (Hill 1986: 140–43). The question of realism also pertains to Eastern European films.

### **Heaven and hell in a socialist combine**

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In the East of Europe, industry in the 1960s was still growing, as much in quantity as in size – the socialist dogma was that the larger the factory, the better. As a result, the cult of work was very strong in this decade, if not in reality, then in official discourses. Industrialisation was coupled with improvements in the standard of living, but also had negative effects, such as uneven development. In Poland, for example, Silesia in the south was overdeveloped, to the detriment of the natural environment, while the north-east suffered due to the lack of investment and, consequently, poor wages and poor quality of life. Because socialist factories lacked mechanisms to encourage an increase in productivity, they were always hungry for people. There was a need to mobilise women and potential workers from the rural areas, and in the case of East Germany even from abroad, to fill the available posts. However, by the 1960s, when countries such as Poland, Yugoslavia and Hungary embarked on programs of modernisation, the shortage of specialists exceeded that of unskilled workforce.

The totalising character of socialist industrialisation is conveyed by the term 'combine' (*kombinat*), functioning in a number of languages, and referring to a big industrial enterprise that links several factories, such as a mine and a power station, under one administration. A typical combine was accompanied by a housing estate built for its workforce, which was detached from normal cities. The employees of combines constituted the privileged part of the socialist workforce, being an equivalent of the Western 'monopoly sector'. Their wages were higher

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than in the other branches of industry and employees were edified in the socialist rhetoric, of which a sign was establishing special national holidays, to celebrate occupations such as mining or steelwork (Stenning 2003). In the end, however, such policies proved unfortunate for the socialist establishment. In Poland large factories became the bastions of the anticommunist movement and played a crucial role in the demolition of crude communism (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Eastern European cinema of the 1960s reflects the importance of combines, by using them as a setting for numerous films, some of which became classics of European cinematic modernism. I will discuss here three Polish films from this period: *Złoto* (*Gold*, 1962) by Wojciech Has, *Walkower* (*Walkover*, 1965) by Jerzy Skolimowski and *Molo* (*The Pier*, 1969) by Wojciech Solarz and one from Yugoslavia, *Čovek nije tica* (*Man Is Not a Bird*, 1965) by Dušan Makavejev. They were shot in places of special pride for the communist establishment: *Gold* in Turoszów in Lower Silesia, where seams of brown coal were exploited on a large scale; *Walkover* in Płock, the site of the largest Polish oil refinery; *The Pier* in the Gdynia shipyard, which produced the most modern ships in Eastern Europe, and *Man Is Not a Bird* in the Bor region of Eastern Serbia, one of the largest and most productive copper mining centres in the world. They all focused on people working there, but (to reflect the modernisation drive) more often on specialists than ordinary workers.

*Gold* and *Walkover* cast as main characters young men just arrived in the industrial complex, either, like Kazik in *Gold*, to escape personal problems, or an uncertain existence, as in the case of Leszczyc in *Walkover*. Their escape is successful; in the plant they are given the opportunity for a meaningful life. However, not all is rosy in combines. In *Gold* nobody encourages the workers to take responsibility for the organisation of the plant; this is left to the authorities. All the employees, except for the idealistic manager, want to escape this place. For one labourer working in the plant is only a means to earn enough money to invest in his farm. The centre of communal life is not the workers' hostel, which is presented as a site of continuous conflict, or the party headquarters, which is nowhere to be seen, but a restaurant with a friendly barwoman, which looks as if transplanted from prewar films. Here workers, managers and various shadowy local businessmen and drop-outs spend their free time having 'philosophical discussions' and drinking alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

Kazik owes his decision to stay in the plant to Piotr, an engineer with managerial duties who assumes the role of his mentor. Piotr points out to Kazik that extracting



**Figure 2.3** Kazik and his factory in *Gold*

raw materials, the eponymous ‘gold’ from the Earth, serves nature. Piotr does not think at all in monetary terms and despises people who are preoccupied with material comfort, and for this reason is in conflict with his narrow-minded wife, who wants him to return to Warsaw. This woman’s origins are in a prewar petty bourgeois milieu, whose remnants the socialist politicians vowed to eradicate. Her especially harsh treatment within the narrative can be linked to the emphasis put by the socialist economy on accumulation, at the expense of consumption, unlike in the Keynes-following West, where consumption was seen as a motor of production.

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Leszczyc in *Walkover* is also lured to stay in the combine by the friendly director of the plant and Teresa, a female colleague from a university who came there to become, as she puts it, 'somebody important'. At their first meeting, the director asks Teresa and Leszczyc to 'send wires to their acquaintances and friends to come, bringing their families with them'. For engineers there are apartments in the newly erected blocks, while the ordinary labourers must content themselves with places in the workers' hostel. The factory director himself, as his secretary mentions with pride, is the youngest *kombinat* director in the whole country. Yet, ironically, he is deaf. He talks, but he does not listen to people, making false assumptions, such as that Leszczyc is an engineer, while in reality he does not have a university degree. This affliction can be interpreted metaphorically as the deafness of the political and economic leadership (*nomenklatura*) to the needs of the workers. The director is played by Krzysztof Chamiec, the same actor who was cast as engineer Piotr in *Gold*. His cinematic trajectory from *Gold*, where he played an idealist in an old jumper, to *Walkover*, where he is a careerist in a black suit, who lures his future workmen by the promise of material gains, is symbolic of the changes that took place in cinematic discourses between the end of the 1950s, when socialist realism was still the norm, and the mid-1960s, when it disappeared from the screen. This tendency towards disenchantment with work will be strengthened in the films of the subsequent decade.

Unlike Kazik in *Gold*, who has no alternative to physical toil, Leszczyc hesitates between taking employment in the plant and continuing his life as a boxer. Work in the plant offers stability and the possibility of promotion. As a boxer, Leszczyc has a chance to lead a more adventurous life. However, being almost thirty he cannot take part in many more fights for nonprofessionals and is too mediocre to embark on a truly professional career. He thus drifts, meeting various people whose stories reveal various possibilities. Neither choice is free from problems, but together they show the remarkably wide opportunities enjoyed by Poles in the 1960s. Among those who take advantage of them is Teresa, although for her success comes at a higher price than for the men. She has to defend her project against a group of more experienced male engineers who regard it as too risky, and a hostile female colleague who cannot stand the success of another woman. We also learn that Teresa was an ardent communist, responsible for Leszczyc's expulsion from the university; political conformity is thus the price of moving up the social ladder.

The managers in these two films combine many functions, which in the capitalist factory would be separated. They appear to be everywhere and do

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everything – from hiring people to inventing and applying new technologies. Andrzej in *The Pier* epitomises this tendency: he designs ships, supervises their construction and is responsible for preparing a ship-launching ceremony. Although he belongs to Fordist times, he behaves as a post-Fordist worker (on post-Fordism see Chapter 4). His talent and importance for the country's economy render him a celebrity, as testified by a crowd of journalists following him at the shipyard. Andrzej also enjoys an above-average standard of living, having a car and a wife who devotes herself to tending to his needs. Yet he has too much to do; he does not even return home for the night, but sleeps in the factory and feels so exhausted that he hallucinates at work. His gruelling schedule is a result of the 'dictatorship of plans', established by people driven by ideological imperatives. The pressure to finish a project on time is responsible for Andrzej's desire to escape from work. Another reason why he wants to flee his place of work is its decadence, alluded to during a banquet prepared to celebrate the shipyard's success. We hear the words of a man who reads praise for the Polish ship industry, but the camera focuses on what happens under the tables. Somebody is putting money in somebody else's pocket, a woman receives a key to use for a clandestine meeting, another person opens a bottle of wine and drinks it secretly. The dissociation of sounds and images creates a contrast between the façade of a successful and united Polish industry and its reality as ridden by corruption and clandestine hedonism. When the celebration is over and Andrzej leaves for the countryside, he meets the same corrupted, selfish and snobbish people. Their final dance, reminiscent of the last dance from *Wesele* (*The Wedding*, 1901) by Stanisław Wyspiański, a critical play about the Polish society of the nineteenth century, suggests that there is no escape from the situation. Significantly, among people celebrating the success of the shipyard there are no ordinary workers, only the representatives of *nomenklatura* and the media. Due to his important position in the shipyard, Andrzej can be compared to Piotr in *Gold* and the director of a combine in *Walkover*, but unlike these two men, Andrzej does not attempt to mentor younger people, being himself in need of guidance and looking for alternatives. He takes part in a motor race, visits an artist and escapes to a place in the woods that he calls a 'rancho'. Yet in the end he returns to the factory, which suggests that for well-paid technical intelligentsia there is no viable alternative: post-Fordism can be exercised only within the limits of a larger Fordist framework.

All three films also refer to the role of agriculture and the countryside in the country's prosperity. In *The Pier* there is no sign of farming; an exotic sounding

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'rancho' is a place where tired 'townies' can rest. In *Gold* and *Walkover* agriculture still exists, but is represented as a poor relative of industry. This is indicated by the decline of agricultural infrastructure, such as a dilapidated building, on which one can decipher the words 'grain warehouse' (*magazyn zbożowy*), shown in *Walkover* and the fact that most people who find employment in the combines come from the countryside. One example is a man who works as the factory night watchman feeding a goat near the plant. He belongs to a large group of Polish 'peasant-workers' (*chłoporobotnicy*): small farmers who in order to make ends meet took employment in the factories, but did not entirely give up their small plots of land. The city/country division affects the unspoken hierarchy of workers, with peasant-workers being at the bottom of the pile, while managers and engineers displaying 'urban veneer' are at the top. Skolimowski shows a huge cross, located at the crossroads, being pulled out of the ground, to make way for a new road. Such action indicates that Polish industrialisation goes hand in hand with eradicating religion. Indeed, in the newly created industrial centres people used to go to church less often than in the country, not least because there were fewer churches there. Yet in *Walkover* removing the cross proves difficult, demonstrating that Poles were very attached to their religion, as they were attached to their scraps of land.

*Man Is not a Bird* begins with the arrival of Jan, a highly skilled technician who comes to the copper plant to install new machines. The choice of setting is poignant because metallurgy was a metonymy for the communist revolution – the process of forging the new order and new people (Bonnell 1997: 20–46; Golonka-Czajkowska 2010). In the combine shown by Makavejev there is the pressure of a plan. This time this is not a plan imposed directly by the government, as under self-management the factories belong to workers' cooperatives, but by the management, which recognises the need to sell their products for foreign currency as a means to invest and continue production. On the ground, however, it makes little difference whether work is enforced by a central planning agency or the factory director as both demand a lot from the workers. Jan does what is expected from him, but at a high personal cost. He works so much that he literally has no home; he is a travelling worker and is never able to settle. He also neglects his young girlfriend, hairdresser Rajka, whom he met in the nearby village. Rajka, for her part, betrays Jan with a less busy truck driver at the very same time that Jan receives a medal for his professional achievements. In the end Jan is very frustrated as demonstrated by him smashing a mirror, which can be read symbolically as his attempt to destroy his image of a perfect worker.

Of all the films discussed in this section *Man Is not a Bird* devotes the largest part of screen time to factory work. Daniel Goulding suggests that this serves Makavejev to contrast the socialist rhetoric about nonalienated work under socialism with the brutal reality of manual toil. As Goulding notes, showing a Gypsy worker stealing state property, some copper wire that he wraps around his torso, is hardly an advert for socialist working practices (Goulding 1994: 215). And yet I do not think that Makavejev's intention was to condemn work under self-management or socialist conditions at large; the message is more ambiguous, as work makes Jan both suffer and feel fulfilled. He balances on the threshold between ecstasy and exhaustion, until he learns that 'man is not a bird': what is unachievable, cannot be achieved. In this sense, he is a forerunner of Mateusz Birkut in Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* (1977) (see Chapter 3).

The authors of these four films also refer to the role of art under socialism. In *Gold* the engineer, who represents the voice of the socialist ideologues, equates artistic creation with industrial work: work is able to transform worthless stones into beautiful jewels. What the earth gives us, after the workers' intervention, becomes so exquisite that there is no need to decorate one's apartment with pictures; industry is the highest art. Such a view, however, is undermined from the bottom by the workers who read American adventure prose and cite French poetry. The director of the combine in *Walkover* does not consider industrial production either a work of art or even a worthwhile topic for it. When two young women, possibly from art college, bring to his office some sketches of his plant, he dismisses them, saying that he has enough factory in the factory – on the wall he wants something different. His words can be taken as an expression of a need for autonomous art under socialism and an ironic comment about the limited potential for attracting audiences to films about the achievements of socialist industry. In *The Pier*, the factory is clearly separated from artistic production. Andrzej visits the artist's studio when his job is finished and revels in what he sees there. He enters this place only as a 'tourist', to admire, but not participate. Ironically, with his nonchalant disregard for social recognition and his idiosyncratic, 'surrealistic' way of looking at the world Andrzej appears close to the stereotype of an artist, more so than his artist friend.

The most complex relation between factory work and art is offered in *Man Is Not a Bird*. Makavejev exposes his workers to many kinds of art and entertainment: classical music, popular music, circus and hypnotist performers in a workers' club, in a factory hall and 'under the sky'. One of the workers, who used to be a circus

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performer, attempts to repeat his circus act in the plant, thus transforming the plant into the utopian space of a circus. In common with the discourse on physical labour, Makavejev's take on art is ambiguous. Much of what we see comes across as vulgar, kitschy, fake or pompous. Nevertheless, all these types of art move the manual labourers emotionally; during the performance they laugh, cry or fight. The work itself also comes across as a magical performance. Watching this film today, when the authorities both in the West and in the East have shed most of their duties towards the citizens in the name of giving them more freedom, and physical work has not only stopped being celebrated but has also become invisible (see Chapters 4 and 5), one feels nostalgic for the times when workers were cared for so comprehensively and big orchestras came to the foundries to play Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* for them.

While the hard-working man in the plant is rewarded for his efforts with a medal and a concert by a symphonic orchestra, a woman's work in a hairdressing salon does not bring any recognition. Women in the world centred on heavy industry have no rights, as stated by one of the workers when his wife complains about him giving her dress to his lover: 'I feed her. I clothe her. I can beat her. She is my wife'. These words clearly convey the situation of the 1960s, with its asymmetry between monopoly and the female-dominated competitive sector and their Eastern equivalents.<sup>4</sup> Makavejev does not condone this situation. On the contrary, he makes us confront its blatant injustice and appreciate female struggle to oppose it. Not surprisingly, in the recent re-evaluation of his cinema, Nina Power argues that 'Makavejev's films should be included in the small but important category of mid-twentieth century feminist films. Indeed, one of Makavejev's very great strengths is his portrayal of "modern" young women, beginning with Rajka, the strong-willed, independent heroine of *Man Is Not a Bird* (1965)' (Power 2010: 42).

Although the choice of the setting and the subject of these four films are 'social realistic', the mode of representing them is not. Their visual styles are close to surrealism. There is something strange, even uncanny about the combines they show. The mise-en-scène in *Gold* was compared to cosmic and underwater landscapes from the paintings by Yves Tanguy (Grodź 2009: 79–80) and this surrealist painter could be evoked in relation to the remaining films. In all of them machines and other human creations, such as a ship in *The Pier*, look like gigantic dragons and sea monsters, with lives of their own, rather than being obedient to their creators. Their sheer size brings to mind Marx's view of machines as a means of thwarting and enslaving the factory worker, although in the socialist realist,

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especially Soviet context, machines encapsulated human power to conquer nature. The uncanny aura is confirmed by strange events taking place there. *Man Is Not a Bird* begins with a hypnotist discussing his work, who also appears later, performing his act for a working class audience. Upon his arrival in Płock, Leszczyc in *Walkover* witnesses a young woman, possibly his old flame, throwing herself under a train. The event is presented in such an elliptical manner that we are not sure if it happened in reality, or only in Leszczyc's imagination. The first people whom Kazik meets in Turoszów are three young women who look like dancers (or high class prostitutes) transplanted from Polish prewar films, and a saxophone player, playing in the middle of the industrial desert. Moreover, unexpectedly workers quote (in French) François Villon.

Why to combine working class heroes, spaces and stories with surrealist universes? For Wojciech Has, who annoyed the authorities with his earlier films, *Pętla* (Noose, 1957) and *Wspólny pokój* (A Shared Room, 1960), deemed as unacceptably bleak and detached from the Polish reality, making a 'production film' (*produkcyjniak*) was a way to redeem himself in their eyes, while remaining faithful to his favourite style. The turn to surrealism, rather than simply making an attempt to purify socialist realism from its propagandistic excess, its blatant nonrealism, signalled that the filmmakers do not reject either socialism or realism, but want to offer us their alternative versions.

In order to appreciate it we shall realise that advocates of surrealism argued that it is not antirealism, but a superior type of realism, able to capture the deeper aspects of reality for which 'ordinary' realism is unable to account (Zusi 2004). Moreover, surrealism, not unlike socialist realism, was not only an artistic style, but also a political project, close to Marxism, but distancing itself from 'the official vulgate of the Comintern' (Löwy 2009: 22; see also Richardson and Fijalkowski 2001). As André Breton wrote in his first manifesto of 1924: 'Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete *nonconformism*' (Breton 1969: 47). Michael Löwy labels surrealism of this kind, most famously represented by Breton, as 'Gothic Marxism' and 'Romantic Marxism'. Hence choosing surrealism could be seen as an attempt to return to Marxism. This role was also played by self-reflexive moments in these films, such as discussions about the character of artistic representations, references to earlier films about industrial production and iconic socialist realist images, such as gigantic worker's hands in *Man Is Not a Bird* (Parvulescu 2009). This latter film is the most metasocialist realist, because it testifies to the director's rejection of the tenets of socialist realism and his

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recognition that one cannot escape them fully – socialist realism will always act as a model for filmmakers from Eastern Europe. In this sense it can be seen as a predecessor to Wajda's *Man of Marble*, which even more openly demonstrates how socialist realism destroyed the innocence of the worker's image and attempts to redeem it. A desire to show a worker's life realistically is conveyed by the extensive use of long shots and long takes, *Walkover* setting a Polish record in this respect. Time in these films drags on, as if working and living under socialism required more effort than under capitalism.

### Retail sector both sides of the Berlin Wall

While for the young male characters in British New Wave films the factory is still the most obvious destination, Antoine Doinel, the most famous creation of French director François Truffaut, who like Colin Smith in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* begins his screen existence as a juvenile delinquent in *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (*Four Hundred Blows*, 1959), spends very little of his working life in a factory. We only see him, played by the same actor, Jean-Pierre Léaud, briefly in a factory producing records in an anthology film, *L'amour à vingt ans* (*Love at Twenty*, 1962) and even there his job looks more like working in a shop than in a factory; we just see no customers. In the subsequent film, *Baisers volés* (*Stolen Kisses*, 1968), after being discharged from the army, Antoine finds work in the service industry, as a night porter in a hotel. Or rather the job is found for him – the father of his girlfriend, thanks to knowing the manager of the hotel, arranges it for Antoine. Every other job Antoine does, he gets without any effort and is accepted everywhere despite ineptitude, revealed when he is unable even to fulfil a simple task of wrapping a shoe box. His continuous bungling of employment opportunities, yet always receiving a second chance, and his lack of remorse when his job goes wrong, can be viewed simply as a means to move a romantic narrative forward. But it is also a reflection of the time when work was easy to get and there appeared to be more employers in search of employees than the other way round. The sense that life is easy for Antoine, that everything comes to him naturally is augmented by multiplying chance encounters and the overall style, inspired by Jean Renoir (Insdorf 1994: 75–77). The employee's power is also revealed in a motif by the owner of the shoe shop who uses a detective agency to find out why women working in his shop show him contempt. One can guess that it must be

cheaper to employ a private detective to get to the root of the problem than to sack the disrespectful sales assistants and employ some humbler ones. Truffaut suggests that in services that are feminised, a male employee tends to be treated better than the women. This is the case with Antoine. He does not shine either as a tradesman or a spy, but keeps his job and unlike his female colleagues in the shop is even offered the privilege of dining with the owner and his wife.

Antoine Doinel in *Stolen Kisses* can even be regarded as approaching the Marxist ideal of ‘hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon’ (Marx and Engels 1947: 22), without becoming a professional. However, Léaud’s later films, as I will argue in due course, testify to the increasing difficulty of fulfilling this ideal. Against the background of this actor’s later incarnations, *Stolen Kisses* comes across as depicting the happiest period in the life of a man who tries to avoid the shackles of alienated work.

Due to combining the roles of shop assistant and spy, Antoine invites comparison with a protagonist of Miloš Forman’s Czech film, *Černý Petr* (*Black Peter*, 1964). Petr begins his adult life as a supermarket apprentice. The film, however, begins even before Petr enters the scene, so to speak. First we see Petr’s boss, the supermarket manager, listening to a march played on the radio, which is an indication of the values to which the manager adheres and a premonition of potential conflict between the younger and older generations. The manager is an archetypal *homo real socialism*. He gives Petr little opportunity to express his opinion or show initiative. He tells his young employee repeatedly that he trusts his customers, but at the same time gives him the task of spying on them, because ‘some people are stealing’. In due course he demands from him greater vigilance, using better tricks to capture the thieves, such as wearing plain clothes rather than the shop uniform. Petr’s failure to catch any thieves is interpreted by the boss not as testimony to the honesty of the customers, expected in the perfect, communist system, but as proof of Petr’s incompetence.

At one point Petr’s boss claims that working in a shop is a good job, while later admitting that this occupation is dominated by women and only boys who are complete idiots come to work there. This situation gives the manager an immense advantage which he uses, bossing his female employees and making comments about their appearance as if the supermarket were his private harem. For Petr’s father the feminisation of the retail sector equals a greater chance for his son, whom he regards as a half-wit, to be promoted. He correctly assumes that where there are many women working in a particular profession, the only man among

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them will be their boss (on working women under socialism see Scott 1976: 117–37; Gal and Kligman 2000). Nobody questions such blatant sexism, contradicting the official socialist ideology of equal opportunities for men and women. The world of work is thus dominated by men and by the older generation. The manager's rule extends outside work. When Petr disappears following a customer whom he suspects of shoplifting, the manager visits his home to find out what happened to the young man. The bosses are present in the places of leisure, observing their young workforce and interfering when they are unhappy with their behaviour. The pains young people go to to win the approval of their superiors can be explained by their awareness that presenting themselves to the foremen in an unfavourable light might have tangible repercussions at work. Such anxiety is well founded because, although in the 'workers' state' all contradictions pertaining to the capitalist mode of work officially had been abolished, in practice working as an ordinary labourer in a socialist country equalled being at the mercy of the foreman. Michael Burawoy uses the term 'dictatorship of the foreman', supporting its use by quoting Miklos Haraszti, a Hungarian poet and sociologist, who for two years (1971–72) worked as an ordinary labourer in the Red Star Tractor Factory. Haraszti wrote:

*The foreman doesn't just organise our work: first and foremost he organises us. The foremen fix our pay, our jobs, our overtime, our bonuses, and the deductions for excessive rejects. They decide when we go on holiday; write character reports on us for any arm of the state which requests them; pass on assessments of those who apply for further training or request a passport; they supervise trade union activities in the section; they hire, fire, arrange transfers, grant leave, impose fines, give bonuses. (Burawoy 1985: 178)*

However, not all workers were so powerless. Those who monopolised some skills (or had significant professional capital, to use Bourdieu's term), had some power over their superiors and could negotiate their duties. The least qualified, who had nothing special to offer, typically the youngest, were most vulnerable (ibid. 178–79), which *Black Peter* demonstrates. It is worth mentioning that in this respect the East was not unlike the West, especially the West from an earlier period. As Daniel Nelson observes, before 1900 and in most factories before 1920 the foreman was the undisputed ruler of the department, gang, crew or shop and the factory technical skills were the key to power (Nelson 1975: 42).

The power enjoyed by the foremen and other supervisors and bosses rendered them as more conformist than the younger generation. This is demonstrated in Petr's dealing both with his boss and his father. The father admits that he had little pleasure in his life and had to hide his views and control his emotions, in order to achieve what he achieved. He gives Petr such tips as: 'Do not interfere in anything!', 'One is lucky who is near the manger!', 'Observe and be vigilant!'. These tips are not only morally vicious, but unconvincing in the light of the father's modest achievements: his rather unappealing, cramped apartment, a prematurely aged and unsophisticated wife and a son who does not respect his father.

Ultimately, both Antoine and Petr come across as inept and distracted from their work by romantic pursuits. However, Petr is harassed by his manager and father, while Antoine effortlessly moves to a different job. Antoine's bungling of his tasks even provides him with opportunities for new adventures and, to use contemporary jargon, to develop transferable skills, such as learning English. Judging on this difference we can deduce that in the 1960s young people from humble backgrounds had more opportunities in the West than in the East.

### Leaving the factory

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The principal characters in Michelangelo Antonioni's films from the 1960s, *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), *L'eclisse* (1962) and *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*, 1964) are prosperous, reflecting the Italian 'economic miracle' of this period. They are much better off than their parents, shun manual work and appear not to be concerned about money. Vittoria in *L'eclisse*, who works as a translator, fits this description very well, while for her mother, as her daughter puts it, poverty was the worst thing in the world. For this reason, in her old age the mother tries to increase her modest income on the stock exchange. Antonioni mercilessly punishes the old woman and thousands like her for her trust in the system, by making her lose her savings, while the situation at the stock exchange affects Vittoria largely on an aesthetic level, as a testimony to the ugliness and strangeness of modern life.

Giuliana in *Red Desert* wants to set up a shop, but not to earn money, only to fill time; she does not even know what she wants to sell or to whom. It is thus paradoxical that these four films are known as a 'tetralogy of alienation', although the director hardly shows us the impoverished industrial workers, whose predicament Marx had in mind when using this term. This paradox, however,

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points to the idea that alienation is infectious and universal; neither the producers of goods, nor the capitalists, nor their consumers can avoid it. This paradox will in some ways reappear in later films (see Chapter 4).

In Antonioni's films places of work, such as the stock exchange in *L'eclisse* and the factory in *Red Desert* take the central stage. Mitchell Schwarzer goes as far as



**Figure 2.4** Fearful factory in *Red Desert*

to say that ‘Antonioni is unconcerned with plot, character development, and dialogue, he shifts the viewer’s attention to the wide-open confinements of the modern mise-en-scène’ (Schwarzer 2000: 198; see also Liehm 1984: 228; Chatman 1985: 99–113). This imposing architecture is a monument to the modernist ambition of constructing permanent things. Fittingly, Gerardini in *La notte* says with pride that only he, the grand industrialist, can create solid design, a lasting monument to the times. Gerardini, of course, will be an anachronism in the 1980s and 1990s, where immaterial and supposedly ‘clean’ production (for instance genetics) gained a superior position over the Fordist industries. Equally, it would not be an exaggeration to say that in Western European cinema Antonioni was the last director capturing literally ‘solid modernity’.

Yet only the architecture seems to be lasting in Antonioni’s films; families, human relations, traditions are all crumbling. The most extreme case of the disparity between the solidity of the external and human frailty is depicted in *Red Desert*, regarded as a culmination of the director’s tetralogy. The person most afflicted by this condition is Giuliana, wife of a factory manager. The reasons why she is so unhappy are not spelled out, but living near the factory and among people whose existence is permeated by technology is an important factor in her condition. She seeks contact with nature, but where she lives there is no nature uncontaminated by industry. Rivers are poisoned by chemical waste, the sea is used by the giant ships. Even birds, as she tells her son, learnt to avoid this environment. Elements of architecture are gigantic and grey, weighing heavily on Giuliana’s soul. The camera frequently ‘neglects the human characters in order to linger on mechanical and structural surroundings for their own sake’ (Brunette 1998: 93), as if to prove that in this part of the world what people created became more important than their creators, a conclusion very close to Marx. Antonioni’s heroine often walks in the proximity of a factory and seeks contact with people who work there, as there are virtually no people where she lives, which ‘in reality’ is Ravenna. We can conjecture that the factory, situated outside this historical city, sucked the life out of the city. Against the large factory building Giuliana comes across as minute and the factory is prison-like, with walls dividing it from the rest of the world. People who work there, including her own husband, have no time for her, simply because they are immersed in their duties, while she is idle. Although she tries to set up a shop or gallery in her town, it is unlikely customers will come, as there is virtually nobody in the neighbourhood. Ultimately Giuliana has no choice but withdraw into the privacy of her home and her body.

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Her condition is mirrored in the behaviour of Corrado, a manager, who comes to the factory to recruit the workforce for an industrial plant in Patagonia. Although he has a specific task, we see him distracted when discussing the future in a distant land with the potential émigrés. This lack of interest in his work testifies to the estranging effect the factory has on him. Moreover, if he loses this job, he will find another, as he himself admits. The workers are also not easily lured away from their current job; they inquire what privileges they will gain if they move to a different country: whether they can phone home, have a good medical service etc. The motif of emigration is presented as proof that we are in the ‘age of welfare’ and widening opportunities for workers – self-fulfilment rather than mere survival is the goal of the workers. (Compare the conditions promised to the Italian workers with those suffered by Polish emigrants in Skolimowski’s ‘British films’ of the 1980s, as discussed in Chapter 4.) Simultaneously, it can be interpreted as a premonition of the time when heavy (Fordist) industry in Europe will disappear, off-shored to places such as South America.

The decline of the factory for the European economy is also predicted in another Italian film of this period: *Teorema* (*Theorem*, 1968) by Pier Paolo Pasolini. Here the capitalist abandons the factory, giving it to the workers for free. Although it is presented as a sign of the late 1960s left-wing revolutions affecting all sections of society, it can also be seen, perversely, as a cunning way for the capitalist to rid himself of a troublesome burden, by giving the workers what he does not need any more.

### **The media factory and the artist’s studio**

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Western films of the 1960s do not show writers, painters or even journalists visiting factories. Artists’ studios tend to be separated from the pollution and drudgery of industrial life. This is the case with the films of the Swinging Sixties, a paradigm more associated with artistic production and the media than any other movement in European film history. During this period London became the youth and cultural capital of the world, as signalled by the words published in *Time Magazine*: ‘The guards now change at Buckingham Palace to a Lennon and McCartney tune, and Prince Charles is firmly in the long-hair set’ (Halasz 1966: 32). From such endorsement emanates joy and a sense of easy life. Swinging London films,

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however, suggest that London was not such an easy place to live and work, even for the privileged elite.

I would like to consider Swinging London films in the context of the ‘culture industry’, a concept first presented by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, the leading representatives of the Frankfurt School in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published in 1947 and later in Adorno’s article ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’, published in 1963. In these works Adorno presents himself as an ardent opponent of a model of popular culture whose sole purpose is generating profit, which, as he believes, dominated in his time, and which he terms the ‘culture industry’. In creating this concept Adorno borrowed from Marx, who argued that the capitalist market transformed art into a commodity to an extent it had never experienced before.

Adorno’s criticism has two components: aesthetic and moral, and by the same token, political. He argues that the products of the culture industry, such as Hollywood genre films and popular music, are mass-produced and standardised, therefore of low artistic value, although they try to conceal their character by inserting various pseudo-innovations. By expecting artists to comply with rules that are meant to increase profit for the industry, such as submitting to generic codes, the culture industry denies them the chance to fulfil their artistic potential, as only art free from commercial pressures is, in Adorno’s view, worthy of its name. The culture industry also denies autonomy to its consumers because, as he puts it, it ‘intentionally integrates its consumers from above ... Although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would like to have us believe, not its subject but its object’ (Adorno 1975: 12). Ultimately, the culture industry locks artists and spectators into a reality that is bad for them in a political sense, due to denying them emancipation from the shackles of capitalism: ‘The advice to be gained from manifestations of the culture industry is vacuous, banal or worse, and the behaviour patterns are shamelessly conformist’ (ibid.: 16). At the same time Adorno edifies modernist high art, epitomised by the writings of Kafka (Adorno 2004: 301).

*Darling* (1965), directed by John Schlesinger, reflects and adds nuance to Adorno’s attitude to high and low culture. One of the early episodes presents the central couple, a model and actress Diana Scott and her journalist lover, Robert Gold, visiting an elderly writer, who lives in the countryside, as Robert puts it, in

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‘virtual isolation’ (demonstrating that ‘virtual’ in the 1960s had different connotations from that which has now). The writer is nonalienated work incarnated; his values pure and noble. He admits that he only writes about what he believes, and preserves his independence rather than mix with people of influence or increase his popularity by pandering to widespread opinions. Robert, on the other hand, perceives himself as a mediator between the old world of high art and the new world of mass media. He does not create from scratch, as the writer apparently does, but only records what the writer tells him, to preserve his testimony for posterity. Robert values the writer highly, yet is equally aware, as is the writer himself, that this man of letters belongs to a bygone era and it makes little sense to emulate him. Nevertheless, the conservative style of the film, consisting of black and white print – in contrast to the later ‘Swinging films’, which are in colour – classical-style score and unnatural language, suggests that Schlesinger himself is in tune with this world.

For Diana, this temple of high art is charming but foreign. When the two men talk, her eyes move between ornaments decorating the writer’s study and she addresses the viewer in an internal monologue, admitting that she does not understand or care about what they talk about. Therefore her job as a fashion model, hostess of charity events and actress playing in film episodes where she remains mute, suits her well or at least it looks this way at the beginning. The boundary between her work and life is blurred; she makes her career by looking attractive: a darling or, as we say today, a celebrity. She is thus a post-Fordist worker in the midst of a largely Fordist world. Her final achievement is becoming the wife of an Italian prince much older than she, in a manner that brings to mind Grace Kelly and Diana, Princess of Wales, for whom being wives of important people became a career in itself. Yet although there appears to be a perfect match between her personality, her life and her work, in the end Schlesinger’s Diana is disappointed, in a way reminiscent of the real royal Diana. Her high-class job turns out to be alienating, when she discovers that glamour and a high social position are paid for with boredom (as shown in a sequence shooting a chocolate commercial) and spiritual void, as all the relations she enters into are either superficial or involve sexual exploitation. What she strove for thus turns out to be unworthy of her effort, but having no other capital to turn to than her attractive physique, she chooses to remain with her conventional and ultimately unloving prince and her life as a living advert of a prince’s life, a commodity. Diana could choose to remain poor, but in the Swinging Sixties films such an option is played

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down. A tacit assumption is that, as is said in *L'eclisse*, poverty is the worst thing in the world, even worse than a spiritual void. The ideal of the time is to have both: material comfort and purpose, be affluent and lead a fulfilling life.

In Schlesinger's film high art is clearly the male domain, as is the upper echelon of the media, which we can identify as the BBC. But even below these high rows there is a clear gender hierarchy. Women audition for parts in theatre, film and adverts; men audition them. Women work on the shop floor in the media factories, posing for cameras; men are in positions of management, deciding where their employees should stand and look and which photographs of women to choose. Women, even as popular and successful as Diana, have no space of their own; they move between different apartments and beds owned by men. This is one reason why Diana is always restless; in Robert's flat she is disturbed by his typewriter; in the prince's palace by the emptiness of his huge rooms and portraits of people she knows nothing about. Ultimately, as Schlesinger demonstrates, women's role in the media industry is always close to that of a prostitute, men's to that of a pimp, which chimes with the Marxist view on women in bourgeois culture.

*Darling* refers to the interlocking worlds of the media, politics and business, especially in the scene of the charity event, when representatives of these spheres meet. In this context Diana suggests associations with Christine Keeler, the call girl involved in the downfall of John Profumo, the cabinet minister in Harold Macmillan's Conservative government. Although Schlesinger alludes to the fact that a pretty girl can destroy the career of a politician (Geraghty 1997: 157–58), this points even more strongly to the media's dependence on the political and economic establishment. We are thus still in the age of 'solid modernity', where politicians, not elusive capital and the media rule the world. At one point we also see Robert interviewing ordinary people on the street to find out what they are ashamed of in contemporary Britain. Two of the four, including one policeman, complain that nowadays British people do not work enough – they would like to have something for nothing. Street questionnaires tend to look comical on screen and in line with this rule, the condemnation of the lazy British citizens does not look very convincing. Nevertheless, the film offers neither a clear critique nor eulogy of such statements, leaving the viewer to decide whether British people in the 1960s passed or failed the 'prosperity test'.

While *Darling* focuses on the experience of a woman who makes her career in the media, *Blow-up* (1966) by Michelangelo Antonioni privileges the perspective of a male photographer, who specialises in fashion, but who also does more

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‘serious’ work, such as photographing people in a homeless shelter. At first sight, Thomas encapsulates nonalienated work, as he enjoys full control over practically everything he employs: his studio, his photographic equipment and his employees. It seems as if there are no physical, technological or bureaucratic obstacles to what he can achieve: when he wants to photograph somebody, process his shots or manipulate them, he can do it immediately. Even more so than with Diana, there are also no boundaries between his work and leisure. Thomas lives in the place where he works and when he is not in his spacious studio, he still takes pictures. He uses his position as a trendy photographer to enjoy a high standard of living, as conveyed by his driving a convertible Rolls-Royce and the ease with which he seduces women. Equally, working is for him a source of erotic pleasure. As Robin Wood observes, ‘Thomas’s photographing of an erotically twisting and writhing model becomes not only a substitute for sexual intercourse but virtually indistinguishable from it’ (Wood 1968: 131). Thomas’s circumstances might serve as a eulogy of this type of work. Antonioni himself admitted to leading a similar life to that of Thomas and enjoying it (Brunette 1998: 114). Another example of a worker who appears to be liberated from the shackles of alienation is Thomas’s friend, a painter, who claims that he does not know what his painting represents and will not know until he finishes it. Yet the photographer’s pleasure at work is paid for by an exploitation of his current and prospective employees: young women who allow him to abuse them in the hope that he will make them famous (ibid.: 114–15). *Blow-up* thus shows (if one wants to see it, as most critics overlooked this aspect of the film) the same asymmetry of power in the media as that made visible by Schlesinger in *Darling*. Both directors also render this imbalance largely by spatial means: showing men as capitalists and masters of their own space and women as employees, never anchored in any space, practically homeless.

Ironically, the advantages of Thomas’s work turn out to be disadvantages in the end. While processing some photographs of a couple who did not want to be disturbed, he becomes convinced that he captured a murder on camera and finds the body of a man in the park where he took his shots. However, when he goes to the park for a second time, the body is not there and he ends up uncertain about the character of his discovery, as shown by him taking part in a game of tennis with an imaginary ball. Working as a photographer who does as he pleases leads to losing a sense of objectivity. But it is also possible that Antonioni wants to show that objectivity and subjectivity are both human constructions, they do not have an essence but depend on the context. A ball in the last scene appears through



**Figure 2.5** Artist at work in *Blow-up*

the power of convention, to suit its context – the game of tennis played by a group of mimes. If this is the case, Antonioni believes in the power of human work or at least artistic work more than any other director discussed in this chapter, as for him man not only produces material and immaterial objects, but the conditions under which things appear as material/objective.

In a memorable episode of *Blow-up* its protagonist goes to the concert of a rock group (in reality The Yardbirds), whose fans listen to the music as if in a trance. The situation changes at the end of the performance when one of the players smashes his guitar and throws its remnants into the audience who fight for it. Thomas wins the fight and leaves the concert with a large chunk of the instrument, but as soon as he reaches the street, he throws it away, as if it were rubbish. We are led to believe that pop musicians are gods in their own restricted space, severed from the normal flow of life. Outside it, their power diminishes to zero.

*Privilege* (1967), directed by Peter Watkins, attempts to test this hypothesis – to establish how much power pop artists have over their audiences and who has

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power over them. The film is set in what was, from a 1960s perspective, the near future of the 1990s. Such a futuristic setting was meant to heighten the features of the then-contemporary reality. The main character is Steven Shorter, the most popular British pop artist, who is on his way to conquer the world with his performance. His power over young audiences is the product of careful management by various people, who regard Steven's work and persona as a lucrative asset. We see Steven first performing handcuffed and locked in a cage, surrounded by policemen wielding truncheons, which is presented by the narrator (Watkins himself) as recreating Steven's act from the times when he was a troublemaker. Such a violent performance allows the audience to release their negative energy, as opposed to directing it towards the political establishment. Politicians even approach music agencies to stage violent performances to keep the youth of the streets. Steven is playing in an advert, sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and producers of fruit, which encourages people to eat more apples and his popularity is used to sell products of British manufacture, such as refrigerators, and increase the popularity of the Church. These three circles of power (politics, economy, religion), in a way recollecting Marxist critique of capitalism and Adorno's critique of the culture industry, are represented as united and reinforcing each other. All this happens when Britain is governed by a coalition government, and the programmes of the main political parties are indistinguishable, making a mockery of democracy. Even the Church, as represented by Watkins, although nominally Anglican, comes across as an amalgam of various Christian religions. In this way Watkins foretells the advent of neoliberalism, when political differences between left and right collapse and the main task of the state will be to support business and discipline labour.

In this world celebrities enjoy power only as long as the politicians and leaders of the economy allow it. When their support is withdrawn, their power disappears. This happens to Steven, who, following his revolt, is banned from public appearances in order, as the narrator puts it, 'to ensure that he does not again misuse his position of privilege to disturb the public peace of mind'. We also learn that 'within about a year, all that remained of Steven Shorter were a few old records and a piece of archive film with the sound, of course, removed'. Paradoxically, Watkins conveys the message of the incredibly powerful and united 'state-economy complex' of the future using aesthetics that render his film one of the first examples of postmodernism in British cinema, due to intertwining fiction and documentary techniques, gaps in continuity and mixing tragedy and humour.

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Yet this paradox accurately reflects the character of neoliberal times soon to come, which are marked by the unshakable power of the dominant ideology, the fragility of the lives subjugated to this power and the heterogeneity of the art representing them.

As much as criticising the British establishment, Watkins is concerned with the welfare of the artist. We hear that Steven has a gruelling schedule, performing practically non-stop: at live concerts, on television and for charity events; not unlike the man who played Shorter, Paul Jones, who was a member of the popular 1960s group Manfred Mann (Pratt 2010: 18). In the process of becoming a star, Shorter is deprived of his subjectivity – he becomes the property of his managers, the political establishment and his audience, as conveyed by mentioning ‘Steven Shorter palaces, where people buy British products as if they were buying Steven Shorter’.

This phenomenon illuminates the perverse (post)modern fetishism of commodities – the fact that the labour of those who produce the commodities is concealed by putting on them, so to speak, the face of Steven Shorter who does not produce them, only sells them. It is suggested that fans love Steven so much not because of his talent but because, like Christ, he offers himself to his followers, performing with all his might, even cutting his wrists during concerts. Work in his case is perceived as crossing a boundary between work and martyrdom, in the way associated with artists, especially during the Romantic period. Yet Steven is perceived as a public property. We always see him in the company of other people and he has no space of his own, but moves from one public place to another. These places where he dwells are represented as media ‘factories’; they are full of machinery and Steven is expected to behave like a Fordist worker: be obedient and react rather than create. Although he serves as a model to follow, he is not allowed any autonomy, and is even more disempowered and ‘colonised’ than the manual workers previously discussed. His position illustrates Marx’s thesis that ‘the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities’ and ‘the wretchedness of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and magnitude of his production’ (Marx 1977: 66), although in this case the product is the public face of Steven.

Steven’s position as the darling of the crowds is contrasted with that of Vanessa Ritchie, a painter commissioned to make his portrait. Although she is also a popular artist and attracts the interest of the establishment, she enjoys more freedom than Steven. Fans do not follow her; she does not have a manager who

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controls her private life and she paints what she wants, much like the writer in *Darling*. Unlike Steven, who is only talked about by others, in a voice-over Vanessa confesses that she found a strange emptiness about Steven, a lack of subjectivity, and therefore decided to paint him, as if confirming that she is a postmodern artist, preoccupied with surface, rather than depth. Unlike Steven, Vanessa possesses her own space: an artist's studio. It is the only space where Steven enjoys some privacy. Ironically, Vanessa is played by Jean Shrimpton, one of the most popular models of the 1960s and, more than Jones, somebody perceived at the time as public property.

### The culture industry Eastern style

In the 1960s films about artistic production and work in the media were rarer in the East than in the West and they did not constitute a coherent movement as was the case with Swinging London movies. This situation would change in the 1970s, when we witness more films about artistic production than industrial work. Yet two films made by Polish directors: Wojciech Has and Andrzej Wajda, respectively *Jak być kochaną* (*How to Be Loved*, 1963) and *Wszystko na sprzedaż* (*Everything for Sale*, 1969), can be regarded as a mini-series entering into a dialogue with their British counterparts. They both investigate the case of an actor who resembles Zbigniew Cybulski, regarded as the most iconic Polish actor of all time. Cybulski is most famous for his role of Maciek Chełmicki in Andrzej Wajda's *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*, 1957): an ex-Home Army man, who dies as a result of his faithfulness to heroic ideals. Has's film offers us what can be seen as an alternative version of Chełmicki: a man named Wiktor Rawicz who is not a true war hero, but only pretends to be one. As a result, he gets into trouble with the Gestapo and is forced to hide in the apartment of an actress who is in love with him. Frustrated by his position as an inadequate Polish man, he nearly destroys her life and commits suicide when the war is over.

But the gist of the film concerns not Rawicz but the actress, her war suffering and postwar recovery. After being banned from the theatre as a punishment for playing in a German theatre during the war (this being the price of offering Rawicz a safe place to live), she gets a role in a radio soap opera, *Radio Lunches at Mr and Mrs Konopka*, as a mature woman, wife and lover, Felicja. In this role she gains immense popularity, as much in Poland as among Poles living abroad. We see her



in the early 1960s on a plane on her way to the United States, where she is to meet a female fan who regards her as an adopted mother. It appears that the soap opera allowed the actress to overcome the war trauma, even gave her back the private life she had lost by taking in a fake war hero (Kurz 2005: 179). Her identification with Felicja is confirmed by the fact that the listeners see no difference between the actress and her role – her adopted daughter invites her as ‘Felicja’. As Elżbieta Ostrowska notes, we do not even learn the real name of the actress and practically all critics writing about Has’s film call her Felicja, although Felicja is only her radio name (Ostrowska 2011). The impression of the identification of an actress with the role is facilitated by showing Felicja in frames. The frames suggest that her roles imprison and dignify her, granting her immortality, as was the case of women whose portraits were made by famous painters.

The radio soap opera featuring Felicja neither serves as propaganda for socialism (which would be expected from the media in the 1950s, when socialist realism dominated Polish culture) nor promotes consumerism (which would be the case in 1970s Poland), but rather advocates building a society based on tradition and respect for ‘family values’, thus close to the Catholic ideal of culture. In the scene of recording we witness a cultural ‘cottage industry’ with only a few actors and technicians, who all know and like each other, unlike the huge and soulless ‘media factories’ that prevail in British films. Has’s film, like the Swinging London movies, points to the blurring of the boundary between living and playing. However, whereas in British films work and life are reduced to commerce, in Has’s film the place of work is upgraded to home. The popular media act as a positive corrective of an unjust past, not a means to twist and corrupt the present and foreclose the future.

The visual style of *How to Be Loved*, consisting of black and white print and precise framing, and of the choice of actors – the majority of whom are associated with the Polish School, a paradigm preoccupied with the Second World War – render *How to Be Loved* a somewhat old-fashioned and nostalgic film. In this sense it is a companion piece to *Darling*. Both films also reveal an attachment to old arts: literature in the case of Schlesinger’s film, theatre in the case of Has’s. Yet while Schlesinger suggests that media and popular art have no chance to be a site of nonalienated work and valuable experience for its consumers, Has edifies them. While films such as *Privilege* use a postmodern style to argue for the modernist separation of life and art/media and for a return to tradition and ‘reality’, Has’s film embraces the postmodern idea of bridging the gap between playing, working and

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living. The difference can be attributed to the different working environments of Western and Polish filmmakers and media professionals at large in the 1960s, with the latter enjoying more prestige and, paradoxically, freedom.

This facet of Eastern European cinema is explored in *Everything for Sale*, whose director, Andrzej Wajda, played the role of its demi-god, enjoying a special position both within the domestic and international contexts. The narrative is triggered by the disappearance of an actor, in whom we can recognise the real-life Cybulski. He was to play in a film by a famous Polish director, similar to Wajda, but did not arrive at the shoot and Elżbieta and Beata, his wife and ex-lover, start looking for him. They go to places where the actor recently dwelled and talk to people who knew him. This journey provides an insight into the process of filmmaking: we see buckets of red paint used to mimic blood and are presented with various camera tricks that are used to yield a sense of reality on screen. But, as Tadeusz Lubelski observes, despite laying bare the technical process of filmmaking, the film ultimately points to a deeper truth of cinema thanks to its ability to construct national history, stir emotions and boost viewers' morale (Lubelski 2003: 37–38). Unlike the music in *Privilege*, cinema, in Wajda's lens, does not 'dumb down' culture or manipulate the viewers, but enriches and enlightens them. The filmmakers, as depicted by Wajda, might be sufferers, like Steven Shorter, but they suffer for a good cause.

The film's title does not mean that films are made for profit. The economic aspect of filmmaking is excluded from Wajda's narrative, reflecting the fact that money was not a problem in the socialist film industry and especially not for Wajda and his ilk. 'Sale' instead refers to a more profound trading in personal stories and emotions, to make truer films. Wajda suggests that his characters' sacrifice at the altar of art is, ultimately, the reason why film should be supported by the state. *Everything for Sale* can thus be viewed as a subtle, yet effective form of promoting its cause.

The film also speaks, perhaps against the intention of its author, of the class character of the Polish film industry. It bears similarity to the feudal court, with the director being a king (aloof, lonely and haunted by the memory of his deceased friends) and his internal circle consisting of decadent aristocrats and less well-off noblemen, eager to serve him in the hope of being promoted. Those of humble background have grave difficulty in reaching this 'inner circle', as exemplified by the case of a plain-looking young woman from the provinces, nicknamed 'Mała' (the Little One). Although mad about acting (she is a member of a local acting

club), she is repeatedly humiliated by Elżbieta and Beata, and advised by the director not to try to join the exclusive club of professional performers. The actress who played 'Mała', Małgorzata Potocka, in due course chiselled for herself a distinctive career, not only playing in films, but also producing them. However, she never became 'Wajda's actress', as if confirming the view expressed by the director in *Everything for Sale* that with her plebeian face and openly expressed ambition she would not fit into his refined world (on class and Wajda see Mazierska 2002).

To summarise this part I would like to quote Richard Shusterman, who in his discussion of popular art argues that its case provides a rare instance where right-wing reactionaries and Marxian radicals join hands and make a common cause against it (Shusterman 1992: 169). The cinema of the 1960s provides a more complex picture, with Eastern films rendering popular art as an enclave of nonalienated work and consumption.

## Work in a camp

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At the entrance to various Nazi concentration camps, most famously Auschwitz, a slogan was placed: 'Arbeit macht frei'. Even those with no command of German and little knowledge about the Second World War know that it means 'work makes one free'. The subject of work in Nazi concentration camps and other similar places has been tackled by many authors. For example, Stanislaw Grzesiuk, author of the popular Polish book, *Pięć lat kacetu* (*Five Years in the Camp*, 2010) who, true to his title, spent over five years in three different concentration camps (Dachau, Mauthausen and Gusen, Mauthausen's sub-camp), writes on the first page: 'The basis of the life in the camp was avoiding work and focusing on arranging food. Those who worked hard, fulfilling all orders of the camp's overseers, would certainly end up in the crematorium' (Grzesiuk 2010: 7–8). Georges Perec in his novel *W* creates an allegory of the concentration camp in the form of an island state, whose inhabitants do not work, but instead engage in sport. In the last chapter the author explains his choice by referring to such a description of the camp, provided in David Rousset's *Univers concentrationnaire*: 'The structure of punishment camps is determined by two fundamental policies: no work but "sport", and derisory feeding. The majority of inmates do not work at all, which means that work is seen as skiving off. Even the least job has to be done at top speed' (Perec 1996: 163). It is also worth adding that in the museum on the site of

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the Majdanek concentration camp one can see a sculpture, designed by one of the prisoners, showing a tortoise, with the inscription 'Work slow'. It was assumed that following this directive would increase one's chance of survival and sabotage the Nazis' goal of exploiting and destroying the inmates.

These descriptions and symbols, while emphasising the difference between 'normal industrial work' and 'camp work', also suggest that they constitute a continuum. While the former involves alienation, due to being repetitive and tiring, leaving a worker a small margin for creativity and stripping him/her of individuality, camp work possesses all these characteristics in extreme measure. An alternative to industrial work used to be poverty and incarceration. Camp work involves incarceration and its alternative is death in the death camp. Although Marx and Engels lived in pre-Holocaust times, their writings (especially Engels 2009 and Marx 1977) shed a light on the connection between industrial work and camp work. The stories of twenty-year-old girls working sixteen hours without a break in dressmaking establishments, who died simply from overwork and malnutrition, are not dissimilar from those found in memoirs of people who endured Nazi concentration camps, such as Grzesiuk, Tadeusz Borowski or Primo Levi. This analogy does not elude David Harvey, who observes: 'Slave owners, Marx points out, can, if they wish, afford to kill off their slaves through excessive work provided they have a new source of cheap slaves at hand. But this is also true for the labour market' (Harvey 2010a: 145). His monumental study, *The Limits to Capital* includes a chapter entitled 'Inter-Imperialist Rivalries: Global War as the Ultimate Form of Devaluation', where we find this statement: 'Not only must weapons be bought and paid for out of surpluses of capital and labour, but they must also be put to use. For this is the only means that capitalism has at its disposal to achieve the levels of devaluation now required' (Harvey 2006a: 445).

Some well-known sociological studies, such as *Discipline and Punish* (1991) by Michel Foucault, Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust* (2000) and *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* (2005), and Dario Melossi and Messimo Pavarini's *The Prison and the Factory* (1981), all of them in some measure indebted to Marx and Engels, also point to the similarity between 'normal work' and 'camp work', 'normal life' and 'camp life'. Bauman writes: 'Jeremy Bentham made no distinction between the regimes of "houses of industry": workhouses, poorhouses and manufactories (as well as prisons, lunatic asylums, hospitals and schools, for that matter). Whatever their ostensible purpose, he insisted, all faced the same practical problem and shared the same concerns: all of them had to impose one,

uniform pattern of regular and predictable behaviour upon a variegated and essentially unruly population of inmates' (Bauman 2005: 14). Melossi and Pavarini observe that:

*The internal organisation of prison, the 'silent' and 'labouring' prison community, with time inexorably marked out in work and worship, the total isolation of each prisoner-worker, the impossibility of any form of association between them, the discipline of work as 'total' discipline become the paradigmatic terms for that which 'should be' in the so-called free society. The 'inside' aspires to an ideal model of what it should be like 'outside'. Thus prison assumes the dimension of an 'organised project for the subaltern social world': a model to impose, spread and universalise. (Melossi and Pavarini 1981: 149)*

The battle to control, discipline and subordinate was fought through spatial means: discipline required enclosure and partitioning. A concentration camp based on these principles appears to be a perfect laboratory for creating a disciplined workforce. Of course, concentration camps also fulfilled other functions, such as dividing and eliminating people on the grounds of their supposed racial, ethnic or sexual inferiority. By and large, these functions are of greater interest to authors writing about concentration camps, but these are outside my core interest in this study. As a work laboratory it showed that forcing people to work through extreme means does not work well for capitalists, as it requires constant supervision and engenders an ethic of avoiding work. As if to confirm this opinion, Alexander Kluge in his television programme, *Lagergeld* (*Camp Money*, 1995), refers to the little known fact that in many concentration camps administrators circulated coupons and banknotes, valid only on the territory of a specific camp, to encourage prisoners to work 'productively', as opposed to faking effort. The money could be exchanged for such goods as extra food or a visit to a camp brothel. When they were valid, these coupons were worth very little, while nowadays, as Kluge informs us with irony, they are rare collectors' items of great value.

In 1960s cinema, the concentration camp experience was conveyed predominantly by filmmakers from Eastern Europe, especially Poland, the country on whose territory Auschwitz was built. I will focus here on Andrzej Munk's *Pasażerka* (*Passenger*, 1963), comparing it with Jiří Menzel's *Skřivánci na niti* (*Larks*

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on a String, 1969–90), a film about a socialist work camp. *Passenger* is regarded as a breakthrough in the representation of camp life and even the ultimate ‘camp film’. Unlike the highly propagandist works of the previous period, socialist realism, in particular *Ostatni etap* (*The Last Stage*, 1947) by Wanda Jakubowska, Munk, inspired by the stories of Tadeusz Borowski, avoids strident proselytising and concentrates on documenting the typical days and nights in the camp. This means showing prisoners at work, barely included in Jakubowska’s classic. We see a group of men harnessed to a huge roller, which is a likely reference to the practices of the sadistic kapo Ernst Krankemann, and women working in detail sorting belongings from new transports. Munk’s film confirms the rule described by Grzesiuk – survival in the camp was at the price of avoiding the work imposed by the Nazis. The ratio of survivors among those who circumvented Nazi orders was higher than among the obedient servants, because prisoners tended to help the rebels and the Nazis themselves were attracted to the strongest inmates, in the same way the ruling class on the island of W was attracted to the best sportsmen, as described by Perec. This is the case for Marta, a Polish prisoner who becomes an assistant to Liza, the Nazi overseer put in charge of the *Kommando* sorting belongings of people sent to the gas chambers (so-called Kanada). Marta’s dignity and defiance attracts Liza. To gain Marta’s heart, Liza looks after her well, even tries to bribe her.

Munk suggests that the concentration camp is an extreme example of the capitalist system with its various features, such as industrialism and colonialism intensified. This is conveyed by the factory *mise-en-scène*. If we remove from the scene the people in striped clothes, we get a picture not different from those discussed in the ‘factory’ part of this chapter, except that the raw material processed in the factories are human bodies sent to the gas chambers. We also see the immense amount of goods looted by the Nazis during their extremely rapid colonising pursuits, which Liza’s *Kommando* is sorting. Many of them, such as ornamental vases, look oriental, evoking the colonial past of countries such as England or Spain, as well as of Germany’s dream to measure up to them. Munk shows that the speed of Germany’s colonisation exceeds its ability to use its fruits rationally. A large proportion of the goods brought by Jews and described by Liza as the ‘property of the Reich’ are thrown out. Likewise, there are too many slaves to engage them in fruitful work, therefore they are made to run in circles, push heavy objects up and down or provide entertainment for the Nazis. This treatment confirms the rule, identified by Bauman, that for the capitalist it is better if the

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worker dies from unproductive work or hunger than if he rests and eats what the capitalist throws out because he is unable to consume (Bauman 2005: 118). The rationale behind this work ethic is that the labour force must be continuously occupied and threatened; only such treatment guarantees that it will remain placid and ensure the survival of the system. The camp ethic is rejected by the prisoners (it cannot be accepted voluntarily, as normal men do not agree to be slaves), but the Nazis sincerely believe that it benefits not only them, but humanity at large. Liza, in particular, is convinced that she works for a higher purpose – a better world, envisaged by Hitler – and her sacrifice is much greater than that of the ignorant prisoners. If we regard the concentration camp as an extreme case of work relations in capitalism, then the lesson is that the workers should not give in to the demands of capitalists, as their ultimate goal is exploitation and then destruction. Only through resistance to oppression, through class struggle, can the proletariat achieve any improvement in its position and, ultimately, a victory.

If *Passenger* can be seen as a critique of an extreme example of a capitalist system, then *Larks on a String* serves as an indictment of a totalitarian version of communism. Not surprisingly, the film was shelved for twenty years, to be released only after communism collapsed. Set in a steel reprocessing plant in the industrial town of Kladno, it focuses on various unworthy (from the socialist perspective) members of society who have been sent there to experience the advantages of re-education through manual labour. Among them we find a lawyer who believes that the accused have the right to a defence, a librarian who refused to destroy decadent literature, a saxophonist whose instrument has been banned as ‘bourgeois’, a Seventh Day Adventist who refused to work on Saturdays and an independent dairyman. Unlike the concentration camp, where the ultimate destination of the prisoner/worker is a gas chamber, the purpose of the socialist re-education camp is, true to its name, re-education: creating a new, socialist man by incorporating the defeated classes into the new social framework. However, the mise-en-scène of freight trains, chimneys and the heaps of remnants of human production and consumption is uncannily similar to *Passenger*, suggesting that if re-education fails to produce the required results, the next stage would be annihilation. Menzel, like Munk, draws attention to the gap between the official ideology and the reality of the camp. While the gate of Auschwitz was adorned with the epigram ‘Work makes one free’, here we find phrases such as ‘Work is a matter of dignity’. The irony of their situation is not lost on Menzel’s characters who repeat the slogans, pointing to their absurdity. Again, the only way to survive

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in this cruel world is to subvert it, or to use de Certeau's terminology, find the appropriate tactics, by working as little as possible and finding alternative occupations, not envisaged by the supervisors: discussing Immanuel Kant, keeping fish, and meeting female detainees from a neighbouring camp.

Menzel also points to the hypocrisy of the prisoners' masters. The men's supervisor talks with pride about his working class origin, but avoids manual toil. Instead, he reveals his fanatical commitment to a campaign for bodily cleanliness, culminating in the sponging of a naked Roma girl which brings association with both paedophilia and ethnic cleansing. A union representative arrives in a chauffeur-driven car only to remove his tie and place a workman's cap on his head when he approaches the workers. While manual labour is thus put on a pedestal in the ideology of the 'workers' state', those who are in positions of power avoid it. What is painfully clear from Menzel's film is that those who were meant to be the avant-garde of the proletariat transformed themselves into the caricatured version of a class they embarked to eliminate: the bourgeoisie (Menzel 1971: 303), which would be later labelled 'nomenklatura'.

### The sites of accented idleness

The 1960s was also a period when the necessity, usefulness and even morality of work were widely questioned. The most famous advocate of idleness was Guy Debord, leader of the group Situationist International and author of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). His political programme was summarised by three words, 'Ne travaillez jamais' (Never work ever), which he painted in 1953 on a wall on the Rue de Seine. Similar ideas can be also found in the work of another Situationist, Raoul Vaneigem's *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (1967) and Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964).

The roots of the rejection of work, propagated by these authors, can be found in earlier works on idleness, such as Bertrand Russell's *In Praise of Idleness* (2004) and earlier Marxist thought, most importantly Marx's son in law, Paul Lafargue (2002). Debord argues:

*The class which organised social labour ... also appropriated the temporal surplus value that resulted in its organisation of social time; this class thus had sole possession of the irreversible time of the living. The only wealth that could*



*exist in concentrated form in the sphere of power, there to be expended on extravagance and festivity, was also expended in the form of the squandering of a historical time at society's surface ... For ordinary men, therefore, history sprang forth as an alien factor, as something they had not sought and against whose occurrence they had thought themselves secure. (Debord 1994: 94)*

At the same time, their ideas have a particular 1960s inflection; their background is Fordism–Keynesianism, with its mass production presupposing and fuelling mass consumption, full employment, welfare, consensus politics and paternalism of the state and workers' organisations, and faith in technology. They perceive capitalism as a vicious circle, in which production of objects and images leads to excessive consumption, which winds up production, and they articulate high aspirations of the affluent Western society of this period, as proposed by Vaneigem: 'From now on people want to live, not just survive' (Vaneigem 1994: 53). The imperative is to have a good life, filled with creative work, rather than simply producing the same objects in the same way for seven hours a day, and a life that is filled with pleasures tailored to each individual, rather than mass-produced entertainment, such as package holidays and television spectacles, which produce an alienated 'society of spectacle' (Debord 1994: 11–24). In their rejection of standardisation the aforementioned authors even muse on the period of archaic capitalism, where workers might have worked fifteen hours a day, but worked creatively, producing 'tiny masterpieces' (Vaneigem 1994: 53). In the later periods and especially since the 1980s, when due to neoliberalisation the 'vicious circle' of production and consumption was broken, labour was disciplined, wages declined, consumption halted; works like *The Society of Spectacle* and *The Revolution of Everyday Life* started to look somewhat dated, their enemies no longer existing. Debord affected French 1960s cinema in some measure, both by making his own films and by influencing other filmmakers, especially Jean-Luc Godard. Echoes of Debord and Vaneigem's concepts can also be spotted in later films (see Chapters 3 and 4).

I find a special affinity between Debord's concepts and the work of many Czechoslovak directors of this period. The fact that these films do not have their counterparts in other socialist countries can be explained by a strong approval for counter-cultural trends in 1960s Czechoslovakia, strengthened by its close links with the West. Furthermore, Czech literature is known for its apologies for those who choose not to work. The most famous example is Švejk from Jaroslav Hašek's

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*The Good Soldier Švejk*, who prefers talking to doing, and who lives in a country where everybody is presumed a malingerer and hard work is punished. Another famous author, Karel Čapek, in two short essays, *In Praise of Idleness* and *In Praise of Clumsy People* (Kussi 1990), combines ideas that could be found later in the works of both Debord and Italian thinkers such as Virno and Negri: praise of idleness as a worthy, enriching pursuit and welcoming the development of technology that would allow everybody to work less and live more comfortably (ibid.: 241–46). Even the various categories of not working used by Čapek in *In Praise of Idleness* (ibid.: 241–42) suggest belonging to a culture that gave nonwork much thought, treating it not as the obverse of work, but as a wide spectrum of activities with different degrees of usefulness and sophistication.

*Sedmikrásky (Daisies, 1966)* by Věra Chytilová tags at the heels of two young women, Maria and Maria. They adhere to the Debordian ideal of ‘never working ever’ by not engaging in paid labour, but they also oppose it, by presenting themselves as ardent consumers, in the film’s finale literally filling and covering themselves with food. In common with the society of spectacle criticised by Debord, they appear to be unable to discern between reality and its image. This is demonstrated in an episode when they eat images of food cut out from colour magazines and praise their quality. However, the ostentatious character of such behaviour suggests that they might be well aware of the difference between material things and their representations, and their action can be viewed as a critique of authors such as Debord, who regard contemporary people as naively seduced by images.

The pranks of these young women are framed by images of war and nuclear explosions, as if to demonstrate that idleness and excessive consumption lead to war, because in order to feed one’s excessive appetite one has to exploit and kill. Such a socialist message, urging hard work and restraint in consumption, was transmitted by the director herself in a letter addressed to President Husák. Chytilová maintained that her film is in fact a ‘morality play, in which the roots of evil are shown as concealed in the malicious pranks of everyday life. The raucous and deceitful behaviour of the film’s heroines is typical of young people when they are left to their own devices, when their unfulfilled creative needs turn into destructive impulses’ (quoted in Owen 2011: 100). This message would be acceptable if not for *Daisies*’ unrealistic style, which in the context of East European cinema signified distrust of ‘crude communism’ and socialist realism. As Owen argues, ‘*Daisies* reveals a certain “excess” of meaning, an intractability to unitary

interpretation ... the surfeit of meaning culminates in its transcendence, a process abetted by remarkable visual effects and photographic experiments unseen anywhere before or since in Czech “mainstream” cinema, and paralleled by occasional flights into a near-abstract plasticity’ (Owen 2011: 99). One can draw a parallel between the excessive consumption of the female characters with that of the filmmaker, ‘consuming’ all the techniques she has at her disposal, and in this way rejecting the rigidity of socialist cinema, and, finally, the viewer, overjoyed if not overwhelmed by this excess. Consumption, as represented by Chytilová is thus not a sign of conformity to mainstream society, but testimony to a rebellion against it (Hanáková 2005: 71), especially against the socialist and patriarchal expectation of working hard and consuming little. It is not the opposite of production, but a higher form of it; it does not lead to alienation from the world, but rather allows experience of the world in a fuller way, engaging all the senses and intellectual faculties.

Perhaps consumption is the only way to engage with the world that the girls are allowed. Such interpretation is suggested in a sequence near the end of the film, when Chytilová’s two gluttonous anti-heroines travel, without obvious reason, to the Czech countryside. As Owen observes, the male labourers and farmers whom the girls encounter act as if they were invisible, while, at the end of the sequences, a montage of padlocked doors suggests how they are denied access to the masculine world of manual work. Unsurprisingly, the protagonists suffer an identity crisis during this trip, even beginning to believe that they don’t exist. It is only when they encounter a pile of husks, remnants of the corn they have been eating, that their existential doubts are resolved. Authenticity and existential consistency are thus confirmed, symbolically, in the act of consumption, not in work (Owen 2012: 196). It is also worth noting that the Marias lose their self-confidence and sense of identity when they are away from home. Home appears to be a crucial factor in their ability to indulge in their favourite lifestyle and carry it outside, to the cafés and dance halls. This opinion, as I will argue in the following chapters, refers also to the ‘lazy’ characters in later films. When deprived of their own space, they become less conspicuous and content in their idleness; it stops being a positive life choice and becomes the result of failure to do anything better.

I decided to finish this part and the whole chapter with *Vtáčkovia, siroty a blázni* (*Birds, Orphans and Fools*, 1969, released in 1990) by Juraj Jakubisko, which is a Slovak-French coproduction, and which can be regarded as a synthesis of Western and Eastern views on work and idleness. Although it premiered in Sorrento in 1969,

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it was shelved and distributed only in the 1970s, thus constituting a bridge between the cheerful 1960s and less happy 1970s. It begins on a happy note, reminiscent of the optimism of May 1968 in France and the Prague Spring, gradually giving way to an apocalyptic tone, which can be viewed as a premonition of the upheaval that followed these events.

The film represents a trio of characters: Polish Andrej, Slovak Yorick and Jewish Marta, who decide to live outside (mainstream) society by abandoning work and engaging in 'free love'. They refuse to be normal citizens because they find normal life, encapsulated by dilapidated houses and orphanages, police patrols and continuous shoot-outs on the streets, frightening and repulsive. They rent a huge, run-down house from an old man and behave as if they were on an island, unperturbed by the waves passing through the sea that surrounds them. The time that normal people devote to work, they spend on play, 'clowning': putting on special clothes or even running round in circles. As with the two Marias in Chytilová's film, their fooling around comes across as a work of art, a magic spectacle that one cannot take one's eyes off.

Yet ultimately, Jakubisko demonstrates that the trio not only fails to make any change in the wider society, which appears to be their goal, but even to maintain their freewheeling lifestyle. Yorick is arrested when he stops a police car and asks for petrol, and is sentenced to a year in prison. This event marks the end of their *ménage à trois*. While Yorick is in prison, Andrej starts to work as a photographer and Marta becomes pregnant by him. The couple welcome Yorick back home, and for a while all of them again wear silly hats when running like mad through their house, but by this point their paths separate. Andrej and Marta move out, finding a smaller house to live in. Yorick cannot accept Martha's embracing of the future and domesticity, and he brutally murders her and takes his own life. Jakubisko thus shows the end of the utopia of idleness and free love, promoted by Debord and other adherents of counter-culture. The tragic ending parallels the apocalyptic images that close *Daisies*. In Chytilová's film, however, it is difficult to say who is responsible for the final apocalypse, whether it comes from within the protagonists or from outside. Jakubisko avoids such ambiguity: his characters are ultimately the agents of their own destruction. The film, despite its freewheeling form, thus embraces the conservative message that for the sake of the people, the era of unchecked searching for self-fulfilment should end and people ought to return to normality, domesticity, discipline and work.

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## CHAPTER 3

# The 1970s

## Seeking Change

### **The time of fragmentation**

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In the previous chapter I described the 1960s as a decade that was good for labour in Europe, with high levels of employment, relatively high wages and opportunities to move up the social ladder. This was reflected in European cinema through the focus on characters searching for self-fulfilment rather than the necessities of life. From the perspective of the economy and politics, the 1970s constitute a watershed. At the beginning of the decade, they conformed to the rules set out by Ford and Keynes. By its end they took a new direction; the values that informed the first thirty or so years of European postwar history gave way to a new set of ideas.

This change was not immediately visible. Eric Hobsbawm observes that ‘The history of the twenty years after 1973 is that of a world which lost its bearings and slid into instability and crisis. And yet, until the 1980s it was not clear how irretrievably the foundations of the Golden Age had crumbled’ (Hobsbawm 1995: 403). Those who attempt to draw the line between the Golden Age and its aftermath point to 1973: the year of the oil embargo following the Arab-Israeli war, property crashes worldwide and the simultaneous collapse of several financial institutions, coupled with the unraveling of the international Bretton Woods financial arrangements, which established the American Dollar as a world currency (Hobsbawm 1995: 403; Harvey 2005: 5–24; Harvey 2006a: x). In contrast to the preceding decades of stability, since 1973 the European and world economy has been in a perpetual crisis (Harvey 2005; 2010b). Yet the 1970s also saw the end of para-fascist regimes in Portugal and Spain. Their end helped the two countries to catch up in many ways, including economically, with the rest of Western Europe. It was also a period of stronger political and economic integration in Europe and better relations between East and West, the so called *détente*, culminating in the Helsinki Accords in 1975. Both phenomena ultimately strengthened the cause of capitalism in Europe and, conversely, weakened the Eastern Bloc, which increased its economic dependence on the West.

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The 1970s was a period of greater fragmentation of the political and social scenes, especially on the left. This phenomenon is linked to the multi-faceted character of the left-wing movements of the late 1960s. Alain Badiou argues in relation to the French May '68, that there were four different 'Mays'. One was marked by a revolt on the part of young university and school students. The second was the biggest general strike in the whole of French history, whose point of reference was the Popular Front. This strike proved very heterogeneous, with workers showing insubordination to trade unions and the Communist Party. The third, no less complex, was the libertarian May, which concerned the changing moral climate, sexual relations and individual freedom. It gave rise to a new wave of women's movements and gay rights movements, and had a significant impact on the cultural sphere. The last May, which lasted between 1968 and 1978, was to do with the end of the old conception of politics and, consequently, a redefinition of the political field. From the 1970s in the West any social cause, struggle or cultural activity could be viewed as political. This had the effect of giving voice to the sections of society that were overlooked by politicians in the earlier periods, such as women and ethnic minorities, and causes that were previously deemed unserious, such as ecology (Badiou 2010: 43–100). However, with this widening spectrum of political voices came the loss of hierarchy of political agents and causes; they all had drowned in the cacophony of 'postmodern politics'. Badiou thus concludes that all these Mays resulted in the end of the idea that:

*there is such a thing as an historical agent offering the possibility of emancipation. It was variously known as the working class, the proletariat and sometimes the people, and though there were debates as to its position and its size, everyone agreed that it existed. The shared conviction that there is an 'objective' agent inscribed in social reality, and that it offers the possibility of emancipation, is probably the biggest difference between then and now. (ibid.: 52–53)*

Elsewhere, echoing Jean-François Lyotard's idea of the end of 'grand narratives' (1984), he describes the 1970s as a watershed that divides 'the final years of revolutionary fervor' from 'the triumph of minuscule ideas' (Badiou 2007: 3).

Stuart Hall also sees the effect of 1968 in changing the face of politics. Since then being radical no longer meant identifying with radical party politics but being 'radically against all parties, party lines and party bureaucracies' (Hall 1988: 181; on

the situation in Britain see also Moore-Gilbert 1994). The left proved unable to adjust to the new situation. Instead of reforming, it stuck to the old ideas and ignored dissent in its own ranks or embraced nondemocratic, violent methods. This attitude ultimately benefited the right, which exploited fears of either a drift towards antidemocratic, totalitarian socialism, as practised in the Soviet Bloc, or lawlessness and anarchy, as encapsulated by the terrorist activities in countries like Germany and Italy.

Moving specifically to the labour/capital divide in the West, at the beginning of the decade wages were still growing and levels of unemployment were low in most countries. However, by the end of the 1970s unemployment went up and quality of life worsened. There were also fewer factories, and more people working in the service sector, as well as more women working outside the home, both in the remaining factories and in the service economy, in part as a consequence of the lowering of male wages. The symbol of the advent of the new epoch was the awarding of the Nobel Prize in economics to two leading neoliberal thinkers, Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman respectively in 1974 and 1976. Yet according to David Harvey, the subsequent victory of neoliberalism was not inevitable. Many events of the late 1960s and 1970s could have led to a different outcome, strengthening socialist elements in economies and governments across the world, maybe leading to a democratic global socialism. As signs of such possibilities he lists communist-controlled 'Red Bologna', a turn towards 'Eurocommunism' in Italy and Spain and the expansion of the strong social democratic welfare state tradition in Scandinavia. Even Richard Nixon, Republican president of the United States, legislated a huge wave of regulatory reform, prompting him to say that 'we are all Keynesians now' (Harvey 2005: 12–13; on the situation in Italy in the 1970s see Lumley 1990). The 1970s also saw an increase in migration to the West, due to a relatively high living standard in many of the countries, including those which previously served as sources of emigration, such as Norway, Ireland and the United Kingdom. The West was a magnet for people from outside Europe, for example Morocco, Algeria, Jamaica and Latin America, and from the East of Europe, principally Yugoslavia, where the decrease in living standards on the one hand and freedom to travel on the other rendered emigration an attractive option. These trends would only increase in the subsequent decades.

In the socialist East at the beginning of the decade some older leaders known for their asceticism, such as Władysław Gomułka in Poland and Walter Ulbricht in the GDR, were replaced by younger ones, respectively Edward Gierek and Erich

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Honecker. Yet, rather than introducing any deeper technological and social reforms, they embarked on a programme of improving housing and producing consumer goods, mostly to appease the discontented population (Stokes 2000: 153–76).<sup>1</sup> The drive towards consumption was marked by an increase in the private ownership of cars and country cottages (Czech *chatas*, Russian and Polish *dachas*) (Bren 2002; Lovell 2002). Consumption was in large part financed by Western credit. Its key source was the flood of dollars that spurted from multibillionaire OPEC states, distributed by the international banking system in the form of loans to anyone who wanted to borrow. ‘For the socialist countries that succumbed to it, notably Poland and Hungary, loans seemed a providential way of simultaneously paying for investment and raising their people’s standard of living’ (Hobsbawm 1995: 474). The oil crisis of the 1970s also proved advantageous for the USSR, which ‘turned black liquid into gold, postponing the need for economic reform’ (ibid.: 474).

The improvement in living standards in the East was noticed and criticised by some dissident thinkers. Václav Havel in his essay, ‘The Power of the Powerless’ (1985), describes Czechoslovakia post-1968 as post-totalitarian, arguing that the aim of such a system is not a mere preservation of power in the hands of a ruling clique (as is the case in classical dictatorship), but making everybody in the system complicit with its functioning. Even those at the very bottom of the political hierarchy are thus both its victims and pillars by almost automatically accepting and perpetuating the rituals prescribed to them by the official ideology. Havel links this willingness to conform and live a lie to being consumption-oriented, rather than striving to preserve one’s spiritual integrity. ‘The post-totalitarian system has been built on foundations laid by the historical encounter between dictatorship and the consumer society’ (Havel 1985: 38; see also Kusý 1985).<sup>2</sup> The post-totalitarian system can be understood as one in which citizens forfeit their right to freedom for the privilege to lead a reasonably prosperous and quiet life (Havel 1985; see also Burawoy and Lukács 1992; Bren 2002).

The shift towards consumption in the East led to the phenomenon that Richard Drake identified in relation to the Italian ‘economic miracle’ of the 1950s and 1960s as the ‘revolution of rising expectations’. These expectations could not be met due to the inability of the authorities to use the influx of resources productively, leading to widespread disappointment and resentment. From the mid-1970s the prevailing view in the East was that something was seriously wrong with the socialist system and it would never work. Consequently, the 1970s was



also a period of dissidence. In Czechoslovakia, Charter 77 was signed. In Poland, there was a plethora of antigovernment organisations, which ultimately gave birth to Solidarity, an independent trade union and an oppositional political movement. Growing resentment towards crude communism did not directly influence political developments in the West, but it added to the perception that capitalism was an economically healthier and more moral option.

Although it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint the moments of birth of cultural trends, I will risk the statement that during this period postmodern cinema was born. It is more heterogeneous than in the 1960s, or at least this is how film historians treat it. For example, Andrew Higson gives his essay on British cinema of the 1970s the title 'A Diversity of Film Practices' (Higson 1994). There were fewer 'new waves' in the 1970s, with the New German Cinema and the Cinema of Moral Concern in Poland being notable exceptions in Europe. Third Cinema was also born during this period, although elsewhere. The division between high and low art was gradually eroded by merging auteurist idiom with the tenets of genre cinema. This makes it more difficult to pinpoint the ideology of 1970s films. The scarcity of cinematic waves and the decline of the auteurist paradigm prompted many critics, such as Dudley Andrew, to describe the 1970s as 'utterly unremarkable' (Andrew 2010: 75), an opinion with which I disagree.

In some films of this period, as in the previous decade, space is rendered very important. We are shown the bulkiness and majesty of factories in long shot, which furnishes the traditional dramaturgy of working class struggles with epic dimensions. Seminal examples are *Coup pour coup* (1972) by Marin Karmitz and *Tout va bien* (1972) by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin. These films and some others, such as *O Lucky Man!* (1973), directed by Lindsay Anderson, and *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1976) by Andrzej Wajda, represent work and class struggle in a wide historical context, often as a re-enactment of earlier struggles. But in other films the camera shoots people from close up, as if to suggest that the characters are unable to locate themselves in a wider picture of historical currents and economic forces. A coherent narrative is frequently abandoned in favour of an episodic structure, literalising the idea of postmodernism as moving away from grand to small narratives. There is also a drive towards immediacy, conveying postmodern time-space compression, often reflecting the low budgets of the films and their directors' backgrounds in television and documentary filmmaking. The drive towards immediacy was also pursued as a new way of reaching audiences, through independent distribution channels, often

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linked with left-wing organisations, such as in France the Communist Party and the confederation of trade unions and specialist cinemas, as well as by showing films at factories. In comparison with the films of the previous decade, 1970s films privilege work done by women and foreign workers (in Germany and many other countries known as *Gastarbeiters*). This shift of attention from workers in the privileged monopoly sector, to those in the underprivileged, competitive sector, as described by O'Connor (1973), can be regarded as a testimony to the collapse of the Fordist-Keynesian paradigm and the fragmentation of the left, as well as a reflection of postmodern culture replacing modernity.

While the first chapter of this book was written under the shadow of the first volume of Marx's *Capital*, centred on capitalist production, the principal point of reference for this chapter is its second volume, dealing with the process of the circulation of capital. Reading the second volume of *Capital* one gets the impression that not only were things put in motion – such an impression can be derived already from the first volume – but that this movement gained in speed.

### **Working women seeking alliances**

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Western cinema of the 1970s granted special attention to working women, reflecting the decline of heavy industry, which traditionally provided employment for men, and the growing importance of the service industry, where more women found work than men. This attention also testifies to the importance of the feminist movement, articulating a backlash against the discrimination of women at work, accepted or ignored by the mainstream left organisations (trade unions, left-wing parties), anxious to preserve the privileges of 'affluent workers' rather than extending them to all workers. A sign of the advances of feminism was the fact that many female directors started their careers in the late 1960s and 1970s. In West Germany, where their presence was most noticeable, in 1978 nearly a third of the films shown at the Berlin Festival had been made by women (Sandford 1980: 142). A large proportion of them worked in 'artisanal', low budget cinema, but some, such as Margarethe von Trotta, managed to enter the mainstream and became important representatives of the national film waves. Perhaps for some important 1970s directors, such as bisexual Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Marin Karmitz, a French director born in Romania, it was easier to identify with women's predicament because of knowing first-hand what it meant to occupy the peripheries of society.

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1970s cinema focuses on women's inequality, resulting from and manifested by working under male supervision, earning less than men and taking more responsibility for homemaking and bringing up children. Domestic work, as we are shown time and again, is hard and unpaid, it reduces women's capacity to earn and negatively affects their social status. These aspects are underscored in a number of films made by the leading directors of the 1970s. I will begin with Karmitz, who is regarded as a model 1970s director on account of his ideology and style. He uses fragmented narratives, employing amateurs playing people similar to them and inserting documentary footage into fictional stories. Karmitz's films thus can be seen as a response to the limitations of Western realism, marked by the use of a smooth narrative and individual protagonist, as discussed in Chapter 2. In the 1970s Karmitz also explored new ways of distributing films, which eventually rendered him one of the most powerful people in the French film industry. *Coup pour coup*<sup>3</sup> is one of two films Karmitz made in the 1970s about work struggles; the second is *Camarades* (*Comrades*, 1970). Yet *Coup pour coup* is better known, perhaps because it invites comparison with *Tout va bien* (1972) by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, made about the same time (Forbes 1992: 20–33; O'Shaughnessy 2007: 36–40).

*Coup pour coup* is set after May 1968 and presents a strike of women workers in a textile factory, following the management's refusal to reinstate two sacked workers and its rejection of their demand for a pay increase. I am purposefully using the word 'presents', rather than 'represents', because the film conveys a sense of immediacy, of filming events as they developed and not knowing their outcome, achieved by using real workers rather than professional actors and allowing them a degree of improvisation on the set. The film consists of two parts. The first shows how the women worked and lived before they went on strike. We see the women labouring in awful noise. They are required to work very fast and in silence, to prevent stoppages and communication between the workers. It is worth mentioning that in *Comrades* the management also attempts to stop communication between workers by mixing French with émigré workers, who do not speak French. In *Coup pour coup* the female workers' supervisor is a woman but all people in positions of power above her are men. Such hierarchy produces an appearance of gender equality and gives ordinary female workers something to aspire to, while affording the woman little real power, as she only transmits decisions from above. The men who regulate the work and appropriate the profit are located a safe distance away from the employees. The manager is hidden

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behind a glass partition, which allows him to observe the women, while being isolated from them. The owner lives in a mansion outside the town and does not like to visit the plant, leaving the 'dirty work' of dealing with dissatisfied employees to the manager and the police. The 'work' of the film is to disrupt the comfort of the capitalist – to make him visible and to reveal his role as an exploiter. The sexist structure experienced on the shop floor is mirrored in the workings of the trade union and the family. The union boss is again a man, but his representative in the factory is a woman and she is given the thankless task of placating the rebellious female workers. The situation reflects the character of the trade unions, ready to sacrifice the interest of underprivileged workers to protect the male monopoly sector. When the young mother of three returns home from the factory, she has to do all the housework as her husband is nowhere to be seen.

The strike, which is represented in the second part of the film, temporarily reverses the rules to which the women are subjected during their normal working day. They are no longer mute, but speak, telling each other stories about their lives, which also contain a history of working class struggles. One of the workers mentions that this is the first time she has been able to talk to a woman working next to her. Unlike during their ordinary week, when they work reluctantly, now they work with pleasure, peeling potatoes and helping each other with caring for children brought to the plant. This is because they work for themselves and have control over the whole strike process, from inception to execution, and there is no hierarchy among the striking women: they all have the same rights and duties. Their 'strike-work' is versatile; every hour brings something new – unlike their daily routine, which is monotonous in the extreme – and the women are not confined to their machines, but walk around the whole factory and ramble through their town and neighbouring countryside, talking to the farmers. Unlike normal work, which is alienating, 'strike-work' is liberating.

The strike changes the relationships between men and women, management and employees, work and home, as well as those between the city and the country. The husband of the striking seamstress is forced to take care of their children. The men working in the neighbouring factory organise a strike in solidarity with the striking women. The farmers sell their milk directly to the strikers, bypassing the supermarket, in the 1970s a symbol of the capitalist dominance over agricultural production and consumption. In this way we see not only how commodities are produced but how they circulate. Finally, the factory boss is locked up and forced to endure the same trepidations to which his workforce is normally subjugated. He

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is not allowed to go to the toilet, is subjected to the gaze of the women supervising him and, after some time, he comes across as a defeated man. The film finishes on a positive note, pronouncing that thanks to the strike the workers gained significantly materially and everybody learnt their lessons. However, we also see that the strike (in common with the May '68 and post-May movements) did not change the foundations of the capitalist society. The factory remained in private hands, which means that the owner retained the power to sell or close it down. Looking at the film now, one can guess that in due course he relocated it to a country where workers were cheaper and more placid. The strike did not even avert patriarchy in a working class family, as demonstrated by the fact that the husband of the striking seamstress brings their children to the factory, so he can free himself from the burden.

*Tout va bien*, made by Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin, has two narrative strands, which at times run in parallel and at times are interwoven. One concerns a strike and the sequestration of a manager in a fictional sausage factory, Salumi. The second strand focuses on a middle class couple, filmmaker Jacques and broadcaster Susan, who visit the plant to interview its manager. The film is set in May 1972, four years after the famous events of 1968, which Godard and Gorin evoke by superposing the intertitle May 1968 with May 1972. In this way the filmmakers invite us to see the represented events as a repetition of May 68 and, at the same time, highlight that they take place in post-May France (Atack 1990: 54).

The methods used by the striking workers are similar to those shown in *Coup pour coup*. As in Karmitz's film, there is also a clear distinction between the radical striking *gauchistes* on the one hand and the conservative communist party and trade union on the other, which condemn the strike.

The workers complain that their work is physically exhausting and poorly paid, makes them smell bad and causes moral discomfort resulting from killing animals. They are also harassed by foremen and managers who attempt to increase the workers' productivity. In the case of female workers, the harassment frequently takes the form of sexual abuse. They see the strike as a way to give vent to their frustration. One way of achieving this is, again, by locking the boss in his office.

Some problems of the factory workers are reflected in Jacques and Susan's situations at work. They also experience a lack of freedom, power and sense of individuality because they have to adjust to rules imposed by the organisations in which they work or by the customers who demand a particular product. Susan says that the style of the medium she uses has a greater influence on her radio

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broadcasts than her individual input. There is also a sense of repetition and thus lack of creativity; after writing many reports on students and workers, she became pigeonholed as a specialist in this area and acts in accordance with this label, not unlike the worker in a Fordist factory. Nevertheless, unlike the workers in Salumi, the middle class couple can afford to move from one job to another or even to quit their jobs altogether when they find their work unfulfilling, and are able to change their position through individual rather than collective action. Indeed, Susan quits her job in radio when her report is rejected by her boss, in order to look for alternatives, as she puts it, and Jacques starts shooting a film about May '68. Susan and Jacques also have a different attitude towards the boundaries between work and domestic space to the blue-collar workers. While the female workers complain that their labour does not finish when they return home but continues because they have to cook meals and look after the children, Susan reproaches Jacques for not wanting to talk about their work at home. This is because Susan expects work to yield pleasure and meaning, as in Marx and Nietzsche's schemes. This expectation is realistic, as domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning are taken care of by a maid, which working class women cannot afford. Susan's demand can be interpreted as the expression of a desire to return to utopian 'primitive' times, when work was part of wider social life, which the May movement in some measure echoed. When the Salumi strike is over, the camera's attention focuses exclusively on Susan and Jacques. Consequently, we do not learn what improvement, if any, the workers achieved through their strike. Their disappearance suggests that, paradoxically, the workers are of interest for cinema only when they are not working. Their quiet, barely noticeable disappearance from the film can also be seen as a metaphor of their slipping 'from the larger picture' of politics and history, which followed the May events.

*Tout va bien* is described as a Brechtian film, due to laying bare its devices, such as showing cameras and microphones. They make the viewers realise that what they are watching is not life itself, but life mediated by technology. Simultaneously, laying bare the devices of filmmaking or radio recording creates the impression of catching an important moment in its immediacy. There is a parallel between the spontaneity of the workers' strike and the apparent spontaneity and amateurish character of *Tout va bien*. In common with the workers who do not want to toe the line, following the instructions of either the trade unions or the managers, Godard and Gorin follow their own route by deviating from the prescribed ways of filmmaking. The use of such Brechtian techniques as actors addressing the camera

directly forces the audience to take a stand, rather than passively observing the action developing in front of their eyes. This refers especially to the young female worker whose speech MacBean describes as an outcry (MacBean 1975: 179). While using actors addressing the camera gives a sense of immediacy and concreteness to the film, the theatrical setting affords it an epic and universal dimension. As Martin O'Shaughnessy observes, such style 'frees [the film] from the restrictive demands of a cause-effect narrative and spatial coherence and allows it to introduce emblematic characters, locations and actions which in turn permit a more thorough and nuanced exploration of the then class struggle in France' (O'Shaughnessy 2007: 37).

*Angst essen Seele auf* (*Fear Eats the Soul*, 1974) and *Mutter Küsters fährt zum Himmel* (*Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*, 1975) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, the pillar of the New German Cinema, also cast as their main characters women who forge new alliances, either as a means to overcome a specific crisis or to alleviate their marginal position within capitalist society. Through their stories Fassbinder attempts to unmask the circulation and interdependence of various elements comprising the capitalist system, such as capital, labour and the ideologies supporting them. Each of these films is a remake of an old film, which encourages the viewer to assess the differences between societies and cultures depicted in the respective films. *Fear Eats the Soul* is a remake of a classical melodrama, Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (1955). Unlike Sirk's film, which is set in a bourgeois American milieu in New England, *Fear Eats the Soul* casts as the main character an elderly cleaning lady from Munich, Emmi, in the period concurrent with its production. Emmi confesses that she never lacks work. Living standards have improved in Germany so much that wealthy people can send Mercedes to pick her up. She has enough to eat, pays her rent regularly and can even afford to hold her wedding reception in the best restaurant in town and go on holiday. Yet the more affluent Germany becomes, the more people like Emmi, performing menial jobs and being openly at the service of the rich, suffer from social isolation. Factors such as her old age and Polish-sounding name, Kurowski (her deceased husband was a Pole who stayed in Germany after the war), add to this position. Her situation changes when she meets and decides to marry a Moroccan Gastarbeiter, Ali, who works as a mechanic in a garage. Thanks to being marginalised, they can quench each other's appetite for company and sympathy. Emmi's decision to marry Ali is initially taken badly by her children, her neighbours, her workmates, even the owner of the local grocery shop where she does her

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shopping. They reject it because of the couple's difference in age and skin colour, which offends their standards of decency. The perception of Ali and foreigners at large as dirty and smelly, combined with frequent references to Hitler (Emmi herself was a member of the Nazi party) suggest that racism in 1970s Germany might be a legacy of Hitler's era. The only person who does not mind Emmi's marriage to a young foreigner is her landlord, who only cares that she pays her rent regularly and does not break the law.

However, unlike her predecessor in Sirk's film, Emmi pursues her happiness. This proves a good strategy, as people's attitudes change when the couple return from their holiday. Emmi's children accept her into their family again because they need her to look after their own small children for free. Her neighbours forgive her because they need her cellar. The shopkeeper who first refused to serve Ali because he did not speak proper German, renounces his position when he learns that his business is threatened by the dominance of the supermarkets. Finally, Emmi's co-workers need to forge an alliance with her again because their wages are threatened by the influx of cheap labour from abroad, personified by a new charwoman from Yugoslavia. The change in people's behaviour is thus effected by their realisation that it does not pay to act on one's prejudices. Emmi and Ali's holiday can thus be seen as a symbolic division between two periods in German history pertaining to two ideologies: one based on some (even if repulsive) morality, such as racism; the second based solely on economic calculation. The latter is 'ideology-free' capitalism, which rejects any values obstructing capitalism's ultimate goal of profit, as presented, most famously, by Max Weber (Giddens 1985: 122–47; on its contemporary version see Žižek 2009b). Of course, not all people mature in their capitalist education with the same speed. Emmi's landlord passed the racist stage earlier than the shopkeeper, as, indeed, did Emmi herself. *Fear Eats the Soul* is interesting in showing, through a simple story, a parallel circulation of capital and ideology. The advances of capitalism, marked by a search for cheap labour (Moroccan and Yugoslav workers) and a movement towards monopoly (replacement of small corner shops by supermarkets) go hand in hand with people going 'blind' to their differences, except for differences in their income and usefulness.

One wonders whether, in Fassbinder's opinion, the transition from ideology based on racial and other prejudices, to 'ideology-free' capitalism marks some progress towards a more just society. According to Salomé Aguilera Skvirsky, it does not: 'The film suggests that the new attitude does not represent an advance



or progress or moral epiphany, but rather a new incarnation of the original offence' (Skvirsky 2008: 102). Skvirsky is right to point out that both attitudes are based on assessing people not according to who they are as individuals (their dignity), but who they are as members of a specific group: their race, age, class position and income. It is worth mentioning that such an attitude, according to Marx, pertains to all formations, preceding communism; only communism would allow for true love to flourish.

Fassbinder does not show us whether the alliance between the old white cleaner and the young Moroccan mechanic lasted. The film finishes with Ali collapsing from an ulcer, a typical problem among those working in a foreign country. The ending, which echoes the final part of *This Sporting Life*, in which Mrs. Hammond collapsed and died, saves the director from the need to assess the durability and, indeed, desirability of such alliances. As Skvirsky notes, Fassbinder's film can be read 'as a look at the challenges of uniting a proletariat fractured by race, culture and the unexercised fascism of the German working class' (Skvirsky 2008: 102). His film is thus made from a distinct 1970s position when all alliances on the left are rendered contingent and fragile, and the right gradually unites by shedding the old prejudices, becoming more and more rational, in the sense of pursuing surplus value at all costs.

Fassbinder continues the theme of the fragmentation of the left and the circulation of ideologies in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* through the story of an old, working class woman, played by the same actress, Brigitte Mira. The title brings association with such works as *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (*Mother Krause's Journey to Happiness*, 1929), a silent film directed by Piel Jutzi, about a working class woman dragged down by circumstances, as well as Maxim Gorky's 1906 novel, *Mother*, about a working class Russian woman who becomes a revolutionary and Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941) (Laurier and Walsh 2003). The earlier times are also evoked by naming the representatives of the German Communist Party the 'Thälmanns', after pre-Hitler German Communist Party leader Ernst Thälmann. Such references help to locate Mother Küsters's story in a wider historical framework and illuminate the specificity of the new times.

Emma Küsters earns her living assembling electrical components, for which she is paid per piece. Working from home has advantages, as she can do her quota when it suits her and work does not interfere with her domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning. However, it renders her lonely and most likely does not

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allow her to earn as much as if she worked in a factory. She does not even perceive herself as a worker in her own right, but only as the wife of a factory worker and the mother of his children, as conveyed by the film's title. As an industrial worker labouring at home Emma exemplifies a woman's condition of carrying a double or triple burden, as well as the postmodern condition of the working class, marked by fragmentation and loss of visibility.

We meet Emma the day her husband killed the son of the factory owner and committed suicide, apparently as a response to the threat of mass redundancies in his factory. Following this violent event, reflecting on the character of the decade, Emma's economic situation worsens, as she loses her husband's wages and is refused his pension. The manager emphasises that this decision has the approval of the trade union. Fassbinder, like Karmitz, depicts the union as aligned with capital rather than with labour or at least supporting the strongest elements in the workforce at the expense of the weakest. Emma's husband's deed has additional negative repercussions, such as media intrusion, which her ambitious daughter-in-law treats as an obstacle to climbing the social ladder. Consequently, she wants to disengage herself from Emma and challenges her husband to choose



**Figure 3.1** Emma Küsters as a working class icon in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*

between her and his mother. Emma's own artist daughter, as I will discuss in the following part, by contrast wants to amplify her father's notoriety for her own advantage. Fassbinder shows us, again through the story of one family, the process of disintegration of the working class.

Devoid of status as a worker in her own right, abandoned by her family and besieged by the media, Emma appropriates the position of custodian of her husband's memory. As a stand-in for her dead husband, who can be rendered a madman, a terrorist or a revolutionary, she is approached by people representing various political interests. They all appear to be keen to help her, but it turns out that they want to exploit Emma for their own interests. This applies to the media, who look for sensationalist stories, the Communist Party, who want to receive more votes in the election by showing that they are supported by 'ordinary people' and the group of anarchists, who use Emma in a terrorist attack on a press office. The paradox of the situation, capturing the political mood of the 1970s well, is that all these organisations are officially left-wing, yet all of them are in deadly conflict with each other. Their fragmentation and conflicts make them behave like capitalists, ruthlessly fighting each other for a diminishing market share of the electorate. Advancement of capitalism thus affects left-wing ideologies, which in their content become more extremely left-wing, but in their application mimic the strategy of their opponents, favouring competition. The need to act effectively leads to treating individual people, such as Emma Küsters, merely as pawns in their political game.

In his criticism of institutions representing the left Fassbinder joins forces with Karmitz and Godard, who were scathing in *Coup pour coup* and *Tout va bien* about French trade unions. Yet, Fassbinder and Karmitz differ in their characterisation of the grassroots. Karmitz and Godard furnish the striking women with the ability to change their lot. Fassbinder denies the working class woman agency and understanding, presenting her as if at the mercy of larger forces. Not surprisingly, for the authors of the review published on the World Socialist Website, this feature constitutes a crucial weakness of the film:

*Sympathy for the victim, without confidence that the victim can overcome his or her victimization, is the movie's and its creator's great failing. Fassbinder never entertains the belief, one is aware throughout, that the class of people for whom he feels great empathy can actually carry out a radical social transformation. In fact, he was always pessimistic about such a possibility, and*

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*the end of the radicalization in the mid-1970s merely deepened this pessimism.*  
(Laurier and Walsh 2003)

Although I agree with their assessment of the way Fassbinder perceives working class people in this film, I will attribute this perception not only to Fassbinder's inner transformation, but also to his awareness that in his time this class dissipated, thereby becoming lonely and vulnerable to political manipulation, while Karmitz and Godard still perceive the working class as a cohesive group aware of its class interests, as a class for itself. Evoking prewar times can be seen as a warning against dire consequences to which such dissipation can lead: fascism and war.

Alexander Kluge, the director who was, along with Fassbinder, a leading figure of the New German Cinema, devoted many of his films to dialectics of work: individual work and macroeconomy, the realities and ideals of work, industrial and artistic work. These aspects are examined in *Die Artisten in der Zirkuskuppel: ratlos* (*Artists at the Top of the Big Top – Disorientated*, 1967), *Die Patriotin* (*The Patriotic Woman*, 1979) and his television programmes and video production, such as *Nachrichten aus der ideologischen Antike – Marx/Eisenstein/Das Kapital* (*News from Ideological Antiquity – Marx/Eisenstein/The Capital*, 2008). Kluge usually points out at the paradoxes of work, conveyed, for example, by the left-leaning Leni in *Artists*: 'It is only as a capitalist that one can change that which is'. Although the majority of Kluge's films are women-centred, they did not attract much sympathy from feminist critics. Helke Sander and Heide Schlupmann recognise that Kluge attributes to women a more important role in society than to men, due to their ability to reproduce the human race and labour, and having noble characteristics that men have either lost or never possessed. Yet they criticise him for denying women equal agency to men to change the world. Sander writes: 'At the same time as Kluge attributes value to feminine characteristics that for so long have meant nothing, he also muzzles women. Woman's worth is increased and men continue to wreck the world' (Sander 1990: 66). Schlupmann discusses Kluge as a follower of Horkheimer's *Authority and the Family*, which looks back nostalgically to the early bourgeoisie (Schlupmann 1990: 78).<sup>4</sup>

Yet *Gelegenheitsarbeit einer Sklavin* (*Part-Time Work of a Domestic Slave*, 1973), his most complex film devoted to work, interrogates rather than assumes a specific position of women in society. The title summarises woman's condition in the modern world: she works, but her work is not recognised as of the same order as that of a man, it is only 'part-time' and is not the source of her emancipation or

enjoyment, but 'slavery'. This lack of recognition, as Eli Zaretsky noted at the time of Kluge's film, pertains not only to the right but also to the left: 'Socialists and others understood her [the housewife's] class position to be that of her husband, since her relation to the outside world was mediated through him ... In contrast to the proletarian who worked in large socialised units and received a wage, the housewife worked for a particular man, for herself, and for their children and relatives' (Zaretsky 1976: 81; see also Fortunati 1995).

At the beginning of the film, the situation of Roswitha Bronski is even worse than that described by Zaretsky. She is doing all the domestic chores: shopping, cleaning and looking after her husband and their three children, but she also has to earn money to support her family, as her husband prefers to study at home. With her friend Sylvia, Roswitha runs an illegal abortion clinic. It is said early in the film that in order to afford children of her own, she has to abort many children of other women. Such a comment might suggest Kluge's anti-abortionist stance, not least because the 'abortionist' economy, as presented by him, mirrors the capitalist logic of 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2005; see Chapter 4). On the other hand, however, by showing the link between the ability to work and earning money and not having to look after children, Kluge demonstrates that the restrictive abortion law, combined with the lack of cheap childcare (the option of a nursery is never considered in the film), thwarts women's careers. The anti-abortionist law is ridden with contradictions as, on the one hand, it is an instrument of producing cheap labour and, on the other hand, due to limiting women to the domestic sphere, of preventing replacement of a more expensive male work by cheaper female work. Due to its antiwomen bias, the law also comes across as a reflection of the Keynesian-Fordist regime, with its protection of the male monopoly sector at the expense of the competitive female sector.

Roswitha's husband's freedom comes at the price of Roswitha's hard and dangerous work. For this reason, rather than shock the audience, in my view, Kluge shows with graphic openness how abortion is performed. Roswitha reveals the same professionalism when, due to being accused by a fellow abortionist of having an illegal practice, she has to close it down. Before the police arrive to arrest her, she and Sylvia change their tools into veterinary appliances. Roswitha's work shows how the personal and the political are intertwined; what she does affects her private life, as well as that of her customers, and is shaped by German law. Equally, her trials and tribulations as an abortionist demonstrate how deeply patriarchy permeates West German society. Although she does everything

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efficiently, not unlike a professional doctor, she has to work illegally, earns less money than a male gynaecologist, with whom she shares customers and by whom she is treated with contempt, despite the fact that he benefits financially from her work. The difference is underscored by the setting: the gynaecologist's practice is in a huge mansion, which can be regarded as a symbol of the cultural capital of male professionals; Roswitha's is in a small flat in a block, a metaphor of female 'cottage industry'.

Roswitha's domestic situation mirrors her professional life. Although she works very hard to meet the needs of her children and to allow her husband to pursue his interests, she receives no gratitude from him. Franz Bronski constantly admonishes his wife for not keeping the house clean, not buying him the right type of food and disturbing him in his studies. She does not object to such harsh treatment, instead trying to find extenuating circumstances for her alleged deficiencies, as if she internalised patriarchal values. The husband's harsh treatment of his wife largely derives from his frustration due to being housebound. He is a chemist and could earn good money, but he refuses to be exploited by a capitalist enterprise. Yet without material rewards he also lacks motivation to work for himself. His attitude points to the paradox of work in the capitalist world – if it is paid, it comes across as exploitation because the surplus value is appropriated by capitalists. If it is not paid, its value is not recognised by society and appears worthless even to the individual who performs this work. This problem also pertains to women working at home. Yet women are expected to gladly accept that their domestic work is not regarded as work in a proper sense, while men are excused for being dissatisfied.

Although Roswitha manages to avoid prison, her illegal work has to stop and Franz becomes the main provider for the family by taking a job in a chemical plant. This changes the family dynamics – freed from the duty of earning for her family, Roswitha devotes herself to political work. She focuses on local issues, such as the situation in the local chemical plant, as well as problems that in the 1970s only began to be recognised as political, such as pollution and the prevention of road accidents. Roswitha attempts to tackle them all at once and becomes overwhelmed by masses of books and journal articles in which she looks for information. One can guess that as an amateur researcher Roswitha stands for Kluge himself, who throughout his career has revealed wide and seemingly incoherent interests (Fiedler 1984), something that is also conveyed by the heterogeneous style of the film, which does not fit any specific genre. Perhaps she can even be compared to

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Marx the multi-scientist. However, Franz regards her unstructured study as a waste of time and proof that she is good for nothing. And yet, contrary to his assessment, Roswitha's study allows her to gain good insight into the workings of capitalist society. In the end, her political activism focuses on the core of traditional left-wing politics – work. She tries to prove that the chemical plant where Bronski is employed will be relocated to Portugal and that the factory management had withheld this information from the workers, breaking trade union agreements. She even travels to Portugal, where a new factory is already in place; this being the beginning of a trend of moving manufacturing from Western Europe to cheaper places, usually those with a history of totalitarian regimes. Roswitha's action pays off – the factory stays in Germany, although its management refuses to admit that it reversed its decision thanks to her exposure of their machinations.

The part of the film showing Roswitha near and inside the chemical plant invites comparing Kluge's character with Giuliana in Antonioni's *Red Desert*. Both women initially appear lost in huge halls full of complicated machinery. Giuliana's reaction to the alienating power of the factory is to withdraw into the (dis)comfort of her home and her body. Roswitha, by contrast, tries to master the factory. She cheats the watchman in order to go inside, navigates her way around the machinery, and makes an appointment with the director's secretary and union representatives. Kluge thus suggests, in common with Karmitz, that alienation can be overcome by political action.

The way Roswitha approaches her task and the problems she encounters testify to the political and social changes taking place in the 1970s. Left-wing agitators, such as union leaders and editors of left-leaning newspapers, come across as unsympathetic or impotent, not unlike the leaders of the left in Karmitz and Fassbinder's films. Yet Kluge does not write them off, but shows that people like Roswitha, representing the grassroots, need them, and that the officials can be influenced by the grassroots. The left needs cooperation and consolidation, not fragmentation. Kluge also points to the difficulties of reconciling Roswitha's urge to save the factory (which can be viewed as a public cause) with her private desire of providing for her family. The private-public nexus is discussed by almost every author who has written about Kluge's film. According to John Sandford, Kluge shows the incompatibility of private and public desires and needs. 'Kluge regards [Roswitha's work as an abortionist] as symbolic of the selfishness that for him is epitomised in the phenomenon of the family: protectiveness towards its own members, hostility towards outsiders' (Sandford 1980: 24). Indeed, Kluge

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shows how difficult it is for a woman to reconcile family demands with acting in the public sphere. This problem is thrown into sharp relief during Roswitha's trip to Portugal. We see her, sad and tired in a motorway café, and the voice-over informs us that she was worried about her children and was on the verge of returning to Germany. We also learn that Roswitha's dedication to the factory strained her relationship with Sylvia, who refused to sacrifice more time with her partner and her children for their political crusade.

And yet I disagree with Sandford's opinion that Kluge uses his narrative to criticise the family (traditionally linked in socialist discourse with a bourgeois mindset) or with feminist critics, who suggest that he wants to imprison women in the domestic sphere. This is because Roswitha's political activism originates at home: she is motivated by a desire to improve the situation of her family, and for this reason involves herself in matters outside her family: the fight to save the factory, the natural environment etc. She learns that sometimes for the sake of her family she has to neglect it (an idea impossible to grasp for Fassbinder's women), therefore despite missing her children, she carries on to Portugal. Although Roswitha's victory leads to her and her family's loss, as her husband is fired from the plant as a punishment for Roswitha's activism, it is not presented as a defeat by Kluge. After all, if Roswitha had not gone to Portugal, her husband would still have lost his job. Roswitha finishes her cinematic life selling sausages wrapped in political pamphlets outside the factory gates. Her final occupation in a sense mirrors that with which she began – it is a job for money, but with a distinct political edge. Not surprisingly, as at the beginning of the film, she is scrutinised and harassed by the authorities. Roswitha's activities can be perceived in terms of de Certeau's 'tactics' (de Certeau 1988; 91–110): she acts within the framework of capitalist and patriarchal society, but against the capitalist and patriarchal order. Having no means to overcome it on the large scale of a country, she works out ways to circumvent them locally. When one tactic stops working, she moves on to the next one. Her path keeps being diverted from the intended one, but her struggle goes on. In this sense she stands for Kluge himself, who as a filmmaker and author of television programmes worked inside the capitalist system, but against it.

Kluge employs a style that underscores the dialectical relationship between a small picture (family) and a large picture (society), alternating shots showing Roswitha at home, often in close-up with long takes, picturing her against the vastness of a factory, the city or countryside. He breaks the flow of the narrative



with extraneous material, such as animated pictures and still photographs, and uses a voice-over (his own voice). Such a style, reflecting direct or indirect (largely via Godard) influence of Brecht on the New German Cinema and 1970s cinema at large (Walsh 1981) demonstrates that in the 1970s being at the forefront of realistic films in the West or at least in its art-house incarnation meant something different from in the 1960s. The old style became exhausted and new ways had to be invented to reflect on reality and to encourage the viewer to take a stand.

### **The seedy worlds of media, entertainment and politics**

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In the previous chapter I drew attention to the importance attached by the cinema of the 1960s to the world of entertainment and mass media. The films discussed focused on their best or most powerful representatives: the leading photographer, the celebrity journalist or pop star, the most iconic actor in the country, the star of the most popular soap opera. Often they showed unhappiness and manipulation behind the glamorous surface, but nevertheless there was glamour to admire and it was deserved – their owners had talent and charisma. The films of the 1970s, conforming to the rule of moving the margins to the centre, typically show characters occupying the lower rungs of the media and entertainment business. These workers are perceived, even by themselves, not as autonomous artists, whose goal is to create something unique that will resist time, but as employees of the ‘culture industry’, as derided by Adorno (1975). The films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder reflect this trend, not least because Fassbinder regarded himself as a worker in the media industry, able to sacrifice artistic perfection and political ideals to the ability to sell his films and thus continue to work (Elsaesser 1996). At the same time, his case shows that limitations imposed by functioning within the confines of the culture industry do not necessarily lead to worthless products. Many of his cheap and hasty films were pronounced masterpieces even in his lifetime and his ‘work-life’, packed with films, love affairs and scandals, is regarded as a unique work of art.

In *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven* Fassbinder ponders on the similarities between 1970s politics, media and the arts. Those who work in these areas lack genuine talent, an original story to tell, an attractive political program (all pertaining to the postmodern ‘culture of exhaustion’), and therefore have to ‘borrow’ from earlier models and from each other. Emma’s daughter models herself on Marlene

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Dietrich and moves in with a tabloid journalist, who helps her career and uses her in his work. The elegant leader of the Communist Party puts on working class clothes when attending a party conference. To increase their attractiveness, these people do not rely on just one medium, but on many. Spectacle is their privileged mode of communication with the audience. This fact aligns the art, media and politics of the 1970s with the period of fascism (Elsaesser 1992; Friedlander 1993) (a similarity that does not elude Fassbinder), and with post-Fordism, as conceptualised by Paolo Virno (Virno 2004: 47–56).

Fassbinder looks at these phenomena with a caustic eye, showing that they lead to widespread instrumentalisation of human relationships and living in an exploitative and fake world. However, he does not allow himself any external idealistic vantage point from which to condemn the unscrupulous tabloid hacks and second-rate ‘Marlene Dietrichs’. By provocatively using a cheap visual style, associated with hasty tabloid journalism, casting his own wife in the role of Emma’s exploitative daughter and, to fulfil the demands of the American distributor of his film, furnishing it with a ridiculously happy ending in the style of an American soap opera, he demonstrates that he was prepared not only to sell *Mother Küsters*, but



**Figure 3.2** Culture industry in *Mother Küsters Goes to Heaven*

to repeat his act as long as it was effective.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Elsaesser argues that Fassbinder ultimately ‘thrived on the energy that the circulation of goods, services and money generated, and in this respect was an anarchist who believed in the permanent revolution, of which capitalism was one significant manifestation’ (Elsaesser 1996: 26). If this is the case, then – from the perspective applied in this book – Fassbinder is ultimately a reactionary director, who while admitting that the existing world has many shortcomings, pronounces that it has no alternative. In this sense he foreshadows the majority of films discussed in the following chapters.

*Satansbraten* (*Satan’s Brew*; 1976), although made one year after *Mother Küsters*, logically precedes it, because it deals with the legacy of the late-1960s counter-culture in the crisis-ridden 1970s. Its protagonist, Walter Kranz, begins his existence in the film as an anarchist poet who gained popularity in 1968, but in the 1970s suffers an artistic, economic and existential crisis. He cannot write and in order to support his family, consisting of his wife and a retarded, fly-obsessed brother, resorts to such means as killing his rich lover, exploiting a provincial spinster who falls in love with his idealised image, cheating a bank to obtain credit and appropriating the identity of a neoclassical German poet, Stefan George, celebrated by the Nazis. To look like or even to become George, he sports a wig, acquires a homosexual lover and organises poetry evenings in his home. Kranz thus commits all the sins of ‘postmodern’/post-Fordist people: artistically he looks back, shamelessly recycling, rather than creating new works, and economically he looks forward, unscrupulously borrowing, in the knowledge that he will not repay his debts. Kranz also conforms to a post-Fordist pattern of work because the division between his creative or professional life and the rest of his life is blurred. He goes to bed with a prostitute both for pleasure and to use her ‘artistically’. He suffers a bout of hysteria after his wife’s death, but it turns out to be a calculated act to impress the onlookers. He also straddles the boundary between high and low art as he intertwines writing a sensationalist book, based on interviews with a prostitute, with high poetry. Like an essential postmodern artist, he also merely reflects the dominant ideology by becoming a neofascist writer. For this reason he eventually succeeds – the publisher likes his new book, entitled *No Funeral for the Dead Dog of the Führer* and gives him a generous advance. His success is confirmed by the withering and death of his ‘proletarian’ wife, who most likely was a legacy of his earlier allegiance to left-wing politics. The transformation of a left-wing poet into a fascist can be interpreted as Fassbinder’s premonition of the political and social turn taken by Germany and Europe at large in the late 1970s from left to

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right. This lurch to the right is ubiquitous because political labels became freewheeling signifiers, as conveyed by the word ‘fascist’, uttered by practically everybody in the film as a general term of abuse, not unlike ‘son of a bitch’ (Grossman 2010).

Throughout the film Fassbinder ridicules Kranz’s pretence to have a better life than the rest of society. This happens through the medium of his plain-looking wife, who tells him mockingly to ‘go to work in a factory to feel better’, when he bemoans his fate. No doubt this attitude conveys Fassbinder’s own sense that artists are no better than the society average and should not be granted any special privileges, not least because putting them on a pedestal or locking them in an ivory tower cuts them off from those whose plight they are meant to represent.<sup>6</sup> That said, the example of Kranz demonstrates that an artist as an ‘ordinary man’ is vulnerable to losing the ability to create new trends and instigate social change; an idea we can find in Andrzej Wajda’s *Everything for Sale* (see Chapter 2).

For the artists, media people and even politicians depicted by Fassbinder, the main problem pertaining to their work is not alienation, as it was for their predecessors from the previous decade, but schizophrenia. They do not suffer from being expropriated from the fruit of their work, but from losing their original identity in the frantic attempt to sell it. This shift in experience of work results from the transformation of an economy balancing supply and demand to one that accepts overproduction and oversupply. In such conditions, the products offered by sellers cheapen and they attempt to alleviate this problem by diversifying their fare and multiplying themselves, so to speak, to cater better for the different tastes of the potential buyers. Such a state can be attributed to Fassbinder himself, who also made varied films to increase his potential audience. In this sense the director of *Satan’s Brew* can be seen as somebody who noticed the advent of post-Fordism and, despite misgivings, embraced it.

### **Culture industry Eastern European style**

Polish *Wodzirej* (*Dance Leader*, 1977), directed by Feliks Falk, can be seen as an Eastern counterpart to Fassbinder’s explorations of popular art and its entanglement in politics. Its protagonist, Lutek Danielak, works in Estrada, a state institution providing entertainment for all kinds of customers: kindergarten and school children, factory workers, as well as private patrons. Unlike theatre and

cinema, which under socialism functioned as ‘art’ and were practically freed from economic constraints by generous state subsidies (and hence could be compared to capitalist ‘privileged workers’), Estrada does not enjoy such privileges: it has to be financially self-sufficient and competitive. In Falk’s film the underprivileged status of Estrada workers is highlighted through a recurring motif of money. We frequently see Lutek queuing at the cashier of his local division of Estrada or negotiating his salary. Lutek’s job and Estrada have a particular 1970s flavour, because professional entertainers proliferated in Poland of the 1970s, remembered as a decade of the ‘propaganda of success’. ‘Dance leaders’, as shown by Falk, are at the service of two types of propaganda: socialism and consumerism. One day Lutek and his colleagues perform at strictly political events, encouraging the audience to sing political songs in socialist realist style, another day they work at balls where the message is ‘Eat, drink and enjoy yourself’. Through their work we see that in the 1970s socialism and consumerism, two ideologies that were previously separated, were brought together, as argued by Havel.

The lack of a stable place of work, in contrast with the theatre, where the vast majority of Polish actors worked at the time, renders Lutek very mobile. This condition is exacerbated by his lack of home. He is doubly uprooted, as he has moved to the city from the country, and following his divorce he rents a room from a workmate. Hence he cannot dissociate himself from work. But neither does he want to, as demonstrated by his attempts to introduce his girlfriend into the arcane entertainment business. In this respect he comes across as a perfect post-Fordist worker, for whom work never finishes. That said, in his proper occupation as a professional entertainer Lutek behaves like a worker on a conveyor belt. No matter whether he entertains kindergarten children or wedding guests, he sings the same cheerful, kitschy song. He does not care about the overall quality of the show, but about ‘ticking off’ his working day. Also, like a Fordist worker rather than an actor in a theatre, who waits for the audience to applaud him, Lutek rushes out like a labourer leaving a factory. His dismissive attitude to his proper job contrasts with his work ‘behind the scenes’ (literally and figuratively) to progress his career, which becomes his all-consuming obsession. This is, however, represented as the most deplorable trait of Lutek’s character. Although almost everybody around him bends the rules, he is prepared to go further: there is no meanness too mean or dirty trick too dirty for him, if it helps him to eliminate his competitors. He is not devoid of moral values, but decides to suspend them till he reaches the top. Ultimately he fails and ends up disgraced and lonely. Yet it is doubtful that his

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**Figure 3.3** Culture industry Eastern European style in *Dance Leader*

downfall will lead to a restoration of the moral order. More likely, somebody else will take Lutek's place, as suggested by the same kitschy song, which we once again hear at the end of the film.

Lutek's on and off-screen work painfully reveals a gap between the façade of Polish 1970s successes, and the country's true material and spiritual poverty. It also points to two types of economy flourishing in Poland and in other socialist countries at the time: official and unofficial. Officially one could purchase only second-class goods, such as unfashionable clothes and cheese spread, which Lutek encourages the audience to consume at one of his gigs. Behind the scenes, however, he trades in such shortage goods as car vouchers and tickets for events at which one could meet people with political power. In both spheres of his life Lutek is incessantly performing. Yet ultimately, Falk is not into the idea of the 'efficacy of performing' (Auslander 1992; McKenzie 2001), namely he does not

believe in the power of transforming people and their environment through performance. For Falk, unlike Fassbinder, people remain who they are originally; in the case of Lutek he remains a simple peasant despite his ‘culture industry’ garb. Such an essentialist construction of human identity, which Falk shares with many Polish directors, such as Andrzej Wajda, can be regarded as a backlash against the socialist realist concept of human personality as malleable, through socialist education and work. In a narrower sense, Falk’s depiction of Lutek confirms the observation I made in the previous chapter, that despite being nominally socialist, Polish cinema was anti-working class and even more anti-peasant and anti-province. Falk, however, goes further than his predecessors by representing boys and girls from the country trying to make good in the city as a highly dangerous category, and exacerbating the 1970s stereotype of rich and greedy peasants who exploit the city. We see that the main private patrons of professional entertainment are rich farmers, who don’t spare any money when organising weddings, and Lutek’s brother, who visits him asking for money to build a new pigsty. Money, as suggested by Falk, moves from the city to the country. In reality, as was mentioned earlier in this book, in Poland, as elsewhere in the socialist bloc, the provinces were exploited by the centre, the country by the city, and only in the 1970s, in part thanks to Western credit, this process was halted and the countryside received some of the benefits that the whole society enjoyed.<sup>7</sup> Rather than seeing in Lutek’s ambition and ruthlessness the incurable flaw of his character, we can regard it as the heavy price Polish provincials had to pay to reach positions that their metropolitan counterparts took for granted. Through his film Falk also endorses a policy of dividing Polish culture into ‘high art’, protected by the state (of which he himself was a beneficiary) and flourishing in big cities, such as theatres and film studios, and ‘low art’, represented by Estrada, operating largely in the provinces, by rendering the former as shamelessly substandard.

*Solo Sunny* (1980) by Konrad Wolf, regarded as the greatest filmmaker East Germany ever had and Wolfgang Kohlhaase, adds another dimension to the image of the socialist entertainment industry offered in *Dance Leader*. Set in Berlin in the late 1970s, at the height of the Honecker regime, it casts as the main character Sunny, a singer in a band of musicians and circus performers, playing predominantly in the provinces. The group has a ‘dance leader’, MC Benno Bohne, who also acts as the group’s manager. He does not show any of Lutek’s ambition to move up the social ladder, but shares with his Polish counterpart a lack of interest in art. Like Lutek, he keeps repeating the same unfunny jokes about

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‘unwearable’ East German shoes, hoping that the uneducated workers and farmers who constitute their prime audience will laugh at them, and he shows his co-workers disrespect, pronouncing that their performance is of the same low quality as the GDR shoes (Brockmann 2010: 277).

The existence of the itinerant performers, like the jokes the manager cracks, is rendered repetitive and sordid. The actors stay in cheap hotels and due to the lack of better options, drink late into the night. Sunny is constantly harassed by her colleagues and the male audience who regard her strong make-up and stage clothes as an invitation for sex. While male artists have some standing, the female entertainer is practically equated with a prostitute. Sunny also has to endure hostile attitudes in the dilapidated, working class tenement bloc where she lives. There the old petit bourgeois prejudices and the new socialist anti-individualistic impulses combine to reject everything that does not fit the social norm. Yet Sunny suffers most because unlike the other entertainers, who are used to their routines, she would like to transcend her position as a provincial culture industry employee and become an artist. This is also the reason why she is the favourite target of the manager’s attacks. The audience, for whom she sings, does not regard her show as anything special and she does not sing an original repertoire, but performs English songs. The Englishness of Sunny’s performance, like her English pseudonym and her ‘Liza Minnelli’ make-up, point to the complexes of the GDR (and by extension, of the whole Eastern bloc) towards the West, and its attempt at self-colonisation. Yet, unlike Falk, who bluntly denounces Lutek as having no talent, Wolf and Kohlhaase leave it open as to whether Sunny is a talentless imitator or a potential artist thwarted by the East German entertainment industry. Her performance comes across as kitschy, but the song on which she works is perfect material for a hit. Yet for most of the film she lacks words for it, which can be seen as a reference to the amateurish character of the Eastern European media industry or a metaphor for woman’s lack of voice in the socialist country. Sunny is only able to overcome her own lack of voice when she meets the right man – a musician and freelance journalist named Ralph, who provides her with the words. However, ultimately their alliance does not work, because Ralph is too intellectual for the spontaneous Sunny. As in the scheme sketched by Falk, there is a gulf between the socialist entertainment industry and (true) art.

Ralph fits the type of an ‘internal emigrant’: somebody who opposes the system, but in a quiet, private way, typical to Eastern European dissidents and other members of oppressed groups under totalitarian regimes (Naficy 2001: 11).



A sign of this attitude is Ralph's hippie posture: listening to records of Hindu music, wearing Indian-style shirts, living in a room full of philosophical books and shunning a regular job. Wolf and Kohlhaase hint that withdrawing into a private space allows Ralph to survive emotionally and just about materially, but it causes frustration and damages his character. Ralph admits that he has no prospect of a better house or a car and cannot afford a child, for which Sunny yearns, because it will force him to conform to the system. Ultimately, he comes across as emasculated.

Although there is little excitement in working in the entertainment industry, this is a more attractive option than the alternative – factory toil. Sunny escaped from the factory into the culture industry and there she returns after experiencing professional and personal crisis. Yet work there proves hard and anonymous. One is even less an individual in an ordinary factory than in the 'media factory'. Wolf and Kohlhaase demonstrate it by filming the factory in a 'Fordist way': in a long shot, showing hundreds of women performing the same job as if they were ants.



**Figure 3.4** Culture industry in East Germany in *Solo Sunny*

Sunny is not the only person who wants to escape from the world of material production. During her interlude as a shop floor labourer she is approached by another female worker, who seeks the singer's opinion about her performance. The drudgery and anonymity of factory life is the ultimate reason why in the end Sunny auditions for the position of a singer in a new band.

*Solo Sunny* has an episodic narrative, which at the time of its premiere critics regarded as its flaw. Such criticism, however, testifies to the persistence of socialist realist tenets in Eastern European film criticism rather than the film's quality. *Solo Sunny* can be seen as an act of rebellion against crude communist reality and its privileged aesthetic. For Sigrun Leonhard, episodic narrative is a 'stylistic correlative to the fact that Sunny's song remains incomplete, her needs unsatisfied. Just as life in the GDR withholds personal fulfilment ... the film withholds from the viewer the satisfying traditional structure of a story that is organised according to the need for wholeness and completion' (Leonhard 1989: 62).

Although *Solo Sunny* is a bleak film about a failed performer, it is one of few GDR movies which 'performed' very well on a wider social scale. According to Andrea Rinke, 'in the GDR, the film triggered audience discussions which lasted for weeks and created passionate controversies amongst critics and viewers' (Rinke 1999: 194). She observes that although some viewers in their letters to the press condemned Sunny's soloist ambitions, 'the vast majority of GDR wrote in with enthusiastic comments about Sunny, identifying with the screen heroine who was later to become a cult figure for fans in Berlin, who copied her confident, sexy dress-sense down to tight jeans, high-heeled shoes and a fox-fur collar' (ibid.). *Solo Sunny* also got an award for Renate Krössner at the 1980 Berlin Film Festival for the best female role; this being the first East German film to be honoured at this festival (Brockmann 2010: 276), suggesting that identification with and sympathy for Sunny reached beyond the borders of her country. Konrad Wolf himself defended his heroine, saying that 'In the long run, socialism depends on such individuals ... We must encourage the public to accept such people, encourage them and ourselves' (quoted in Leonhard 1989: 63).

### **Who is lucky, who is not, under capitalism and socialism?**

*O Lucky Man!* by Lindsay Anderson and *Man of Marble* by Andrzej Wajda are films of grand ambitions. The former attempts to tell the universal story of a working

man under capitalism; the latter under socialism. They are both, in a sense, historical films, but also look ahead, attempting to predict what will happen to the societies they witness. They are episodic and heterogeneous, mix narrative perspectives, colour with black and white stock, and codes pertaining to different genres and periods of filmmaking. They mobilise all these means to create a new language, able to capture the situation of an ordinary working man. In this sense *Man of Marble* follows in the footsteps of the films about industrial combines made in the 1960s (see Chapter 2), but Wajda is more open than Skolimowski or Makavejev in admitting that his film is both chronologically and ideologically post-socialist realist.

It is not a surprise that Anderson and Wajda embarked on such ambitious projects. Both are known for their wide interests, which include not only cinema, but also theatre, a desire to speak about and on behalf of their countries, and each being critical about the system in which they lived. They knew each other; in the 1960s and 1970s Anderson was the greatest champion of Polish and Eastern European cinema in Britain and, especially, of Wajda, and he worked in Polish theatre. The best part of their careers coincide with the 1960s and 1970s, when first they co-created important national waves, respectively Free Cinema and the British New Wave (Anderson) and the Polish School and the Cinema of Moral Concern (Wajda). A measure of their epic ambition is the fact that *O Lucky Man!* and *Man of Marble* are considered as parts of a larger oeuvre, devoted to the histories of ordinary man. *O Lucky Man!* is preceded by *If...* (1968) and followed by *Britannia Hospital* (1982); *Man of Marble* precedes *Człowiek z żelaza* (*Man of Iron*, 1981) (which will be analysed in Chapter 4).

One reviewer described *O Lucky Man!* as a bewildering medley of surrealism, realism, music, self-reference, satire, spy-film, polemic and poetry (Hoskin 2011). All these means are mobilised to tell the story of a young man, Michael Travis, a 1970s reincarnation of Voltaire's *Candide*. *Candide* is a young optimist who becomes disillusioned with the world during his peregrinations. A similar trajectory is offered by Anderson. However, before presenting the history of Travis, he shows his prehistory. In a sequence that looks like a fragment from *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D.W. Griffith, we see dark-skinned men working on a coffee plantation. One of them, played by Malcolm McDowell, who will also play Travis, attempts to steal some coffee, is caught by a white guard and punished by having his hands cut off. The intertitle announces that he was not so lucky. Of course, he was also a

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victim of colonialism. The link between one's happiness and prosperity and one's place on the colonial/colonised axis is tackled throughout the film.

Travis begins his film existence as a trainee salesman in the Imperial Coffee Company (a possible nod to Marx's examination of colonialism), an industrial complex that combines manufacture, trade and training. Although we see a Fordist-style factory with many women labouring behind the machines, packing Nigerian coffee for British consumption, the trading wing of the enterprise is regarded as more important for its success than manufacture, foretelling its decline and then practical extinction from the British soil. The loss of one salesman is presented as the cause of a major crisis and the reason why Travis's training is cut short and he is sent to Yorkshire to sell coffee. He does not stay there or anywhere else for long, but moves from one county to another and from one post to the next, before getting the hang of a new job. His wanderings, while evoking *Candide's* peregrinations, also predict the new neoliberal world of highly mobile labour and transferable skills, desperately needed by workers in the reality of



**Figure 3.5** Michael Travis beginning his travels in *O Lucky Man!*

rapidly disappearing jobs. Travis is arrested in Scotland for spying, when by chance he trespasses on military territory. He manages to escape from prison and, penniless, agrees to go to a private hospital, where his body is to be used for a week in medical experiments for a fee. There he sees that one of the patients becomes crossed with a cow, which can be interpreted as a premonition of the development of life sciences in the 1980s, to which Anderson also refers in his later *Britannia Hospital*. Travis runs away and joins a group of musicians (in reality Alan Price and his group) and their groupie, a rich young woman called Patricia. He manages to get a post as personal assistant to Patricia's father, Sir James, a super-rich industrialist with business interests in Africa, who – as we hear – once drove 500,000 Bolivian peasants from their farmland, in the 'best colonial tradition'.

The operations of Western powers in Africa are presented by Anderson via an educational film, watched during a meeting of various interested parties, discussing ways to expand Sir James's influence in the fictitious African country of Zingara. For the advantage of 'creating business opportunities' in Africa, the new colonisers pay black workers a pittance, create sweatshops reminiscent of concentration camps, with women and men living segregated from each other in barracks, and brutally suppress any rebellion of the natives. The colonial expansion happens with the consent, even encouragement of the local rulers, who join forces with white tycoons, according to the scheme described by Marx (see especially Marx 1965: 750–74) and evoked by David Harvey to describe the neoliberal world (Harvey 2005; 2006a; Chapter 4). The idea of moving from postwar capitalism softened by the influence of Keynesian economics to the new regime where capital meets no barriers is referenced by showing Marx and Keynes's books lying on the floor, abandoned and discarded. However, Anderson shows that the neocolonisers are not entirely free to subjugate the indigenous population because their own governments disapprove of using all means of colonial oppression (which will be less the case from the 1980s). For this reason Patricia's father needs somebody like Travis, who can do the dirty work for him. Sir James entrusts 'the new Candide' with the job of supervising the transport of the latest invention in the technology of chemical weapons, PL45 (aka 'Honey'), to help subdue the local population. Caught by the police, Travis goes to jail, while Patricia's father, who framed him, remains free.

Following his release Travis continues to seek work and a place for himself, joining a charity worker who distributes soup among London's homeless, but his preaching puts off the poor who almost kill him. His last attempt is to audition for

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a part in a film, entitled *O Lucky Man!* Only now Travis turns out to be lucky. He gets the part and finds people who accept him: the whole cast of the film that we have just watched. Such a narrative, however, emphasises the oppressive character of ‘this reality’. If even for a young white man with a healthy body and a strong work ethic, the chance of being lucky in a capitalist world is close to zero, what chances have the white poor populating London’s slums, or the black inhabitants of postcolonial Africa? Such a pessimistic message is reinforced by a piece of graffiti on a wall, passed by Travis: ‘Revolution is the opium of the intellectuals!’ One reason why revolution is impossible, as suggested by Anderson, is the desire of the young and self-confident, like Travis, to join the rich quickly, rather than collectively overcome the world’s poverty and injustice, which was a motif explored by Anderson in *This Sporting Life* (see Chapter 2). Another factor is the reactionary character of the very poor, of the lumpenproletariat, in line with the diagnosis offered by Dickens and Marx (Marx and Engels 1947; Marx 1978b). And, of course, the rich have no desire to abandon their wealth or even the most oppressive means of ‘creating’ it, such as using weapons, again as in the neoliberal scheme described by Harvey. The chance of revolution is also diminished by the lack of communication between different types of working people, such as factory workers and employees of the ‘Fordist’ entertainment industry, and between workers and political forces representing them, such as left-wing parties and trade unions.

The messages transmitted by the narrative are ironically reinforced by the songs, performed by Alan Price and his group, not unlike the chorus in an ancient play. Through this device, as well as casting the same actors in multiple roles and an exaggerated, antipsychological style of acting, Anderson proposes the idea that realism (such as he himself used in *This Sporting Life*), is insufficient to capture the fate of ordinary (and not so lucky) men. Such distancing techniques, compared to Brechtian theatre, especially his *Threepenny Opera* (Izod et al. 2010: 221), help Anderson present a complex reality in a simple way. They also encourage the viewer to think about what s/he has in common with the character and thus assess one’s position in the world. Brecht regarded his distancing technique as an important step towards revolutionary action. As for Anderson, the critics suggested that *O Lucky Man!* does not advocate revolution, but withdrawal into Zen philosophy (ibid.: 221), which is clearly a postmodern position (see Chapter 4).

Against the background of Anderson’s film and others discussed so far, *Man of Marble* comes across as an exception due to its optimism. Wajda’s film also attempts to find a new language to represent the working class’s labour and

political struggle. It achieves this goal through revealing the disparity between the ways workers were represented in Polish cinema and other media during Stalinism and the gap between these representations and their experience: between the history from above and the history from below.

The film begins with a fragment of what looks like a 1950s newsreel, showing a man energetically laying bricks to the accompaniment of a cheerful song from the period. After that, the film introduces Agnieszka, who is a final-year film college student. She is making a diploma film, financed by state television, to be entitled *Gwiazdy jednego sezonu* (*Falling Stars*), about bricklayer Mateusz Birkut, the same who appeared in the opening sequence. He took part in building the city of Nowa Huta, which was regarded as the greatest enterprise of the six-year plan, a period of intensified industrialisation in Poland along Stalinist lines (1950–55). Birkut enjoyed a short career in the 1950s as a champion of socialist work, laying with his team of bricklayers over thirty thousand bricks in one shift. He served as an example to be followed by ordinary workers, was captured on camera, as well as immortalised in huge portraits and marble sculptures. After that he disappeared virtually without trace from Polish politics and culture. It is the mystery of his downfall that prompts Agnieszka to make a film based on his life.

Before Agnieszka begins her investigation, we see her looking at the television building that she just left, disappointed by the hostility of the executive towards her plan. In this sequence the camera is placed near the ground, which renders her monumental, evoking visual codes of socialist realism, whose purpose was to edify socialist heroes (on visual representation of socialist heroes see Golomstock 1990: 198–215; Bonnell 1997: 20–63), and foretelling Polish films such as *Niedzielne igraszki* (*Sunday Pranks*, 1983), which ridiculed the pomp of Stalinism and its Polish mutation. Wajda, however, in all seriousness renders Agnieszka as a towering figure, able to stand up to everybody and conquer everything. Such an idea is confirmed in the subsequent scene, when she reaches the cellars of the National Museum in Warsaw, finding there a marble statue of Birkut, locked in a dark and closed room amongst dozens of other socialist realist statues. Margaret Turim perceptively notes that showing Agnieszka ‘picking the lock of a state archive with a hairpin to steal an image of a marble statue offers us an image that attempts to propel Poland towards democratisation’ (Turim 2003: 94). When Agnieszka enters the cellars of the museum, we hear a familiar, joyful, socialist realist song and the mobile camera gives the impression that the statues are moving. It thus feels as if Agnieszka’s presence has brought the marble statues back to life: there

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is a rapport between her and the ghostly figures. She decides to shoot in these poorly lit interiors, but not as her aged cameraman suggests, by putting the camera on a tripod, but holding the camera with her hand, to breathe life into the ‘sleeping knights’ of Polish socialism. To do so, she sits astride a statue of Birkut, which is lying on the floor. In this position Agnieszka looks as if she is having sex with the huge but passive Birkut, similar to how Thomas in Antonioni’s *Blow-up* looked when he was photographing models (see Chapter 2), but Agnieszka’s cine-camera is much larger than the instrument used by Antonioni’s protagonist and she is less exhausted by this ‘act of love’ than Thomas.

Subsequently Agnieszka looks for her elusive ‘lover’ in the film archive, which allows us to see how work was represented in the 1950s. The newsreels employ a male voice-over that draws on military jargon, for example talking about ‘workers *fighting* for a better future’. This militarism is underscored by using dynamic, march-like songs in the soundtrack. The work is spectacular; Birkut’s act of breaking the bricklaying record is admired by hundreds of onlookers and captured on camera. The off-screen narrator talks not about the simple task of bricklaying, but about the art of bricklaying and about Birkut being a virtuoso of this art. As if to confirm this statement, in the following fragment the builder is transformed into an object of art. The camera shows him from below, rendering him as super-human and points to his multiplication in huge socialist realist portraits and sculptures, adorning halls used for celebrating the successes of socialist industries. The voice-over and image offer a familiar, Stalinist trajectory of progress, marked by a transition from the country to the city and conquering the virginal space (Mroz 2007). Birkut leaves behind a family farm and moves to a place where the new *kombinat* and the city of Nowa Huta is to be built and the whole country progresses because the fields and meadows give way to industrial complexes and new housing estates. Economic advancement is accompanied by progress in education and changes in personal life. Birkut attends evening classes to overcome his illiteracy and in Nowa Huta meets a nice girl named Hanka Tomczyk, whom he subsequently marries (or at least this is what the socialist propaganda tells us).

By accessing the rejected footage and meeting people who knew Birkut first hand, Agnieszka learns that his life and the country’s trajectory did not adhere to the official version. The builders of Nowa Huta were not as joyful as the newsreels show, not least because they had to work in appalling conditions and were not even given enough food. Moreover, the stakhanovite successes of Birkut and others like him were paid for by physical exhaustion (we see Birkut fainting after breaking his



bricklaying record) and workers' disunity, as the ordinary workers were hostile towards the record-breakers who drove the standards up. Birkut was punished for his extra effort by a fellow worker who passed him a hot brick, which permanently damaged his hands. In due course he distanced himself from Stalinism and became an activist, engaged in a struggle to improve workers' conditions. For this, he was again punished by being deprived of a public voice (literalised by the switching-off of the microphone when he tries to address the union meeting) and knocked off the pedestal. By the time Agnieszka starts researching Birkut's life, he is no longer alive – he died in 1970 during an anti-state protest.

However, what Agnieszka unearths is not a simple reversal of a socialist realist narrative, which would lead to a wholesome condemnation of socialism and extolling the opposite system – capitalism. The memories of people who knew Birkut show that although his work was extremely hard, it was not alienated, as he laboured with enthusiasm, like a sportsman trying to achieve something nobody had done before him, and he felt that he was working for himself and for the greater cause: to build a better, prosperous Poland. Birkut's story thus supports the idea conveyed in the popular 1970s slogan 'Socialism – yes, distortions – no', which might also be a reason why film's script was accepted by the censors.

The material about Birkut that Agnieszka has collected during her peregrination leads to the rejection of her project by the television producer. Rather than do what he (and by extension the authorities) wants her to do, she decides to quit the media altogether, go to the North of Poland, the cradle of Polish anticommunist opposition and join the Polish workers' struggle to overthrow the oppressive system. Agnieszka does so because, paradoxically, she is a socialist – the workers' lot matters to her more than her career. Her ideal is a country in which everybody can live in peace and prosperity, as was Birkut's and his son's, Maciek Tomczyk, whom she meets in Gdańsk and eventually marries, which will be shown in *Man of Iron*.

While making her film Agnieszka learns that the previous failures in the workers' struggle for a 'better socialism' resulted from disunity, especially between the workers and the intelligentsia. When one class rebelled, the other kept quiet and vice versa. She decides to cross the class barriers and work with and for the workers. Agnieszka's act is an important step towards creating Solidarity: a heterogeneous, yet ultimately united force, which can be compared to Hardt and Negri's 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri 2006; see Chapter 4). Hardt and Negri use this term to describe the situation under capitalism, but, as state socialism bears many similarities to capitalism, it can be mapped onto the class relations in Eastern

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Europe, while ‘Empire’ can be compared to the elites and institutions sustaining state socialism. Indeed, several years later Solidarity declared a war against such Empire and won. Paradoxically, Agnieszka joins the ‘people’ because she behaves like an individual who strives to work in a nonalienated way. She wants to follow her own instincts, take care of the whole process of filmmaking and create something that fascinates her. In this respect she is different from the television executive who advises her, evoking the ethos of Estrada, to give people what they want, and from the film archive employee, who keeps repeating ‘I am here not to think but to splice pieces of film stock’, and from virtually everybody she meets who betrayed the Marxist ideals, either by becoming careerists or narrow and purposefully apolitical specialists.

Although Agnieszka never finished her film, in a sense we see it – this is Wajda’s *Man of Marble*. In it, in place of the old, socialist realist language of work Wajda offers a new language. The old language was static and patriarchal, the new is dynamic and female; the old gave answers, the new asks questions and tests hypotheses; the old created spectacles, the new excavates truth; the old offered a coherent and smooth narrative, the new focuses on gaps and privileges outtakes; the old hides the creator to give the impression of objectivity; the new places the author at the centre of the story. In the process of replacing the old language with a new one Wajda also furnishes the film director with a dignity of which the bulk of the creators of the Cinema of Moral Concern stripped the representatives of the media. *Man of Marble* thus succeeds in returning the diminished socialist culture industry to the level of art. Another consequence of this approach, less positive from the perspective of the workers, is rendering them passive, as mere material to be shaped by the talented and committed filmmaker. As I argued elsewhere, despite the film’s title, which pronounces the importance of Birkut, *Man of Marble* is more about Agnieszka than about Birkut (Mazierska 2006). The sense of workers’ passivity will be overcome in *Man of Iron* (see Chapter 4), but each of these films also alludes to the future, when workers would lose their privileged position in the country’s history and disappear from the ‘large picture’ altogether.

### **Decadent workers and weak bosses**

The 1970s also offered a great number of films about overly powerful and decadent workers, who dominate their incompetent or weak bosses and disrespect their

customers. Such films were made especially in the East, where work ethic allegedly collapsed during this decade, and most were comedies, which allowed for a sharpening of their critical edge. One Polish director, Stanisław Bareja, practically built his career on ridiculing decadent workers and incompetent bosses, becoming the most popular Polish director of the communist period (Mazierska 2008). In this part, however, I will analyse one British film, *Carry On at Your Convenience* (1971) by Gerald Thomas and one Soviet, *Sluzhebnyy roman* (*Office Romance*, 1977) by Eldar Ryazanov.

*Carry On at Your Convenience*, one of many *Carry On* films, epitomising the lower end of British comedy and British cinema at large, reveals an interesting paradox about British culture. Although addressed primarily to a working class audience, the main target of its satire is the decadence of the British working class, nurtured by the too-powerful, Soviet-inspired workers' organisations, represented here by a trade union official, Vic Spanner. Vic uses every opportunity to stop production in the toilet factory, WC Boggs, bringing it to the verge of bankruptcy. To add to the denigration of Vic, the film depicts him as somebody who cannot or does not want to see that one group of workers' rejection of work affects another group's welfare. This is shown when the workers go on an excursion to Brighton and are refused dinner at a hotel due to a strike of the hotel's employees. Rather than accepting this decision of fellow workers, Vic shouts abuse at his union counterpart. Of course, Vic and others of his ilk are able to exert such a huge power in the workplace because capitalists and managers are weak. This view is conveyed by presenting the factory's owner, W.C. Boggs as a closet homosexual (played by real homosexual Kenneth Williams), who not only shirks from any contact with women, but the outside world at large. Vic is punished within the narrative by losing a girl with whom he is in love, as she marries the son and heir of the Lavatory factory. Finally, the last strike called by Vic is ended by an intervention of womenfolk from his town, led by his strong and overbearing mother. A woman urging her 'sons' to put up with whatever work there is to do or risk perishing comes across as a premonition of Margaret Thatcher, who less than a decade later embarked on a mission to discipline the apparently decadent British working class.

As in all *Carry On* films, *Carry On at Your Convenience* does not have a single protagonist, but moves from one character to another. Such a style of narration, which John Hill contrasts with the narrative structure of British New Wave films, creates an effect of portraying a community or society in its everyday interactions (Hill 1986: 139–42). In this case the style adds to the message that British workers

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do not want strong unions – their main dream is to be allowed to work, as much for the benefit of the capitalists as for their own welfare, because prosperous capitalism ensures good-to-do labour. Again, such an idea, as I will argue in due course, would be perpetuated by Thatcher and virtually all advocates of the neoliberal version of capitalism in the following decades.

*Office Romance*, like *Carry On at Your Convenience*, charts the dynamic between management and ordinary workers, although in a socialist rather than capitalist enterprise and in a firm producing immaterial goods – statistical data. Its director is a woman – Ludmila Kalugina, in line with the rule that women who achieved positions of power are common in Soviet 1970s cinema. We find them also in *Proshu slova* (*May I Have the Floor*, 1976), directed by Gleb Panfilov, which offers a portrait of a woman mayor, and in *Moskva slezam ne verit* (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, 1979) by Vladimir Menshov, which casts as the main character a factory manager. But these women, including Kalugina, do not have real power: important decisions are taken at a higher level where women are scarce (Navailh 1992: 214). Kalugina does not create policy or prepare plans, and her work is reduced to ensuring that everybody does the bare minimum – and even this cannot be taken for granted. By the time the film was made the state gave up on the idea of creating a new socialist man through work – it contented itself with the worker accepting the status quo, namely political and economic stagnation. However, according to Ryazanov, this does not lead to bad consequences, either for the workforce, or the country at large.

The workers in *Office Romance* come across as reasonably satisfied because being at work allows them to fulfil many different tasks and roles, removing the risk of alienation. We see that the female employers begin their working day by putting on make-up – this being presented as a more important ritual than anything to do with (proper) work. Later they go shopping and in the meantime they arrange private affairs, such as phoning schools to inquire about their children's behaviour or discussing divorce. Many of these extra-work activities reflect badly on socialist economy, such as the scarcity of consumer goods, due to prioritising heavy industry, or long journeys to work, due to employment opportunities being concentrated in big cities, difficulties to do shopping due to shops being open at the same time as offices and the lack of money to buy childcare and high-quality goods. Yet, for the same reasons the office comes across as their second, or even better home, because they feel more secure there, get moral support and, as the title suggests, fall in love. Despite workers not working to their full capacity, the

country is functioning, as demonstrated by the recurrent motif of cars moving swiftly through Moscow's streets, suggesting that nothing changes – things always will be the same, not too good, but not bad either.

In contrast to the employees in *WC Boggs*, the clerks in the statistical office are completely apolitical. The only person who tries to make the employees act as a collective, most likely a union representative, limits herself to collecting donations for various causes, such as the newly born baby of one of the workers. Such representation reflects the fact that by the 1970s workplaces in the Soviet Union were depoliticised, which Ryazanov gently mocks and people, alienated from politics, retreated into the private sphere.

Paradoxically, the least happy worker is Kalugina, who cannot afford any of the pleasures of work due to being a boss and having to set an example to her workers and, most likely, prove her worth to her superiors. She cannot go shopping during office hours, have friends among her subordinates or even fall in love. Her progress on the career ladder is linked to her private unhappiness – not having a husband and children and therefore, as is put candidly in the film, not being a woman. The crux of the narrative is to 'make a woman of her' by making her fall in love with a male worker, economist Anatoly Novoseltsev, a single father lacking self-confidence. A happy ending happens when Kalugina and Novoseltsev come together and she becomes pregnant with his third son. Of course, Kalugina's narrative progress testifies to the regression of real Soviet women, which had already started in the 1930s and reached its bottom in the 1970s (Navailh 1992: 223). Thus, in the Soviet Union in the 1970s we observe an opposite trend to that in the West, where this was a decade of a rise of feminism. Although Novoseltsev lacks charisma, ultimately he proves a superior character to Kalugina's deputy Samokhvalov, with whom Novoseltsev's best friend falls in love. Charming, well off and fresh from some contract work in Switzerland, therefore sporting Western consumer goods, he ultimately proves shallow and dishonest. His downfall can be regarded as a means of condemning what he stands for – consumerism and imitation of the West.

While *Carry On at Your Convenience* was a flop, *Office Romance* was the greatest box office success in the Soviet Union in 1978 (Lawton 1992: 14) and still enjoys wide popularity in Russia. Users of the IMDb website, who wrote reviews of this film, admitted that they love it so much because it provides a memory of happy times. Of course, such opinion testifies as much to the benefits of the past as to the disappointments of the present.

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## Camp (non)work

In the 1960s socialist countries practically had a monopoly on making films about concentration camps. The situation changed in the 1970s, when filmmakers from a larger number of countries started to capitalise on the interest in this subject. I am using the term ‘capitalise’ to indicate that many ‘camp films’ made in this decade were accused of being made solely for financial gain, without respect for the seriousness of the subject. These films fell into the rubric of ‘exploitation’, constituting a sub-genre of this type – Nazisploitation. The country leading this trend was Italy, which is explained by its turbulent political situation in the 1970s, including the rise of fascism and terrorism, the unwillingness of successive governments to address the memory of fascism (on Italian 1970s see Drake 1989; Lumley 1990), as well as commercial factors – a large market for this type of film, first on television and in specialist cinemas, and then on video (Hake 2010).

However, as with all ‘low’ genres, Nazisploitation derived from and blended with higher genres and arthouse cinema. Many critics see it as ‘first cousin’ of films such as *La caduta degli dei* (*The Damned*, 1969) by Luchino Visconti, *Il Portiere di notte* (*The Night Porter*, 1974) by Liliana Cavani and, most importantly, *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (*Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom*, 1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini or even regard these arthouse classics as a special, ‘higher’ type of exploitation (Friedlander 1993; Hake 2010; on the Holocaust in Italian film see also Marcus 2007). I belong to this group too, and therefore in this part will consider two films, *L’ultima orgia del III Reich* (*Gestapo’s Last Orgy*, 1977) by Cesare Canevari, whose allegiance to Nazisploitation is unquestioned, as confirmed by its inclusion in various guides to this genre (for example Luther-Smith 1997) and *Goto, l’île d’amour* (*Goto, Island of Love*, 1969) by Walerian Borowczyk. Borowczyk is, significantly, known both as a (high brow) surrealist and a (low brow) pornographer, hence his career points to a fuzzy border between art and exploitation, as well as between modernism and postmodernism. *Goto*, his feature debut, is typically considered as belonging to his earlier, ‘surrealist’ period (Richardson 2006: 110–11). However, in terms of representing work in a camp, it provides a link between serious art and Nazisploitation, as well as between 1960s ‘camp films’, including *Passenger*, discussed in the previous chapter, and the representations prevailing in the 1970s.

The island of Goto, placed in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by rocks, is cut off from the outside world. There are no ships and the last, meagre boat is

destroyed during the course of the action. Inhabitants approaching the coast are surveyed from a tower and possibly executed, although this is for the viewer to deduce. Goto, like the republic of Salò, which would be portrayed by Pasolini several years later, and like any ‘concentrationary universe’, is an absolute monarchy. The current king, Goto III, grants life or death to his subjects according to his will. It is a materially and culturally impoverished place, where the history taught at school covers only the history of Goto and the only entertainment available to the citizens is forcing convicts to fight and watching the execution of the losers. Contrary to the film’s title, we do not see real love on Goto either. The male inhabitants fulfil their sexual needs in a brothel. The only woman who is not a sex slave is Glossia, the wife of the king, who has an affair with her horse-riding instructor. However, even she loses her privilege to choose her ‘mating partner’ as her lover is executed and she is confined to her cell.

How do people labour in this place? To answer this question, it is worth recollecting that in Munk’s *Passenger* the main occupation of inmates was ‘Fordist’ work (see Chapter 2). We saw prisoners pushing heavy objects or sorting clothes. By and large, Munk’s Auschwitz looked like a combine. In *Goto*, by contrast, there is little to do and the only work we see is in the ‘service industry’, being in service to the rich and powerful by giving them horse-riding lessons, polishing their shoes, keeping their dogs. There is talk of some people working in a quarry, but it is kept off-screen, suggesting that the quarry is some distance from the main part of Goto, or even off-shored. The citizens spend their time largely on the pleasures of spectacle, most importantly watching competitions between prisoners and the executions of losers. This focus on spectacle evokes Guy Debord’s idea of the ‘society of the spectacle’, in which everything that was directly experienced is dislocated to spectacle, to representation; living is reduced to watching. Yet, as I argued in the previous chapter, Debord linked the ‘society of the spectacle’ with consumerism resulting from affluence. Borowczyk, by contrast, in a more profound way (perhaps resulting from observing Stalinist show trials of political enemies), links the rise of spectacle with poverty. This is because it is cheaper for the sovereign to give the masses ‘circus’ than ‘bread’ and dizzying them with bloody spectacle removes the danger of their rebellion and revenge.

Munk’s film showed us a camp in its blooming, colonising period, of which a sign was the overseers’ frantic collecting and cataloguing of ‘treasures’ brought by inmates from all corners of the world. They were enthused by the Nazi ideology – Liza’s faith in the Führer’s infallibility allowed her to suppress any soft feelings

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she had towards people sentenced to death. Borowczyk, by contrast, offers us a camp as an exhausted ideological project, as testified by the fact that nobody remembers what happened at the beginning of *Goto* and it is no longer important. Oppression is perpetuated by the power of routine, rather than physical force or ideology (Durnat 1976; Owen 2014). Borowczyk's is a post-Fordist and postmodern version of the camp. Although on first sight such a camp comes across as less cruel, it eventually transpires that it is no less oppressive than that shown by Munk, not least because the exhaustion here affects not only the rulers, but also the ruled, who regard the world in which they live as normal, accept their values and eschew any desire to escape.

*Goto* is, of course, a fictional location. It is also an abstract place: any similarities to concrete locations and cultures are avoided, even the royal couple's headquarters are devoid of any distinctive features and almost bare. In this sense, Borowczyk's vision evokes *W* by Perec, mentioned in the previous chapter. Perec's project was to investigate the relationship between the historical Holocaust, where his mother perished and an ahistorical 'camp', encapsulated by the island *W*, cut off from the world, whose inhabitants devote all their time to the 'pleasures of sport'. Moreover, as a reader of Perec's book (at least for this reader), the viewer of *Goto* only gradually realises that what s/he witnesses bears uncanny similarity to a concentration camp. This gradual illumination, in my view, was intended by both Perec and Borowczyk and its purpose was to make the reader/viewer come to the conclusion that in fact s/he is familiar with this world – it is part of his/her world. By and large, the 'concentrationary universe' Borowczyk offers in his film is not a historical entity, but to use Giorgio Agamben's words, a 'hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space' (Agamben 1998: 166), which can be recreated in different places and times. The specificity of this system, on which I will elaborate in the next chapter, is an extreme asymmetry of power: the sovereign has absolute power over his subjects, the subjects are deprived of any rights, therefore everything is possible there.<sup>9</sup> The episodic narrative of the film, which undermines a causal link between events, confirms this message.

*Gestapo's Last Orgy*, like *Goto*, *Island of Love*, also offers us a camp 'exhausted', but not in the sense of being driven by routines and apathy, but due to its rulers abandoning most of its (traditional) functions and focusing on one only: consuming the prisoners. This is not due to the shortage of material goods but, on the contrary, due to their temporary (as the end of the war is in sight) abundance, which renders all pleasures, except for the most perverse ones, unappealing. The



Nazis are literally eating female prisoners who are served as the main dish to the camp leaders and their guests. We also see them burning one woman alive and eating her during their orgy. Another overseer is wearing soft, pink gloves, made from the skin of a Jewish baby. The prison masters are so obsessed with the bodies of their slaves, because unlike merely appropriating their work, possessing their bodies equals possessing them totally. Unlike work, which can be alienated from the person performing it, leaving him or her practically intact, except for a loss of some energy, body cannot be alienated from a person – it is a person. The treatment of the prisoners' bodies confirms Marx's view that capitalist production is thoroughly wasteful with human material.

The Nazis also consume prisoners with their eyes, torturing them in an elaborate, 'spectacular' way and by engaging in public sex with them, which yields pleasure to their genitals and the eyes of fellow Nazis. The camp itself comes across as an elaborate theatre, with rooms looking like stages, allowing the masters to admire what they do to their slaves. Unlike in *Passenger*, in which much of the punishment and trepidation suffered by the prisoners was hidden from the public, in *Gestapo's Last Orgy* all are flagrant. Punishment and suffering is all for the spectacle. The orgy of cruelty has its main rationale in the conviction that the world is approaching its end, the war is practically lost. What is also characteristic of this camp is that slaves internalise the values of their masters – the main character, Jewish Lise, eventually falls in love with her Nazi lover and sends her friend from the camp to her death. It appears that the Nazis achieve such ideological success precisely because they are so extreme in their actions. As it is impossible to rationalise their behaviour, one has to blindly love and trust them, in order to come to terms with them.

*Gestapo's Last Orgy* and other films of this kind are usually sentenced to the bin of cinematic history, but an argument is made, which I endorse, that due to not being constrained by the rules of 'high art' or even 'higher genres' such as, in this case, a Holocaust film proper, they are bolder in revealing the 'spirit' of the times in which they were made (Sconce 2008). Accordingly, I see *Gestapo's Last Orgy*, like Borowczyk's *Goto*, as a metaphor of a post-Fordist world, in which there is much less need for work and greater appetite for spectacle, consumption by those in power becomes more and more unconstrained and hysterical, as it even includes the bodies of those at the bottom of the pile, and the masses who are oppressed not only fail to rebel, but collude with their oppressors.

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## Defeated refuseniks and (not so) clever lazybones

In the previous chapter I discussed films whose characters chose idleness, regarding it as a superior lifestyle; their idleness was provocative and was accompanied by contempt for those who work. Refusal to work is also represented in films throughout the 1970s, yet the most famous of this kind were made at the beginning of the decade, suggesting that they are a legacy of the 1960s, rather than a premonition of a new epoch. Idleness in these films also tends to be less ostentatious. Their characters rarely show pride in their condition and admit that their choice is achieved by numerous compromises with the world of paid employment.

I will focus on one French film, *La maman et la putain* (*The Mother and the Whore*, 1973) by Jean Eustache and one Polish film, *Rejs* (*The Cruise*, 1970) by Marek Piwowski. Both are somewhat transitory and unique pieces in the histories of their respective national cinemas. *The Mother and the Whore* is considered a post-May '68 film, in the sense of echoing the issues highlighted during May's events (Forbes 1992: 142–46; Smith 2005: 80; Habib 2007). More importantly, however, and this might be one reason why Alison Smith devotes to it only a footnote in her otherwise comprehensive discussion of French post-May cinema (Smith 2005: 80), it does not take this 'echo' any further, so to speak, does not offer any obvious solution to the problems exposed by May's events, as was the case with the previously discussed Karmitz film. As André Habib argues, 'it creates an intimate portrait of a generation (Eustache's own) caught between the glorious myths of the New Wave and the depressive aftermath of May 68' (Habib 2007). The debt towards 'May cinema' is conveyed by using a black and white print, uncommon in the 1970s, and casting Jean-Pierre Léaud in the main role of Alexandre. Léaud in this film stands for a generation in search of lost time, oscillating between past and present, condemned to be simultaneously in and out of synch with the sound of its own time (Habib 2007). Some authors underscore Léaud-Alexandre's anachronistic posture, reminiscent of a nineteenth-century dandy (Weiner 2002: 44–45). I shall also add that this is only one of several workshy men whom Léaud played in this decade; other roles include a man who pretends to be a deaf-mute in *Out 1* (1971–74) by Jacques Rivette.

Alexandre chooses not to work, like his earlier incarnations in New Wave film, in order to enjoy life. As he puts it, evoking Baudelaire, 'I don't do anything, I let time do it'. Léaud is the ideal actor to show how the passage of time affects a

person and how idle life can be pleasant and interesting, because we have seen him on screen since he was a kid and he has excelled in roles playing men whose pursuit in life is not a career. Equally, Eustache is the perfect director to capture the pleasures of an idle life. Take, for example, an episode when with a face expressing irony and fascination, Alexandre listens to music from an old record, or when visiting a friend he picks up a book on the SS and starts reading it from the middle (a possible reference to Godard, who had a habit of browsing books when visiting friends), finds a fascinating passage and starts to read it aloud. Although Alexandre's pleasures are derivative – he only consumes what others created, not unlike Chytilová's Marias, discussed in the previous chapter – his consumption comes across as an artistic performance. Alexandre defends his affinity for 'second-handness', saying that imitations are better than originals, because they are real, unlike originals, which are dominated by their myths. This statement captures the post-May period, and Eustache's own position in relation to the French New Wave as its follower, and can be viewed as a defence of the postmodern art of recycling, which originated in the 1970s.

Although Alexandre defends things that are 'post', he also muses on the beauty of the 'original', saying: 'In May '68 a whole café was crying. It was beautiful. Tear-gas had exploded ... a crack in reality opened up'. This crack in reality should be understood as the possibility of a different life: less materialistic, more communal and defined by a person's inner needs, not external pressure. To literalise this metaphor, Alexandre finds his own 'crack in reality' in the apartment of his girlfriend Marie, owner of a clothes boutique (the perfect profession for the partner of an image-conscious dandy). However, we encounter Alexandre when the 'crack in reality' feels like a less comfortable place than it used to be, most likely because the world around him has changed. Money matters more than it used to and people have lost hope of any revolutionary change.

Unlike in the films by Jakubisko and Chytilová, discussed in the previous chapter, where the issue of who supports the idle characters remains practically untouched, Eustache shows that for somebody to enjoy the idle lifestyle, somebody else has to work or possess capital. The fact that on this occasion the working part is a woman and the idle part is a man, points to the changes brought about by May '68. Eustache also shows that either the May attitudes were not fully assimilated or there was a backlash against them, as testified by Alexandre's self-perception. He calls himself a mediocre man, sentenced to socialising with other mediocre people, and he presents himself as not working rather than being idle,

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thus suggesting that work is for him a norm, idleness an aberration. Moreover, Alexandre repeatedly broaches the subject of money. On the one hand, he buoyantly pronounces that the lack of money was not for him an obstacle to eating well or being cultured, as in his youth he tended to steal books (as did Godard). On the other hand, he frequently tells how the lack of cash limits him. He also discusses the growing power of money in the outside world, saying that in the past girls fell for soldiers; nowadays the charm of the uniform gave way to the attributes of affluence. In another episode we see Alexandre's 'lazy friend' sitting in a stolen wheelchair. The juxtaposition of an able body with a vehicle helping to overcome physical disability creates a discord, suggesting that physically able people should not slack off. The fact that this friend collects Nazi memorabilia adds to the impression that shunning work might have unhealthy consequences.

Alexandre's position as a barely surviving 'mediocre young man' forces him to be always on the move. He traverses streets of mostly greyish Paris and only temporarily inhabits shelters: cafés and other people's apartments. Paradoxically, being in transit underscores the strict geographical and mental limits of Alexandre's world: he cannot venture very far and he cannot leave his social milieu or the woman who clothes and feeds him. He thus moves in a vicious circle. Eustache's predilection for filming people in static medium shots and eschewing any stylistic innovations underscores this painful 'static mobility'.

Despite difficulties, during most of this long film Alexandre manages to hold onto his ideal of idleness. Eventually, however, he is defeated. This happens when Marie attempts to commit suicide and his new girlfriend, the possibly pregnant Veronika, expresses her growing despair. This does not mean that Alexandre would not be able to continue his lifestyle, but its likely cost would be social rejection, shame and self-loathing. By and large, as Jonathan Rosenbaum puts it, *The Mother and the Whore* shows 'youthful dreams about a pleasant and careless life turn into bitter ashes' (Rosenbaum 1997: 232; see also Forbes 1992: 142). Rosenbaum argues that the film is 'profoundly reactionary' (ibid.: 233). In my view, however, this opinion would be justified if the author showed us the advantages of reacting against the ideals of May '68 and offered solace in the certainties of the past. Instead, in 1970s fashion, Eustache embraces neither the past nor the future. His film's utter lack of hope also acts like a premonition of Eustache's suicidal death that would happen eight years later, when he was only forty-two years old. Or, at least, this is the conclusion based on the film's explicit content. Its form, on the other hand, testifies to the value of idleness. The film is filled with long

monologues and characters listening to songs from records. Alexandre's experience of life comes across as deeper and more original than that of people who devote their lives to work and do everything in haste, and I believe that this impression is even stronger now than when the film was made.

*Rejs* (*The Cruise*, 1970) by Marek Piwowski occupies a similar position in Polish cinema to that of *The Mother and the Whore* in French cinema. It summarises the previous epoch, the 1960s, while simultaneously trying to predict the country's future. Moreover, it is the ultimate Polish cult film which, according to Umberto Eco's definition, is seen as flawed, but by the same token more interesting than the official masterpieces (Eco 1988). Piwowski can be seen as a Polish Eustache. He was born in 1935, thus three years before Eustache and following *The Cruise*, he was regarded as somebody who would draw on and exceed the successes of Polanski and Skolimowski's New Wave films, but who did not fulfil this expectation. Unlike Eustache, the director of *The Cruise* did not commit suicide, but his artistic output after the 1970s became very limited. Yet he remained an important cultural personality in his native country. Nowadays, Piwowski is almost the last living (post)communist refusenik who chose life over a career. His life can almost be read as a manual for how to survive under communism while (professionally) doing little. This theme is also inscribed in *The Cruise*.

Piwowski's film owes its cult status largely to its language – both the language spoken in the film and the cinematic language employed by the director. It is easy to recognise the speech used by the characters as 'the language of public discourse which penetrates, like a cancerous growth, the vernacular and everyday linguistic practices as the universal language of collected truth' (Kurz 2008: 97). Piwowski suggests that this clumsy and twisted language imprisons the characters. By extension, Poles, as represented by him, are prisoners of the social reality in which they navigate. But, at the same time, the episodic structure inspired, in the director's own words, by Umberto Eco's concept of 'open work' (quoted in Łuczak 2008: 4), suggests that in Poland under socialism everything is possible: life can be assembled in many different ways.

The film begins with the sign 'You work on the land, you rest on the water', advertising a cruise on the Vistula. Yet the sign is accompanied by a hand-written note, 'No tickets', subtly pointing to the reality of shortages behind the façade of plenty. The film's main character is a chancer, who cons his way on board the boat and becomes its entertainment officer (Polish *kaowiec*, from K&O, culture and education). His immediate promotion testifies to the easiness in communist

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Poland and Eastern Europe at large to become recognised as a ‘professional’ (which I discussed apropos of *Dance Leader* and *Solo Sunny*), and to the drive to institutionalise all aspects of social life, including leisure. Of course, the drive towards organising leisure could also be observed in the West (Seabrook 1988; Adorno 1991). However, Piwowski shows that in this respect the East was hardly lagging behind the West, although it was prompted initially by a different motive from in the West: not profit, but the need to create a socialist ‘new man’. However, by the 1970s this project was largely forgotten, and only, as Piwowski shows, certain rituals pertaining to it survived, as testified by the fossilised language.

Piwowski’s *kaowiec* manages to dominate the ship and, true to his new role, organises ‘culture and education’ for fellow travellers in such a way that it starts to resemble working life under crude communism. It is filled with talent shows of people lacking any talent and meetings whose participants utter banalities, assuming that this is what the situation requires. *Kaowiec*’s career on the pleasure boat can be perceived as both his success and defeat. Success, because he becomes practically the most important person on the boat; defeat, because it is paid for by renouncing his desire not to work. He might thus be a lazybones, but not as clever as he thought he was.

If Jean-Pierre Léaud was instrumental in the success of *The Mother and the Whore*, so was Stanisław Tym who played *kaowiec* in *The Cruise*. However, Tym was not Piwowski’s first choice. The role was written for Bogumił Kobiela, best known from the film *Zezowate szczęście* (*Bad Luck*, 1960) by Andrzej Munk, where he played Piszczyk, a man cursed with bad luck, because he always wanted to conform but turned out to be out of synch with Polish history. One could conjecture that if Kobiela played *kaowiec*, he would suffer, again, from bad luck. Kobiela, however, died in a car crash shortly before the shooting of *The Cruise* started and he was replaced by Tym. In due course Tym became an important media personality and almost a symbol of the last twenty years of communist rule in Poland. Taller and of a stronger build than Kobiela, Tym appears to be more in command of his situation than the hapless Kobiela-Piszczyk was in Munk’s movie. He also comes across as more ambiguous and opaque – in this sense also signifying the amorphous, almost ideology-free Polish 1970s.

When *The Cruise* was released and during the whole remaining period of Polish history, it was perceived as a satire on life in socialist Poland, marked by excessive bureaucracy, acceptance of mediocrity and state interference in the private affairs of citizens. But it is taken differently now, over twenty years after communism’s

collapse. I, for that matter, see it today more as a gentle paeon to the times when life was relatively easy and pleasant. One could lack talents but still survive, and even be rewarded by one's superiors and appreciated by one's peers. Leisure was like work, organised and communal, but work was like leisure too, social and not too strenuous. Both organised leisure and disorganised work left people to enjoy themselves collectively and individually. The gentle rhythm of a boat encapsulates the moderate pace of life in Poland at the time and the rather small boat, containing Polish society in a nutshell, detached from the stable land, from 'reality', acts as a metaphor for the times of preglobalisation, when the country and its citizens could be separated from the rest of the world, but could float without sinking and even slowly move forward. There would be no more ships like that in Polish cinema – the ships in the films of the 1980s would usually show people escaping Poland, in the hope of finding a better life in the West (Mazierska 2009).

## CHAPTER 4

# The 1980s

## Learning to Survive

### **The time of disembedding**

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The 1970s were turbulent years, filled with political struggle, whose outcome at the time was difficult to predict. Yet as David Harvey wrote in the introduction to the 2006 edition of his *Limits to Capital*: ‘The solutions that emerged victorious (though very unevenly) from the confusions of the 1970s were broadly along neoliberal, or so-called “free-market” lines, in which finance capital (in part because of the petrodollar problem) led the way’ (Harvey 2006a: x–xi). Neoliberalism, also known as monetarism, free market or global capitalism, is a version of capitalism, in which capitalists enjoy a high degree of freedom and protection from the state, while labourers are deprived of similar freedoms and state protection. The assumption of neoliberalism, as with that of the classical liberalism of Adam Smith, is that its hegemony will lead to the benefit of all: ‘a rising tide of capitalist endeavour will “lift all boats”’ (Harvey 2010b: 218). Yet in Harvey’s opinion, this system does not fulfil its promise.

Neoliberalism, as described by Harvey, boils down to ‘accumulation by dispossession’. Such accumulation is achieved by: 1) privatisation and commodification of public assets; 2) financialisation, in which any kind of good can be turned into an instrument of economic speculation; 3) the management and manipulation of crises and 4) state redistribution, in which the state becomes an agent of the upward redistribution of wealth, including the poor countries subsidising the rich (Harvey 2005: 160–62). The third point listed by Harvey, namely embracing crisis and chaos, rather than equilibrium, accounts for the main difference between neoliberalism and classical capitalism. As Melinda Cooper puts it, ‘What is *neo* about neoliberalism is its tendency to couple the idea of the self-organising economy with the necessity for continual crisis’ (Cooper 2008: 43–44). Harvey regards the upward redistribution of wealth as a systemic feature of neoliberalisation, not an unfortunate by-product of the march towards a better world for everybody. Elsewhere he writes: ‘An ethical, non-exploitative and socially just capitalism that redounds to the benefit of all is impossible. It contradicts the

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very nature of what capital is about' (Harvey 2010b: 239). Neoliberalism can be seen as a model that European countries (or rather their elites) try to replicate, by purging the existing political and economic systems from socialism. Therefore it is often better to talk about neoliberalisation than neoliberalism, especially in relation to countries such as Sweden or Denmark, where there is still much left of the old system.

Harvey's diagnosis of the world in which we have lived since the 1980s, as he notices, chimes with the description of capitalism provided by Marx and Engels in this passage from *The Communist Manifesto*:

*The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors', and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment'. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. (Marx 2008: 36–37)*

If we accept Harvey's interpretation, which is echoed in the work of other authors, such as Naomi Klein (2000, 2007) and even, to some extent, Joseph Stiglitz (2002), then we have to conclude that neoliberal policies damage the vast majority of the inhabitants of our planet and the Earth itself. Why then have they been so widely adopted? An important factor was the behaviour of financial elites, who used all available means to protect and enhance their power, curbed by Keynesian rules (Harvey 2005; 2006a; see also Chapter 3). The shift was also affected by the dissatisfaction of the traditional supporters of the left with the situation that occurred in the 1970s. A large section of them saw in the turn to neoliberalism a solution to high inflation, crippling strikes and insufficient opportunities for the workers.

These factors are discussed by French sociologists, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello in their influential book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, published for the first time in France in 1999. They do so by comparing two periods in French and

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European history, 1968–75 and 1985–95. The year 1968, in their view, led to a profound crisis in capitalism, which in Europe jeopardised its very survival. Yet it was precisely by regaining some of the oppositional themes articulated during the May events that capitalism was able to disarm its critics and gain new dynamism. Boltanski and Chiapello identify two types of critique of capitalism, which they describe as ‘social critique’ and ‘artistic critique’, reflecting the fact that not only workers, but also students, artists and intellectuals took part in the May protests. The workers spoke the language of capitalist exploitation, of confiscating the fruits of their labour; the students of alienation, of decreasing chances for autonomous and creative work. The first group demanded more economic equality and security; the second more autonomy, flexibility and scope for creativity. Capitalist organisations successfully disarmed both groups. They addressed artistic critique by changing their structures and modes of operating, becoming open to creativity and flexibility, becoming post-Fordist. At the same time, the social critique was thwarted by capitalist corporations and states, which withdrew from responsibility for the workers’ wellbeing, pronouncing that the natural laws of economics and workers’ own skills should ensure their prosperity (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 184). Assuming such a position was helped by the fragmentation of the workforce, which diminished its ability to bargain with employers (ibid.: 215).

A similar diagnosis of France post-May is offered by French communist intellectual, Régis Debray, who, writing on the tenth anniversary of May ’68, presents May as a means through which French capitalism rejuvenated itself, using workers’ own hands:

*The old France paid off its arrears to the new ... The France of stone and rye, of apéritif and the institution, of oui papa, oui patron, oui chérie, was ordered out of the way so that the France of software and super-markets, of news and planning, of know-how and brain-storming could show off its vitality to the full, home at last. This spring cleaning felt like a liberation and, in effect, it was one.*  
(Debray 1979: 47)

These views are shared by Paolo Virno, except that what Boltanski and Chiapello term ‘artistic critique’, Virno regards as being in fact a ‘social critique’, shared by workers who demanded more scope for individualism and did not want to possess the state but to defend themselves from the state. Accordingly, for Virno the

social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s were profoundly antisocialist (Virno 2004: 111); an idea to which I will return in due course.

The transformation from a Keynesian to a neoliberal version of capitalism was achieved by continuous change, in which not only the traditional right-wing parties participated, but also the left-wing ones. In the United States, the long-standing commitment to the Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies with full employment as the key objective was abandoned under Democratic President Jimmy Carter in 1979 (Harvey 2005: 23). In Europe, the neoliberal turn was introduced during the rule of the Socialist Party under François Mitterand in France and the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher. Neoliberalisation led to a polarisation of societies into rich and poor, unknown since the time of the greatest economic crisis in the 1930s. Again, Harvey observes:

*In volume 1 of Capital, Marx shows that the closer a society conforms to a deregulated, free-market economy, the more asymmetry of power between those who own and those excluded from ownership of the means of production will produce an ‘accumulation of wealth of one pole’ and ‘accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole’. Three decades of neoliberalization have produced precisely such an unequal outcome. A plausible argument can be constructed, as I sought to show in A Brief History of Neoliberalism, that this was what the neoliberalizing agenda of leading factions of the capitalist class was about from the very outset. Elite elements of the capitalist class emerged from the turmoil of the 1970s having restored, consolidated and in some instances reconstituted the power worldwide. (Harvey 2006a: xi)*

To account for the negative effects of neoliberalism, as listed in this quotation, which are represented in some 1980s films, I will draw on concepts developed by authors such as Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. Foucault’s ‘biopolitics’ and ‘biopower’ concern the impact of political power on all aspects of human life, and ‘governmentality’ refers to the means by which governments and other institutions of power produce citizens who largely self-govern themselves (Foucault 1991a). Although Foucault’s concepts were meant to capture phenomena that began in the eighteenth century<sup>1</sup> or even earlier, they proved particularly well suited to examining the neoliberal era, when Western, and in due course also Eastern states, withdrew from taking responsibility

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for the welfare of their citizens, simultaneously perfecting the means through which citizens became the tools of their own oppression, as demonstrated by numerous studies building on Foucault's concept (Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991; Barry, Osborne and Rose 1996). Giorgio Agamben elucidates Foucault's ideas in such terms:

*According to Foucault, a society's 'threshold of biological modernity' is situated at the point at which the species and the individual as a simple living body become what is at stake in a society's political strategies ... What follows is a kind of bestialization of man achieved through the most sophisticated political techniques. For the first time in history, the possibilities of the social sciences are made known, and at once it becomes possible both to protect life and to authorize the holocaust. In particular, the development and triumph of capitalism would not have been possible, from this perspective, without the disciplinary control achieved by the new bio-power, which, through a series of appropriate technologies, so to speak created the 'docile bodies' that it needed. (Agamben 1998: 3)*

Agamben develops Foucault's work by elaborating the concept of 'homo sacer' – a sacred person who 'can be killed and yet not sacrificed'. This paradoxical position befalls a man without any rights, who has only 'bare life' and can be killed with impunity by a sovereign power (on bare life see also Arendt 1951; Rancière 1981; Benjamin 2004). Agamben regards modernity and especially Nazi Germany as a hotbed of 'bare life'. However, although he does not focus on the connection between the production of 'bare life' and unrestrained capitalism experienced since the late 1970s, his examples of violence, drawn from contemporary eugenics and colonialism clearly point to this link. I argue that the Keynesian system and state socialism attempted to transform the 'bare life' of people deprived of almost everything by the Second World War (which was itself a product of capitalist crisis of the 1920s and 1930s) and its aftermath, into a 'good life', as defined by Aristotle. The production of 'bare life' is a consequence of abandoning this project. Many neoliberal traits, such as an exaltation of personal freedom and a promise to curb the power of large organisations, including trade unions, professional associations, local government, universities and even the state (although in reality neoliberalism relies on the state as an instrument of the protection of its interests), appealed to the electorate as a means of democratising society, bringing more justice and

power to the people. Instead, however, as the critics argue, neoliberalism reduced it to an atomised and disempowered mass society.

Nowhere in Europe was the victory of neoliberal capitalism more rapid and more contested than in Britain. It was personified by Margaret Thatcher, who became the leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and Prime Minister in 1979 (two years before Ronald Reagan became President of the USA). Thatcher's ascent to power excellently reflects the political and cultural contradictions of the late 1960s and 1970s. She can be regarded as a beneficiary of feminism, which criticised male-dominated society for excluding women from power. The fact that the traditional party of capital chose a woman as its leader confirms Chiapello, Boltanski and Debray's diagnosis that during the crisis years of the 1970s the forces of capitalism (often described as the New Right) reinvented themselves. Yet, Thatcher, with her traditional views on women and family, embodied many features against which the feminist movement fought in the 1960s and 1970s, and continue to fight to the present day.<sup>2</sup>

While the New Right triumphed in Britain, the Labour Party suffered a profound crisis of identity, programme, membership and ultimately, electorate. Its traditional supporters were dissatisfied with the functioning of the Keynesian paradigm, such as high inflation, excessive bureaucracy, as well as perpetuating male exclusiveness. Writing about Britain, but in a way that could be applied to other Western democracies, Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques observed:

*In the face of industrial struggles which fail to generalise themselves for society as whole, which are as much for low-paid, the unskilled, the black or women workers as they are for the advanced sectors of skilled, white, male labour, it is possible to represent the trade unions as a sectional interest. In circumstances where the commitment to 'welfare' fails to redistribute wealth or to increase real changes in the balance of power, it is possible to make the return to possessive individualism and competitiveness look like 'common sense'. In conditions where benefits are administered by a gigantic state bureaucracy and the content and forms of decision-making remain deeply undemocratic, individualism and 'freedom' can be made to appear attractive. It invaded and seized territory from a Labourism which had lost its popular-democratic connections and which appeared increasingly as, simply, a less and less efficient or convincing manager of capitalist crisis. (Hall and Jacques 1983: 14)*

In this fragment Hall and Jacques locate the failure of the left in its rejection of universal socialism, of privileging the welfare of only one group. Such an attitude inevitably leads to dissatisfaction for those left behind, on which the right builds its capital, pitting one group against another – an art that Thatcher perfected. This is a motif we can find in Marx's writing, including in his call for workers to unite – unite on the terms of the most unprivileged.

The Labour Party and the mainstream Western organisations of the left elsewhere failed to register and appropriately react to the creeping transition from Fordism to post-Fordism – a shift from large factories to small units of production and a lean and flexible, casualised workforce, hence to the workforce becoming more dispersed and 'invisible'; from production of things to 'immaterial' production of services, information, ideas and symbols, which requires intellectual and 'affective' labour rather than the exertion of muscle (on post-Fordism see Virno 2004; Liu 2004; Hardt and Negri 2006; Lazzarato 2006; Kirn 2010; Gregg 2011). One consequence of this shift has been a melting of boundaries between work and nonwork. Under post-Fordism, working time, places of work and mental states pertaining to work overlap and invade those previously belonging to nonwork. This leads to only 'a few moments of human time being able to escape the money nexus' (Nowotny 1994: 131) and to the collapse of personal and professional identities. The last aspect means that people's capacities for friendship and intimacy are most regularly exercised in the pursuit of (capitalist) profit, leading to the danger of them being unable to appreciate or even seek the benefits of friendship or love for unprofitable purposes (Gregg 2011: 6).

It should be stressed that the move to post-Fordism did not cause the disappearance of Fordist-type labour. As Hardt and Negri admit, 'workers involved primarily in immaterial production are a small minority of the global whole. What it means, rather, is that the qualities and characteristics of immaterial production are tending to transform the other forms of labour and indeed society as a whole' (Hardt and Negri 2006: 65). The shift from Fordism to post-Fordism was abetted by neoliberalisation. This is because neoliberalism, as a more extreme form of capitalism than its Keynesian version, demands more surplus value, hence more work from its labour force, and its flexibility, fragmentation and invisibility are a perfect means to achieve this goal. At the same time, the alleged freedom offered to workers (or at least some workers) by liberating them from the shackles of the factory routine could be used to justify neoliberalism as a better, more socialist system (on this argument and its repudiation see Virno 2004; Rancière 2010).

Political and cultural life in the 1980s was also characterised by a harsh critique of Eastern European communism, both in the West and by dissident authors from the socialist world. The critics frequently applied the categories of totalitarianism to the realities of ‘crude communism’ without encountering the same resistance as in the 1950s or 1960s (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 178). Such widespread criticism was facilitated by accelerating economic, technological and political crisis in Eastern European countries. While in the 1970s their growth rates (3.4 per cent) fell more slowly and were higher than in the OECD West (3.2 per cent), by the mid-1980s, they were lagging far behind the West (Mazower 1998: 369). This was in part because the 1980s saw many unwise decisions in the area of economy, such as, for example, in Romania, the ‘creation of monsters like oil refineries which operated at 10 per cent of capacity, or the aluminium complex which used up as much energy as the whole of Bucharest’ (ibid.: 370) and, in the GDR, embarking on an ambitious program in microelectronics, for which the country did not have sufficient financial and human resources (Stokes 2000: 193; on the structural problems of socialist economy in the late communist period see Burawoy and Lukács 1992).

In Poland, the weak state and emboldened, angered society led to Solidarity triumphs in the early 1980s, which was ‘the great rehearsal for 1989, when the communist regimes finally crumbled’ (Bunce 1999a: 32). Between this rehearsal and the ‘final show’, martial law was introduced – the last and unsuccessful attempt to halt an anticommunist opposition in Poland, which only strengthened the association of communism with totalitarianism. In the Soviet Union Brezhnev, who died in 1982, and his aged successors were eventually replaced by the youthful in age and spirit Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985. Unlike Brezhnev, the new leader of the Soviet Union proved unwilling to support the local authorities in their attempts to quash anticommunist opposition and openly admitted that socialism in the form practised from the Urals to Luba had not worked well and needed thorough reform in order to survive. His assessment proved right as socialism indeed did not survive beyond the end of the decade.

One consequence of neoliberalisation was a much higher risk of unemployment, due to governments abandoning the goal of full employment, regarding that as something outside their (new) limited remit and too heavy a price to keep inflation in check. Unemployment was also exacerbated by rapid technological changes and deregulation of the market, resulting in moving enterprises and whole branches of industry to cheaper places, where workers had less protection (Sennett 2006). This

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process, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, gathered speed in the 1990s, not least because Eastern Europe opened itself up to Western capital.

Since the 1980s, in practically every profession, from cleaners to computer specialists, there have been many more workers available than the market can absorb. Consequently, from the 1970s family income in the First World has stagnated and decreased, although this trend has somewhat halted since 1995 (Harvey 2005: 25). The 1980s are also marked by the return of the sweatshop not only outside but also inside Europe (Harvey 2006a: xii–xiii), confirming the Marxist thesis that ‘in proportion, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases’ (Marx and Engels 2008: 43). As it becomes easier to hire and fire, work also becomes more precarious, as much for those at the bottom as for those at the top of the pay ladder. An effect of neoliberalisation is also an increase in national and international migration, as more and more people leave their homes in search of work, following the frantic movement of capital. I shall also mention an increase in the length and cost of education, which is largely paid by students’ engaging in low-paid labour, which increases competition for available work and in a vicious circle, exacerbates the other negative effects already mentioned.

This paradoxical situation, in which there is less (paid) work available and workers have to work harder to earn enough to sustain them materially, led to a new, neoliberal work ethic, which included many elements of the work ethic preached to factory workers in the nineteenth century. Those who are employed are expected to be grateful to have work, as work is regarded as a special privilege. Those who are not employed are regarded as not deserving help from the state or social respect (Bauman 2005). To account for the unwillingness and, increasingly, the inability of governments to provide employment, the onus of finding work is put on the individual. As Harvey writes, ‘neoliberal theory conveniently holds that unemployment is always voluntary. Labour, the argument goes, has a “reserve price” below which it prefers not to work. Unemployment arises because the reserve price is too high’ (Harvey 2005: 53). Since that reserve price is partly set by welfare payments, neoliberal governments embark on reducing welfare payments (*ibid.*: 52–53). Neoliberal rulers shift the blame onto the unemployed for their condition, as in the scheme captured by Foucault’s ideas of governmentality and technologies of self (Cruikshank 1996). In Britain the opinion that the unemployed are responsible for their own plight was made famous by the minister in Thatcher’s government, Norman Tebbit’s call for the unemployed to ‘get on their bikes’ (Seabrook 1985: 88–108). Those who are entrepreneurial and ‘create’ work, even



if coupled with exploitation on a par with those described by Marx and destruction of places of work elsewhere, are presented as ‘charitable’ individuals and rewarded with state honours.

This shift in attitude to work is captured by language. In 1980s Britain ‘redundancy’ replaced ‘unemployment’, with the connotation of being ‘superfluous, supernumerary, un-needed’ (Bauman 2005: 69). Later in Britain ‘jobseeker’s allowance’ replaced ‘unemployment benefit’, where ‘jobseeker’ signifies a desire to find employment, as ‘allowance’ conveys something that is paid on much harsher conditions than a benefit. Changes in language also reflected the new, pseudo-egalitarian ethos of neoliberalism, according to which those earning millions were essentially in the same positions as those earning pennies, all belonging to the supposedly classless society. As Jeremy Seabrook noted in 1988, those who found themselves in privileged employment (managers, entrepreneurs, advertisers, researchers):

*frequently borrow the language of more primitive forms of labour to express themselves, admiring each other’s ‘work’, attending endless ‘workshops’, discussing their ‘skills’, ‘crafts’, referring to themselves as ‘workaholics’; indeed, they often inhabit former places of far cruder toil: disused and converted warehouses and factories, with bright green rails, iron ladders, red-painted windows and decorative remnants of the building’s original function left as ornamentation. (Seabrook 1988: 4)*

Processes not dissimilar to those in the West also took place, albeit unofficially, in the socialist part of Europe. During this period many communist *apparatchiks* became *enterpreneurchiks*, effectively privatising state assets (Bunce 1999a: 45; on the situation in Poland see Wasilewski 1995). Consequently, the 1980s was a period of greater economic polarisation of societies under socialism, which made the poor even more hostile towards crude communism and the rich less reluctant to make the transition to capitalism, indeed they sought it.

European cinema of the 1980s reflects the various trends pertaining to postmodernism. It mimics the economic polarisation and disappearing middle by moving in two opposing directions. On the one hand we observe an upsurge of spectacular cinema, exemplified by British ‘heritage films’ (Higson 1993) and, to some extent, French ‘cinéma du look’ (Harris 2004). This is a cinema of long takes and lavish *mise-en-scène*, which looks nostalgically into the past, displaying

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national heritage as objects to be admired and consumed (for a price). On the other hand, the majority of remaining films, especially those dealing with work under a neoliberal regime and made from a more or less left-wing perspective, look cheaper and rougher than those made in the previous decades, as if they had suffered from underinvestment. Their frequent subject is decay, both material, caused by de-industrialisation and capitalists taking over the space used by the poor for new developments for the rich, branded regeneration or gentrification (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2003), and moral, resulting from social pathologies such as poverty and alcoholism. In the Soviet Union, Russian commentators disdainfully labelled this trend *chernukha* (dark stuff) (Faraday 2000: 172–79), a phenomenon that also has its equivalents in other Eastern European countries.

This and the fifth chapter in this book are particularly informed by the themes of Marx's third volume of *Capital* and *Grundrisse*, concerned with the process of capitalist production as a whole, such as depression of the wages of labourers as a means of sustaining profit, relative overpopulation and capitalist crises, as well as the diminishing demand for labour, caused by mechanisation.

### **Thatcher's winners and losers**

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Unlike in the previous chapters, where I jumped from country to country on one page to demonstrate the connections between realities and films made in different parts of Europe, this chapter will be in a large part devoted to the films made in one country: Britain, although not exclusively by British directors. This is because in the 1980s Britain underwent a greater political and economic change than any other country in Europe. It became a laboratory of neoliberalism, which in due course has been adopted practically everywhere across the world, including in postcommunist Europe. As Andrew Graham notes, what happened in the U.K. under Thatcher is therefore unusually interesting and important to any judgement about contemporary capitalism (Graham 1997: 117). Two reasons why Britain was in a neoliberal vanguard included a weaker working class/left-wing movement than in France, Italy or Germany, and particularly the deep crisis that Britain suffered in the 1970s. This crisis culminated in the 'Winter of Discontent' of 1978–79, marred by widespread strikes, including by those working in essential services, such as waste collectors and grave diggers. This situation laid bare the weaknesses

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of the Keynesian model, which the left was not able to address. Inevitably, it paved the way to Thatcher's victory in the subsequent parliamentary elections.

Thatcher was in office between 1979 and 1990, making her the longest-serving British prime minister in history. Even if we take into account the peculiarities of the British voting system, which makes it difficult to create a coalition government, Thatcher's appeal was phenomenal and this was recognised by her fiercest critics, such as Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, who in 1983 noted that the 1979 election marked the penetration of Thatcherite appeal deep into the very heartlands of traditional Labour support (Hall and Jacques 1983: 10). This support was mobilised by a mixture of criticism and promise. Thatcher pronounced the Britain of the 1970s as sick – morally, socially and economically, describing the Winter of Discontent as a 'reversion towards barbarism' (Jenkins 1989: 66). In her narrative, the main culprit was Labour governments, whom she criticised for perpetuating the welfare state, leading to high inflation, low productivity, frequent strikes, as well as moral failures, such as collapse of authority and a high level of divorce, which created lazy and irresponsible youngsters (*ibid.*: 66–77). Thatcherism was grafted onto resentment of the 'little non-political person in the street' against the big, corporate battalions – big government and big unions – which characterised the statism of the social democratic era' (Hall and Jacques 1983: 10). Thatcher promised a 'free market, strong state, iron times', namely an authoritarian populism through 'marrying the gospel of free market liberalism with organic patriotic Toryism' (*ibid.*: 10). 'One after another the old landmarks – full employment, welfare state support, equality of opportunity, the "caring" society, neo-Keynesian economic management, corporatist income policies – have been reversed. In their place a new public philosophy has been constructed, rooted in the open affirmation of "free market" values – the market as a measure of everything – and reactionary "Victorian" values – patriarchalism, racist and imperialist nostalgia' (*ibid.*: 11). Thatcherism perfectly confirms Polanyi and Harvey's views that a liberal and, by extension, neoliberal project could only be sustained by appealing to conservative values and, when necessary, by resorting to authoritarianism (Harvey 2005: 39–86).

Yet Thatcher's governments not only took away privileges from ordinary people but also gave them, or at least some of them, something in return. One such privilege was the chance to own one's home thanks to the extensive selling off of public housing to tenants. Thatcher's housing policies satisfied the working class dream of owning a house and introduced a new, often speculative dynamism

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into the housing market that was much appreciated by the middle classes, who saw their asset value rise (Harvey 2005: 61), hence enrichment without extra work. Through the release of council tenants from ‘municipal serfdom’ the Conservatives projected the powerful image of a property-owning democracy (Monk and Kleinman 1989: 121). Thatcher also significantly reduced income tax and corporate tax, facilitating setting up businesses. Ordinary people were encouraged to invest their savings in shares, a process that became accelerated by the transformation of mutual societies into banks and the privatisation of utilities. In this way they linked their success with the success of the capitalist class. This helped to perpetuate the idea that class in Britain ceased to matter: Britain became a classless society, while in reality the gap between the rich and poor grew apace and the rights of the poor and medium-earners were eroded. Thatcher’s reforms concerning capital and labour relations have been characterised by the virtual absence of legal minimum standards, the replacement of collective employment rights with individual ones, and the decentralisation of bargaining at the plant and individual level. ‘Unemployment was now seen as the consequence of irresponsible collective bargaining or of misguided government interference in the market. As a result of the reforms, the system of determining wages was as uncoordinated as before, while changes in industrial relations clearly favoured the interests of employers’ (Koch 2006: 110).

The blow of Thatcher’s politics and rhetoric was so hard that it took British filmmakers some years to be able to represent it from a bird’s eye perspective. The few films that attempted to construct a synthetic image of Thatcherism, such as *Britannia Hospital* (1982) by Lindsay Anderson, *The Last of England* (1988) by Derek Jarman and *The Cook, The Thief and Her Lover* (1989) by Peter Greenaway, failed, in my view, due to being either unable to pinpoint Thatcher’s political project or too esoteric for the general public. Many films offering a larger picture of the changes to the labour-capital divide, such as *Brassed Off* (1996) by Mark Herman were made some time after Thatcher’s demise. By contrast, films of the 1980s typically focus on the microscale, investigating the effects of Thatcherism on a specific individual or family. In this way they reflected Thatcher’s famous words that society does not exist, only men, women and their families, which can be seen as a summary of her political program, which included dismantling the vestiges of society. The ‘mini-narratives’, often made for television, focused on redundant industrial workers, the nouveaux riches and young people. Such characters populate the 1980s films of Mike Leigh and Stephen Frears, which for many authors best illustrate

Thatcherite cinema (Hill 1999). I will discuss here Leigh's *Meantime* (1984) and *High Hopes* (1988) and Frears's *My Beautiful Laundrette* (1985), as they deal specifically with work and its shortage in Thatcherite Britain.

Leigh's two films adhere to what I label a 'compensatory narrative' due to presenting characters whose material circumstances leave much to be desired, but who nevertheless triumph over those who are better-off, thanks to possessing personal qualities that the others are missing. In *Meantime* we get insight into the lives of two sisters and their families, childless Barbara Lane and mother of two, Mavis Pollock, who live in different parts of London. Barbara went to university and used to work in a bank, and is now living with her husband John in a neat, middle class, West London suburban semi. Mavis, an uneducated housewife, shares a council flat on an unappealing housing estate in the East End, with an unemployed husband and jobless adult sons, Colin and Mark. The film starts at the end of a visit by the Pollocks to the Lanes. The Pollocks, who do not have their own means of transport, are taken home by John Lane in his car. The tenement blocks on their housing estate look shabby and dilapidated, with litter blown about everywhere and colourless, anaemic grass on the public square. Not far from the Pollocks's house bulldozers are destroying some blocks, described by a council worker as 'development work'. The image acts as a reference to the effects of Thatcherite housing policies, which led to the neglect of many working class dwellings and displacing the poor from places that the rich found attractive (Wright 1991: 31–36; Monk and Kleinman 1989). This practice can be viewed as a sign of what Harvey describes as accumulation through dispossession. Yet while Leigh recognises the precariousness of the Pollocks's position, he suggests that in reality the Lanes are hardly any better, as their estate is also anonymous, grey and marginal, and the same melancholic atmosphere envelops their respective houses.

Most of the remaining part of the film is filled with images of the Pollocks's life on the dole with occasional cuts to the Lanes's house. We see the Pollocks queuing for unemployment benefit, the menfolk occasionally visiting their local pub and Mavis playing bingo, and most of the time they all watch television. Lack of money and an abundance of time, exacerbated by 'natural disasters', such as the breakdown of their new washing machine, lead to frustration and aggression. Barbara is sympathetic to the hardship of her sister's family and takes their side in arguments with her husband, Yet equally she is exasperated by their passivity and disregard for their material surroundings, in a way reminiscent of Tory politicians, including Thatcher herself, who tended to regard the British working class, reduced

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to an underclass by her policies, as victims of their own laziness and lack of enterprise. Barbara ridicules Mavis's addiction to bingo, reproaches the Pollocks for 'living in squalor' and forbids her sister from touching her immaculate kitchen. Her greatest sympathy is for myopic and slow-witted Colin. Barbara's desire to help Colin manifests itself in an offer to pay him for renovating her bedroom. However, the proposal arouses no enthusiasm among the Pollocks. Frank regards the wages Barbara offers as miserly and Mavis points out the danger of Colin losing his unemployment benefit if anybody finds out about the job. Mark is the most critical, regarding Barbara's proposal as insulting not only to Colin, but to the whole family. 'Charity, as Mark knows, is hard enough to take from the servants of the Crown, let alone from one's own family', explains John Pym (Pym 1983/84: 62). Pym's words point to the fact that work in the 1980s started to be perceived as a gift from those who 'create jobs' to the unemployed, rather than the product of the exploitation of workers by capitalists. At the same time, they suggest that taking up work given in 'charity' was then still widely resisted by the working class.

Despite misgivings, Colin accepts Barbara's offer and visits her in her suburban home, only to be dissuaded by his brother, who also finds his way to the Lanes's house. Mark treats his aunt with disdain, mocking her posh accent and jokingly comparing her to Princess Anne. He suggests that by moving upward on the social ladder, Barbara has betrayed her family and her true identity, recollecting the criticism of the upwardly mobile from the 1960s films (see Chapter 2). He also reproaches Barbara for her childlessness, thus suggesting that her affluence does not make up for the loss resulting from not having children. It seems as if Barbara herself accepts this analysis, feeling lonely in her home, her marriage and on her estate. The only connection outside the family that the Lanes appear to have is with John's boss and his wife. Barbara does not like them and it is suggested that their relationship is based on John's professional interest rather than a genuine friendship, as if to confirm the rule that under neoliberalism all relations are in the last instance financial relations.

The Pollocks are also, as I indicated, locked in their world. They represent a post-Fordist post-working class, or the new poor: an abstract group of people sharing a common fate, but no longer communicating with each other. The crucial factor in the old Pollocks's isolation is their unemployment, and the lack of money and stigma attached to it. The young Pollocks, who have never worked, but spend their lives on the housing estate, have more of a social life than their parents. Never having had a respectable, working life, they are less ashamed to share their

misery with people in a similar position. Their principal friend, a skinhead named Coxy, perfectly suits Jeremy Seabrook's description of the new poor living in rich countries who live 'a life of recklessness and spontaneity ... a here-today-gone-tomorrow fatalism; a saga of feuds and passions ... lawlessness, excitement ... and boredom' (Seabrook 1985: 91–92; see also Bauman 2005).

Ultimately the Pollocks come across as more fortunate than the Lanes because their family proves more cohesive, 'genuine', spiritually richer than its middle class counterpart thanks to having children and having to rely on each other to overcome their misfortune. Paradoxically, the fiasco of renovating Barbara's house brings the Pollocks closer together. After the incident, Colin, known to everyone as 'Muppet' or 'Kermit', resolves to stand up for himself, thus gaining some respect from his parents and his brother and making the whole family happier.

*High Hopes* conforms to the pattern of showing the rich as spiritually impoverished and the poor as spiritually richer, only increasing the moral distance between the economic beneficiaries of Thatcherism and those who lost materially due to her policies. It was made in 1988, five years after *Meantime*, when it became clear that Thatcherite policies led to an economic polarisation of British society unknown since the end of the Second World War. The film makes us identify with a couple in their thirties, Cyril and Shirley. Cyril is of working class background; his widowed mother, Mrs Bender, is the last council tenant on the street, which became 'gentrified' as a result of the sell-off of all the other houses to private owners. The very fact that there are no more working class people in Mrs Bender's neighbourhood is a powerful symbol of society's transformation during the Thatcher years. We can imagine that some of the people who lived on Mrs Bender's street were promoted to the middle class thanks to owning their house, while others relocated to poorer areas and joined the lumpenproletariat – a phenomenon that would gain in speed in subsequent decades. Cyril works as a despatch rider, delivering parcels on his motorcycle to London businesses, while Shirley works for the council as a gardener. Leigh suggests that it is on account of Cyril's socialist principles, rather than due to lack of education, resourcefulness or the government's neoliberal policy, that their flat is modest, they own no car and have 'lowly occupations'. One critic described Cyril as 'a very marginal, bohemian member of the working class and a very English sort of socialist. His socialism derives more from his moral revulsion to capitalist greed and upper middle class living styles than from an adherence to a set of ideological positions' (Quart 1989: 57). Moral revulsion with capitalist greed and upper middle class lifestyle is a

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distinct ideological position, but what this quotation conveys is a lack of will to engage in politics on the part of people like Cyril.

If it were not for their worries about the millions of people dying of hunger all over the world (the root of Cyril's initial unwillingness to have children) and their disappointment at the state of British society, Cyril and Shirley could be described as a model happy couple. Importantly, they both like their jobs. It amuses Cyril to visit the tall, claustrophobic offices of banks and business corporations, where people live in constant stress and even have no time to look at each other. For Shirley, who loves flowers and plants, her work is an extension of her hobby. Even after living together for ten years, they still show each other affection. They also care for Cyril's ageing mother and offer shelter to a stranger, Wayne, an unemployed young man from the provinces, who came to London looking for his sister and got lost.

Leigh contrasts Cyril and Shirley with Cyril's sister, Valerie Burke, and her husband, Martin. They are well-off thanks to Martin's business as a burger bar owner and second-hand car salesman – a byword for unscrupulousness and the profession of one of the most unpleasant characters in British New Wave cinema



**Figure 4.1** Cyril, Shirley and Karl Marx in *High Hopes*



– Peter in Tony Richardson’s *A Taste of Honey* (1961). Martin’s idea of work is ‘to have people working for you and you only collect the dosh’, which can be viewed as a vulgar articulation of the values of neoliberalism, which celebrates the role of the renter (Harvey 2005: 187). Martin clearly stands for the nouveaux riches, a group that Mrs Thatcher particularly supported, seeing in it dynamism able to lift the country from economic decline. Valerie is a housewife who spends her days shopping, doing aerobics and looking after her Afghan hound. The Burkes have two cars, one of them a Mercedes, and they live in a spacious, detached house in an affluent suburb of London. Their house is full of shiny ornaments and the house number is lit in neon. The Burkes are obsessed with sex. Valerie wants her husband to emulate the style of Michael Douglas in the bedroom, then known best for his roles in *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and *Wall Street* (1987). Martin, on the other hand, prefers to indulge in extra-marital affairs. Leigh’s critique of the Burkes thus combines the new leftist criticism of Thatcherite neoliberalism as leading to greed and insensitivity with the old leftist critique of the upwardly mobile working class as untrue to itself (see Chapter 2).

The ultimate crisis in the relationship between the siblings and their respective families takes place at a birthday party organised for Valerie and Cyril’s mother. The meeting is a scene of multiple discords, finishing with Cyril, Shirley and Mrs Bender’s departure. The couple take the old woman to their apartment and she stays with them during the night. This is also the night when they make love without using contraception. After the fiasco of the family gathering at the Burkes’s, family attitudes and feelings eventually triumph – there is a chance that Mrs Bender will move in with Cyril and Shirley and also become a grandmother. Thus, again, it is only the working class family that has these noble, redeeming features (Mazierska 2004; Watson 2004: 85–100). The other families are the locus of vulgarity, greed and insensitivity, of which the lack of children is an emblem. The unappealing features of the non-working class families are even conveyed by their names: Burke and Boothe-Braine, connoting respectively stupidity and pretentiousness.

While exalting a working class family as the antithesis of and a buffer against the cultural penetration of Mrs Thatcher’s ‘pet class’, the nouveaux riches, Leigh looks with a sceptical eye at other types of bonds among the working class by identifying himself with ‘bohemian and marginal’ Cyril. Cyril’s distance from the ‘ordinary’ working class is exemplified in his and Shirley’s relationship with Wayne, the simple man previously mentioned. They care for him, but cannot hide that Wayne is a cultural stranger to them. For example, they giggle in bed when Wayne

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is lying in his sleeping bag in the next room, listening to loud music on his ghetto blaster. Equally, they have little sympathy for their politically radical neighbour, Suzi. Her talk about the coming revolution in England and the need for international cooperation between those on the left is dismissed by Cyril as pure nonsense. He also accuses Suzi, who plans to have a stall on the market, of hypocrisy – having socialist views, while wanting to live as a small-time capitalist. Suzi is also scorned by Shirley, who dreams about having a child, for her pro-choice views on abortion. Differences in manner of speaking (Suzi's language is driven by Marxist clichés, while Cyril and Shirley's is natural and individualised) and body language (she is hyperactive and neurotic, while Cyril and Shirley have an upper-class poise), demonstrate that there is little in common between Suzi on the one hand, and Cyril and Shirley on the other. However, rather than proposing how to overcome the gap between the various sections of British society disadvantaged by Thatcherism, Leigh discourages such a project by suggesting that his favourite couple, Cyril and Shirley, are happy with what they have. Leigh also panders to the idea that class as an economic category has lost its relevance; what matters are people's manners and tastes.

In this light it is not surprising that, whilst dismissing their neighbour's radicalism, Cyril and Shirley do not present any alternative to Suzi's utopia. Cyril admits that he himself does nothing to change his country or the world; he is not even a member of a trade union, most likely due to his individualistic taste, rather than because his job is on the margins of unionism. As in *Meantime*, Leigh shows disapproval and distaste towards Thatcherite order but as an alternative he proposes withdrawing into a private sphere. Such an attitude, which can be compared to 'internal exile' as practised by the citizens of Eastern Europe, was more convenient for Thatcher's government than active resistance, as shown in the strikes against mine closures, or riots in inner cities against introducing the poll tax. It allowed for neoliberal capitalism to wreck the world, while those disagreeing with it quietly enjoyed their moral and intellectual superiority. Such an attitude can also be linked to a postmodern mindset, with its idea of 'utopia limited', conveying the view that small spaces of resistance or difference can be carved out or inhabited within 'the system' and even that the self and everyday life can be sites of political dissent and transformation (DeKoven 2004: 249–87). Of course, such views can be held only if macropolitics do not encroach on everyday life too much, while life is still bearable. With the growing triumphs of neoliberalism, it will become more difficult to behave like Cyril.

This is already the case with *My Beautiful Laundrette*. This film represents people who cannot afford to stay aloof – detachment in their case would be tantamount to sinking. This might be explained by its setting in a Pakistani milieu (thanks to the influence of the film’s scriptwriter, Hanif Kureishi), as emigrants, their descendants and ethnic minorities tend to have a lower human capital than the rest of the population. Such a milieu also allows an examination of the interstice between race and class under Thatcher (Hill 1999: 208–18). Frears’s film is a new version of an old narrative about a young working class man who is offered a chance to leave his marginal position by embarking on a new career, but at the price of complying with the patriarchal and capitalist authority. Such a situation was presented in *This Sporting Life* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, in which sport was a way out of a difficult predicament (see Chapter 2). The situation in *My Beautiful Laundrette* is different, reflecting the circumstances of the 1980s and the peculiarity of the situation of Pakistani immigrants in Britain. Omar, the main character, does not come from the traditional working class, but from the milieu of impoverished Pakistani intellectuals. His widowed father was a famous dissident journalist who, disappointed with Britain, now lives an idle life in a small and dilapidated apartment near the railway line.<sup>3</sup> Omar acts as a carer to his father until he gets a chance to work for his entrepreneurial uncle Nassar. Yet unlike Colin in *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*, who rejected the chance for social advancement as a tribute to his working class father, for Omar the demise of his father acts as a disincentive to follow his idealistic path. He eagerly throws himself into his uncle’s businesses and those of his extended family, including his cousin Salim, who controls a large drug-dealing operation. Apart from being a way out of poverty, the work Nassar offers Omar appeals to the young man because it requires versatility and creativity and offers autonomy, hence it conforms to the type of work the disaffected youth demanded in the 1970s (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 175). For Nassar, the ascent of Thatcher, with her reduction of income tax and corporate tax, was a gift from heaven. As Susan Torrey Barber observes:

*The Pakistanis now form part of the privileged class in the eighties, many holding positions of power in South London. As the new landlords, they reversed the traditional imperial/colonial hierarchy by displacing the native British. Frears dramatically demonstrates this dynamic at the film’s beginning when Salim and his henchmen throw out ‘squatters’ Johnny (Daniel Day Lewis) and*

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*Genghis (Richard Graham) from a run-down building Salim purchased, depriving them of their only home. (Barber 1993: 224–25)*

The reversal of colonial positions is poignantly conveyed by Omar saying about Johnny, ‘He is of lower class. He will not come to [Omar’s uncle’s] house without permission’. The clearance of what was effectively slums to be ‘regenerated’ for occupation by more affluent dwellers (who also might eventually be dispossessed), without offering the squatters any alternative housing, confirms the neoliberal logic of ‘accumulation by dispossession’, to which Leigh also alluded. It is worth quoting Harvey, who coined this term, saying: ‘It seems sometimes as if there is a systematic plan to expel low-income and unwanted populations from the face of the earth’ (Harvey 2010b: 245). Barber notes that Salim employs Jamaicans to do his dirty work, which furthers the resentment that the young unemployed white males harbour towards both sets of immigrants, and reinforces decades of racial tension between the communities (Barber 1993: 25).

Despite their ethnic and class differences, Omar and Johnny form professional and personal alliances and might expand on them, creating a chain of laundrettes. Their relationship, although based mostly on sexual attraction, is also a fruit of Thatcherite policy, which allowed for greater flexibility and creativity than traditional Fordist work order, and forced people to transcend ethnic rivalries to create successful businesses (ibid.: 226). Such a mechanism, as I noted in the previous chapter, can be also observed in Fassbinder’s films, where German greengrocers and cleaners overcame (or hid) their distaste for *gastarbeiters* in order not to lose their profit. The Pakistanis in Frears’s film, like Fassbinder’s *gastarbeiters*, are aware that their acceptance into the ‘host’ society depends on their economic usefulness. As Nassar observes, without money he is nobody.

Although Frears’s film points to the advantages of Thatcherism for the young and people of colour, its overall tone is critical. One way is by playing on the association of cleaning (clothes) with ethnic cleansing and money laundering. We see that much violence is involved in setting up Omar’s business: he and Johnny roughly throw some children out of the laundrette and there are numerous beatings between Omar and ‘his people’ and Johnny’s old friends. Moreover, Salim’s affluent style is financed by his drug operations. He can be regarded as an early incarnation of a new breed of capitalists, whom Slavoj Žižek labels ‘liberal communists’ (Žižek 2009b: 13) and whom I describe as ‘postmodern’ businessmen. Salim does not invest in one area, but many; some of them legal, others less so.

Some of his business operations are confined to Britain, others, such as drug dealing, are international. He is extremely ruthless in his business operations, but he also engages in philanthropy, boasting about possessing ‘one of the best collections of modern Indian painting’. His appearance suggests that he wants to look like a Westerner (unlike Nassar, who is comfortable with his Eastern ways), but he has a Pakistani wife and his social life revolves around his extended family, in a way associated with Asians.

Omar’s joining the pole of capital, despite coming from a left-wing background and an ethnic minority, and his father’s disenchantment with Britain and his own life, is an indictment of the British mainstream left’s inability to attract underprivileged sections of the population, as noted by Stuart Hall. For people like Nassar and Omar, Thatcher, despite her bigotry, is a better choice than the Labour Party. Frears does not agree with this opinion, but poses it as a challenge to the left, which in the 1980s was not met and, in my view, nor was it met in the subsequent periods.

If the situation of the indigenous working class, as represented in 1980s British cinema was difficult, the situation of foreign workers was even worse, as shown in Aki Kaurismäki’s *I Hired a Contract Killer*, the film made in 1990, but representing well the themes of 1980s British cinema. *I Hired a Contract Killer* tells the story of a middle-aged French man named Henri who works as a clerk in a British state utility company. According to the economic principle of the 1980s, the company is to be privatised and for some workers this means redundancy and for others (the ‘lucky ones’) worsening conditions of employment. Henri falls into the first category. He is told that the reason he is picked out is his foreignness: strangers are first to go. This is only natural to the logic of capitalism, according to which the periphery is sacrificed for the centre. This rule was shown at work already in *O Lucky Man!*, discussed in the previous chapter.

Henri’s demise is foretold in a sequence showing him still at work. His office is huge, employing many clerks, sitting at their desks. This is a Fordist factory, although one that produces information rather than material goods. When sitting at his desk, Henri merges with the crowd of workers, but when he goes for lunch, he sits alone at the table, while his fellow workers are chatting and laughing, not unlike a Yugoslav cleaning woman in Fassbinder’s *Fear Eats the Soul*. Henri himself adopts a neoliberal work ethic: work is for him the only reason to live, without paid employment he is human waste even in his own eyes. Deprived of work, he does not fight back, but internalises the blame and decides to commit suicide.

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Henri is played by Jean-Pierre Léaud and this is probably his most important role in the 1980s, when his stardom diminished due to Truffaut's death and Godard's turning to a new crop of actors. His role is imbued with symbolism – Léaud brings memories of his earlier parts. In films from the previous decades Léaud's characters botched every job they were offered, but they always got a second and third chance or did not work at all and somehow survived. In *I Hired a Contract Killer* Henri works hard, but it does not matter – he is dismissed. Comparing these films illuminates the shift in the position of working and non-working people from the 1960s to the 1980s. This shift is excellently captured by a fragment from Charles Péguy's *L'Argent* (1912), in which the author compares the past with the present, 'modern' times, when 'those who do not gamble lose all the time even more assuredly than those who do' (quoted in Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: xvii).

### Solidarity and beyond

While the films made in Western Europe in the 1980s lamented the fragmentation and weakening of the working class, Poland at the beginning of this decade saw the production of a film that pointed to a different trajectory: from fragmentation and weakness to unity and strength. This was Andrzej Wajda's *Człowiek z żelaza* (*Man of Iron*, 1981), a sequel to *Man of Marble*. This consolidation takes place around the traditional centre of working class struggles: the factory, in this case a shipyard on the Baltic coast of Poland. The film documents the triumph of Solidarity in 1980, which, albeit interrupted by the martial law of 1981, ultimately led to the crumbling of crude communism in the whole socialist bloc at the end of the 1980s. In hindsight, Wajda's film also foretells the ascent of a new, neoliberal and patriarchal order in Poland, which occurred after 1989. Ironically, Polish workers triumphed when their British counterparts suffered the greatest defeat in their postwar history. This irony was strengthened by the fact that at the time the bulk of Polish strikers heralded Margaret Thatcher as a hero and Britain under her rule was regarded as a model that Poland should follow as soon as communism fell.<sup>4</sup>

As Valerie Bunce observes, it was no accident that Poland laid the groundwork for the subsequent collapse of socialism. This was thanks to the relative success of earlier protests in Poland, such as in 1956 (unlike in Hungary), the lack of experience of Soviet intervention (unlike in neighbouring Czechoslovakia) and

the strength and autonomy of the Catholic Church (unlike in any other country of the Soviet bloc), which allowed for the flourishing of antigovernment opposition in Poland (Bunce 1999a: 32). Wajda does not refer to the first two factors, as his goal is not to show the relative freedom but the deprivations Poles suffered, but he does draw attention to the moral power of the Catholic Church.

The main theme of *Man of Iron* is creating Solidarity, a movement in which Polish society is unified against the authorities and which, through strikes and negotiations with the government, succeeds in breaking the communist monopoly of power first in the workplace and then in the public sphere at large. This movement is encapsulated by the figure of Maciek Tomczyk, the son of Mateusz Birkut, the 'man of marble' of Wajda's previous film and Agnieszka's husband. The film takes the form of a series of retrospectives, which demonstrate Maciek's maturation from a young student, concerned with what was regarded as 'student issues', such as freedom of speech, to a worker who cares about the whole country. As Kristi Long observes, Maciek exemplifies the union of the working class and the intelligentsia in his person as well as in his personal relations:

*He is a university student who becomes a worker and marries an intelligentsia filmmaker (and KOR-style activist). The turning points in Tomczyk's life are moments of crisis in which there is a refusal of solidarity ... Early in the film, we see Tomczyk demonstrating as a student in 1968 and his worker father refusing to support the student demonstration. Two years later, Tomczyk and his fellow students stand by as shipyard workers' strikes on the Baltic coast turn violent. Tomczyk's father is among the victims. His father's death provokes a crisis in Tomczyk's life, and he abandons the life of the intelligentsia to work in the Gdansk shipyard. Fragmented, Tomczyk is first an intellectual, and then a worker. As a worker, though, he becomes unified with the liberal intellectual opposition (i.e. KOR, ROPCIO) in his marriage to an opposition filmmaker. She guides him into the life of the Free Trades Union activist in the 1970s. Transformed into an icon of the unified Poland, Tomczyk becomes the centre of the Solidarity movement. (Long 1996: 164–65)*

Almost everybody in the film identifies with Maciek's plight and his final triumph, marked by the signing of an agreement between the government and Solidarity, which allows for the official existence of the workers' union. His success is rendered as a victory for all working people, confirming the reading of Solidarity as

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‘the twentieth century’s response to the Paris Commune’ (Burawoy and Lukács 1992: 115). Yet foregrounding Maciek’s story is at the expense of sidelining other characters, most importantly women. As many authors have observed, the role of Agnieszka in *Man of Iron* is hugely reduced in comparison with *Man of Marble* (for example Roszkowska 1992; Falkowska 1996; Mazierska 2002; Ostrowska 2006b). At the time of the strikes in Gdańsk, which transform Maciek into an icon, she is imprisoned and cannot participate in the antigovernment conspiracy or become a media celebrity. Wajda foregrounds the role of ‘real’ male politicians such as Wałęsa, but cuts out from his story well-known female Solidarity activists, such as Alina Pienkowska and limits the role of other Solidarity women to the preservation of the memory of earlier struggles (Long 1996: 165–66; on Pienkowska’s role in Solidarity see Starski 1982: 238).<sup>5</sup> The masculine character of *Man of Iron* is sealed by the fact that the part analogous to that of Agnieszka in *Man of Marble*, of the investigator of the country’s past, is given to a man: a radio journalist called Winkel. In the summer of 1980, Winkel is sent to Gdańsk to collect material that would discredit Maciek.

Winkel is usually neglected in the critical discussions of *Man of Iron*, but deserves closer examination due to being the main character in the film and encapsulating a large section of Polish society who joined Solidarity in the 1980s and, no doubt, affected the course of Polish and European politics post-1989. Not unlike Maciek, he was a political dissident, involved in antigovernment protests, which led to his imprisonment. He was freed, but at the expense of working for the authorities. Nevertheless, he did not entirely lose his youthful ideals, as signified by his working on state radio, as opposed to television, where the pressure to conform to the official line was greater. Winkel also shuns promotion and at his work, somewhat schizophrenically, attempts to serve two ‘gods’: communism and anticommunism. We see it in an early scene of the film, set in a radio recording studio, when he first records a poem by a famous émigré anticommunist poet, Czesław Miłosz, recited by an actress played by Maja Komorowska (who was herself involved in anticommunist opposition), and then records a group of ‘ordinary women’ who read from a script about their opposition to the strikes. Winkel does not put much heart into either of his tasks, which testifies to the fact that such an inconsistent political position lowered the overall working standard in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Winkel also has a penchant for alcohol, most likely as a means to numb his discomfort from being ostensibly on the side of the authorities, while deep down feeling like a dissident.



The authorities allowed such closeted, half-hearted dissidence, regarding it as a price worth paying for keeping the citizens quiet. Yet, in a time of political crisis, as shown in this film, the danger that people like Winkel would swing towards the opposition increased. Various people attempt to ‘discipline’ Winkel, reminding him to whom he should be loyal. Their threats ultimately work and he is punished within the narrative for being two-faced, but this punishment comes when he is truly converted to the side of Solidarity. In reality, during the 1980s, as Slavoj Žižek observes, many party members, who were nominally on the side of the authorities, switched sides and joined Solidarity, becoming part of a heterogeneous ‘multitude’ (to use Hardt and Negri’s term), which led to the destruction of the ‘evil empire’ of the Soviet bloc (Žižek 1997).<sup>6</sup> The creation of the Polish multitude happened through comparing grievances towards the state and realising that they were systemic. This phenomenon was perfectly captured by the leader of Solidarity, Lech Wałęsa:

*The whole working society has a common denominator of losses and limitations. For the worker it means that he earns little and is cheated; for the writer, that he is not allowed to write or told to write as he doesn’t wish to; for the teacher, that he must say things that are untrue, that he does not believe in. Thus all are in some way oppressed by the system. (quoted in Singer 1985: 764)*

Wajda not only shows the victory of Solidarity but foretells and endorses what will happen once the victory is achieved, namely sidelining and new forms of oppression of women, of which a potent symbol became the anti-abortion law, introduced in 1993 and the dominant position of the Catholic Church in Polish politics and social life. This can be deduced from Wajda’s marginalisation of women, as previously mentioned. Unlike Mateusz Birkut who, although remaining a Catholic, assimilated Marxist values, his son comprehensively rejects Marxism, replacing it with his devotion to the Catholic Church. Ironically, the term used to name the anticommunist trade union, ‘Solidarity’, strongly evokes Marxist discourse – Marx himself talked about solidarity as the principle of the International and the main weapon of the working class against capital (Marx 1978b: 524). Yet for Maciek and the whole of Solidarity, the great hero of the working people is the Polish Pope, John Paul II, who was an ardent critic of Marxism. He was also a critic of the excesses of capitalism, and urged capitalists to be charitable; the call was answered by many neoliberal capitalists, yet without giving up their overall

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approach of expropriating surplus value. Nevertheless, he accepted people's right to private property, free trade and the capitalist organisation of the economy. Another sign of things to come is a positive representation of the West in *Man of Iron*, which functions in the film as the chief ally of Polish struggles to overcome communism and as a model to follow. Finally, Wajda represents the workers as a crowd that needs to be guided by the leaders. This idea is conveyed in the documentary footage included in the main narrative, in which the workers admit that they need wise leaders; without them they will not achieve anything. Unlike *Man of Marble*, which conveyed a profound distrust in the documentary form, *Man of Iron* transmits a seemingly naïve confidence in this medium. Such confidence can be attributed to the situation in the 1980s, when political and cultural discourses polarised and films and television programmes, as much as political speeches, were scrutinised for their truthfulness, measured according to how much they supported or rejected the communist rulers.

*Kobieta samotna* (*A Woman Alone*, 1981) by Agnieszka Holland is set at around the same time as *Man of Iron*, but offers us a markedly different insight into the material circumstances and consciousness of a Polish worker. Irena, the eponymous 'woman alone', works as a postwoman. Postal workers did not belong to the privileged section of the working class, because they did not produce, they only served and, being dispersed, hardly constituted a threat to the political authorities. For this reason they were paid less than shipyard workers or miners.<sup>7</sup> Although a postal worker is by no means a new profession, by choosing a postwoman as her heroine, Holland pointed to the future of the working class in Poland as being dispersed, mobile and thus having little chance to communicate with each other. Irena is, indeed, depicted in this manner. As Elżbieta Ostrowska observes, 'She is always seen alone, walking along long corridors, being observed by her colleagues, who are talking to one another gathered in two-or-three-person groups' (Ostrowska 2006a: 201).

Irena brings up an eight-year-old son; the child's father is serving a jail sentence and does not provide for his offspring. Unlike the higher echelons of the working class, who by the 1970s usually acquired cooperative apartments in newly built blocks, she lives in a room without running water or heating, in a house on the outskirts of town. Even in this modest place she does not feel at home, as another poor family hopes that she will move out, so they can take over her room. Clearly, in this world there is not enough room for poor people – survival is at the expense of one's neighbour. Irena is barely able to survive materially when she learns that

she has to move to a less attractive department. To add insult to injury, her hopes to inherit an apartment and savings from her aunt, whom she cared for all her adult life, are shattered. Moreover, neither the party nor Solidarity are willing to solve her housing problem; her loneliness and economic marginality render her marginal on their list of priorities. These organisations privilege the monopoly sector, as in the previous decades.

Abandoned by everybody, Irena asks herself 'Who am I?' and replies 'I am nobody'. In a sense, she is right, as her circumstances have stripped her of all resources. She has practically nothing and nobody, she has become a 'bare life', as described by Agamben. Yet love offers Irena a chance to escape from her predicament. She becomes romantically involved with Jacek, a man who lives less than modestly on incapacity benefit, being disabled after an industrial accident. Jacek is able to survive emotionally thanks to believing that one day he will emigrate to the West. For him the West is a utopian place, where, as he puts it, 'people are respected'. Of course, this utopia stands for what socialism failed to bring. Jacek infects Irena with his dream and to fulfil it, she steals money from work and embarks with Jacek on a car journey that is cut short when they suffer an accident. In a hotel where they stop, Jacek strangles her and proceeds on his own to the American embassy. There he threatens an employee that he will detonate a bomb if he is not granted asylum in the United States. As one might guess, the people in the embassy have no desire to grant him his demands. After all, the richest capitalist country in the world is hardly a paradise for disabled ex-workers. Thus Jacek's last source of hope is about to disappear. The ending, with a car abandoned in the middle of a journey, a woman killed by the only person who seemed to love her, and her lover about to be arrested, is symbolic of what Hobsbawm describes as the chaos, confusion and misery that happened after the affluence of the three decades of Keynesianism. In her unsympathetic representation not only of the communist regime, but also of Solidarity and the West, as noted by a number of authors (for example Marciniak 2005: 7; Ostrowska 2006a: 201) Agnieszka Holland was a unique figure in Poland. However, in this respect she was similar to many Western directors who since the 1970s have been scathing about the institutions and leaders of the left. She also predicted the growing mutual violence and exploitation among the working poor, as shown in films such as *Rosetta* and *The Dreamlife of Angels*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Authors writing about Holland's film noticed an accumulation of unattractive objects and tight framing. Such style on the one hand contrasts *A Woman Alone*

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to *Man of Iron* and, on the other, links it with many films of this and subsequent decades, for example those made by the Dardennes (see Chapter 5). It appears that Holland, in a postmodern fashion, privileges the ‘small narrative’ of a disenfranchised individual and cuts out a wider picture of political, social and cultural reality. Such a style reflects and, in some measure, facilitates the political fragmentation of the left, by denying it a grand narrative. In Katarzyna Marciniak’s view, Holland’s style, which ‘binds the audience gaze at the diegetic tonality of oppression and desperation’, renders the film very honest (Marciniak 2005: 7). Such an opinion reflects on the widespread tendency to link realism with the representation of misery and suggests a belief in an ‘ahistorical realism’ which, as indicated in the previous chapters, I do not share.

The idea that Polish workers are helpless when dispersed and lacking strong leaders, suggested by Wajda, is tested in two films by Jerzy Skolimowski, *Moonlighting* (1982) and *Success Is the Best Revenge* (1984), set during martial law, when the Polish march towards overthrowing communism was temporarily halted. However, Skolimowski’s films are not set in Poland, but in London, where the director lived in the first half of the 1980s. They can thus be seen as a bridge between two countries undertaking profound political change: Poland and Britain. *Moonlighting*, on which I will focus, shows a group of Polish workers, led by Nowak, who at the end of November 1981 travel to London to renovate the house of his Polish boss – the Boss. The Boss, played by Skolimowski himself, remains mysterious throughout the film, but he fits well the model of an *entepreneurchik*, a high representative of the political elite, the *nomenklatura*, who used his position to amass wealth and transferred some of his assets to the West, here represented by his house in London.

In order to fulfil their assignment, the workers have to live in appalling conditions in the very house that they are meant to renovate, work extremely hard to save for their families, as well as suffer isolation, due to not knowing the language or the people among whom they live. Being unable to manage the financial resources allocated to him by the boss, Nowak is forced to drastically limit their needs and their contacts with the outside world. He changes the time on the workmen’s watches so they think they slept more than they actually did, steals food from a local supermarket, as well as clothes and cosmetics from department stores, so that they do not need to spend any money on gifts for their families. During their stay martial law is announced, about which, however, only Nowak learns. He hides this knowledge from his co-workers, convinced that they

will work better if kept in ignorance. He tells them about the situation in Poland only when the renovation of the house is completed.

By showing the lives of Poles in London to be more miserable than if they had stayed in Poland at a time when there is ‘war’ at home, Skolimowski, in contrast to Wajda, who in *Man of Iron* exalted capitalism, suggests that this system offers Polish workers no hope. Under capitalism, or at least the version introduced by Thatcher, they will be treated more like slaves than they were under communism. We can see that the methods Nowak uses in relationships with his subordinates replicate the methods Polish authorities applied in their dealings with Polish society during the same period, and the methods neoliberal rulers employ towards the working class. They both attempt to lock the workers in their ‘home’, deprive them of any agency, restrict their access to information and cheat them. They also share justifications for their action, trying to convince themselves that by applying all these drastic measures they act in the best interest of the workers. By and large,



**Figure 4.2** Polish workers in London in *Moonlighting*

no matter whether one works for an Eastern or Western boss, the result is the same: exploitation and misery.

The period of martial law, when Skolimowski's film is set, in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, constitutes the last stage of the socialist mode of work, marked by privileging heavy industry and large-scale Fordist production. After the end of martial law, a shift could be observed in Poland, from Fordism to post-Fordism, from heavy industry to a service and knowledge economy, both in reality and in the official discourses on work. The workers employed in heavy industry were among the first victims of the rationalisation of the Polish economy, losing jobs in their hundreds of thousands, as well as numerous privileges granted to them by the previous system. The heroic figure of the miner or ship-builder was pushed from the pedestal to make space for the new heroes: managers and entrepreneurs. In not much time, manual labour in Poland had become 'the site of obscene indecency to be concealed from the public eye' (Žižek 2001: 133). Such undermining of the dignity of manual work is exemplified in *Moonlighting*. Nowak's 'brigade', working according to the rules: 'no strikes, limited freedom of movement for the work force, low wages' (ibid.: 134) became a model for the organisation of work in Poland in the years to come, and of the position of Poles working abroad. In this sense *Moonlighting* foretells Poland's postcommunist future.

Skolimowski's film is also prophetic because it draws attention to the physical distance between the places where, on the one hand, manual labour is performed and on the other, where it is planned, controlled and taken advantage of, which characterises neoliberal capitalism. He shows that the physical distance between the worker and the capitalist works to the advantage of the latter, because it frees him from direct involvement in class struggle and any moral or aesthetic displeasure such involvement might bring him. The 'dirty work' is performed by Nowak on behalf of his absent boss. Neoliberal society, not unlike a concentrationary universe, is thus rendered as a society in which the poor and the oppressed police each other for the sake of their masters.

Although London in *Moonlighting* is full of posters proclaiming the solidarity of English people with Poles suffering as a result of the military coup, the real British people in contact with real Poles come across as bigoted and hostile. In the end the London neighbours of the 'Boss' call the Polish workers 'communists' and demand that they leave England immediately. The director strips his characters of any agency or sense of tragedy; they come across as a nameless and passive herd, whose desires are reduced to animal needs, to preserving 'bare life'.

This unsentimental portrayal of foreigners' attitudes towards Poles chimes with that proposed by Agnieszka Holland in *A Woman Alone*, in which the American embassy shows no desire to help Jacek, but it poignantly contrasts with that offered by other Polish filmmakers tackling Polish migration in the 1980s, for example *Ostatni prom* (*The Last Ferry*, 1989) by Waldemar Krzystek and *300 mil do nieba* (*300 Miles to Heaven*, 1989) by Maciej Dejczer. In these films the host countries show Polish emigrants compassion and offer them practical help. This difference in approach can be attributed to the 'inside' knowledge that Skolimowski enjoyed when making his film, resulting from his living in London in the first years of Thatcher's rule. In this time he befriended some of the new Polish emigrants (such as Eugeniusz Haczkiwicz, who played one of the workers in *Moonlighting*) and lost his house in London, which forced him to emigrate again, this time to the United States.

### **Opera, punk, the old working class and the new capitalist**

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I mentioned at the beginning that the cinema of the 1980s, especially that produced in the West, comes across as a cinema divided between high-class spectacles and films that look rough, poor, even amateurish. The two most celebrated full-length feature debuts, respectively in France and Spain, *Diva* (1981) by Jean-Luc Beineix and *Pepi, Luci, Bom y otras chicas del montón* (*Pepi, Luci, Bom*, 1980) by Pedro Almodóvar, illustrate this division. Each film was associated with a profound political change in the country where it was made: Beineix's with the first socialist government in France for thirty-five years; Almodóvar's with the end of the Franco regime.

*Diva*, as the title suggests, concerns high art. Cynthia Carter is a famous opera singer and is regarded as very capricious, because she refuses to make records, believing that her performance only has sense when she sings for a live audience. Her position, challenged during the course of the narrative by her manager, can be linked to Marx's dichotomy of alienated and nonalienated work. Unrecorded performance approaches the ideal of nonalienated art, as it gives an artist control over the process of production, unlike work in a studio, where it is affected by and subordinated to the demands of the producer and the machinery of recording. It is nonalienated also because it does not lead to producing a material product, hence cannot become an object of exchange, although post-Fordism challenges

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this idea (Vishmidt 2010). Cynthia's choice to perform for the sake of performance also evokes Paolo Virno's concept of a 'virtuoso' (also in part inspired by Marx), whose activity finds its own fulfilment (that is, its own purpose) in itself (Virno 2004: 52–55). Finally, it brings to mind Walter Benjamin's concept of original art, furnished with 'aura', which disappeared in the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 2007).

Cynthia's insistence on performing without recording, which brings with it the risk of flooding the market with pirated versions of her work and losing a large chunk of her income, is a utopian gesture, expressing a desire to return to premodern times when art was not integrated into a regime of generating profit. But Beineix shows that Cynthia can behave in such a premodern way because she is a diva – her performances fill the opera theatres and pay for luxurious hotels. That said, she also behaves as a Fordist worker, for whom the time of work is clearly separated from that of nonwork, as shown in a scene when she asks to be left alone, because she wants to rehearse in peace, and her wearing different clothes at work and after work.

Cynthia's art is an object of utter devotion, indeed obsession by a postman, Jules, who follows her performances throughout Europe and illegally records her singing for his own benefit, which eventually puts him in trouble with the mafia. Fredric Jameson claims that Jules represents the old working class, with its Popular Front connotations (Jameson 1992: 77), but in my view, he stands for the new one: de-unionised and fragmented. Jules is better educated and has a more refined taste than 'a woman alone' in Holland's film but he is also ultimately helpless. When attacked by the mafia, Jules seeks help not from the representatives of the traditional left or the state, but from a capitalist named Gorodish. Gorodish encapsulates all the values identified by Boltanski and Chiapello as pertaining to 'reformed', 'cool' capitalism. Fredric Jameson describes him as a 'zen millionaire' (ibid.: 76). He meditates and listens to Third World music and is happy to devote his time to domestic tasks, such as buttering a baguette, which he treats as art. His name sounds Eastern or middle European (Powrie 1997: 109), connoting global, as opposed to French (national) capitalism. Jameson suggests that Gorodish got his fortune from the media. This might be the case, but we do not learn it during the course of the film. The point is that his financial operations are kept off-screen, as is the case with contemporary capitalists who enrich themselves through financial operations rather than industry. They might not even know how their capital is used. This fact also keeps safely off-screen any oppression that capitalist activities



involve, such as building sweatshops in Asia or destroying natural environments in South America. Gorodish is also a benefactor of the oppressed – he rescues Jules from the mafia henchman and he helps the Third World, personified by his Vietnamese girlfriend, Alba. Alba appears to be still a child, which might suggest colonial exploitation by Gorodish, but such suspicion is diffused by the way their relationship is depicted. We do not see any sex between Gorodish and Alba and they are represented as a happy couple, matching each other with style and sophistication. Gorodish allows Alba to be independent; she is even allowed to bring men to the huge loft she shares with him. Finally, unlike Jules and the police, who come across as clumsy in their operations, Gorodish gets rid of his adversaries effortlessly, traverses modern and postmodern spaces of the underground shopping arcades and the disused hangar with ease. He thus fully deserves to be in charge of the underprivileged of the world. Without people like him, we are to believe, they would perish, fighting with each other and incompetent and corrupt state institutions. The production of *Diva* coincided with the socialist ascent to power in France, as Jameson noted, and reflects on the direction the European left took in France and elsewhere in the 1980s by trusting, almost blindly, the new capitalists. The style of the film, with its fetishistic cult of the surface, typical for the ‘cinéma du look’, which *Diva* inaugurated (Harris 2004: 219–20), supports the idea that new capitalists are ‘cool’ and the rest of society should learn from them, and suggests that it is reconciled with the film’s glossy, ‘commodity’ status.

*Pepi, Luci, Bom*, along with another of Almodóvar’s early films, *Laberinto de pasiones* (*Labyrinth of Passion*, 1980) shows characters seizing an opportunity for artistic and cultural inventions. Although Almodóvar does not refer directly to political change as a condition of these inventions, those familiar with Spain’s history know that this is the case – Franco’s death allowed a new type of culture to flourish. This is, according to the director, a popular culture. Its value lies in uniting Spanish society, fractured by the divisive policies of Franco, and allowing those who were excluded from participating in art, members of the working class and women, to take active roles as art’s creators.

Almodóvar focuses on *movida*, a cultural movement that came into existence in the late 1970s and gained momentum in the first half of the 1980s (Allinson 2001: 14). ‘Movida’ means movement, although it can also be translated as ‘stage’. The word is also an ironic travesty of Franco’s party, *Movimiento* (Toribio 2000: 275). *Movida* offered an alternative to the existing trends in music, fine arts and cinema, and proposed new models of behaviour for young people. It promoted the do-it-

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yourself spirit of British punk, cultural recycling and all sorts of hybridity, including artistic and cultural mixing. Almodóvar himself did not passively observe movida's flourishing but became one of its leading figures (Allinson 2000; Toribio 2000), which is reflected by him playing small parts in his films, including the director of a competition for the largest penis in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*. Social barriers in these films either do not matter or are overcome in the course of the narrative. The rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, all gather in private places and public spaces to celebrate their freedoms, including sexual ones. In this world money matters, but it is rather easily obtained, for example by using a rich gay voyeur, who pays handsomely to observe a movida-style party from a window of his house, complete with the aforementioned competition. The party can be seen as a perfect form of nonalienated yet profitable work, in which not only does everybody involved get pleasure, but also surplus value is produced (money paid by the rich voyeur), which is appropriated and consumed by the 'workers' on the spot.

In *Pepi, Luci, Bom* Almodóvar also shows that this road of social advancement through art in post-Franco Madrid is open to those previously unprivileged. This is, however, because of the wide rejection of the values celebrated in *Diva*: originality, exclusiveness, professionalism, refinement, beauty, wholeness, putting in their place their reverse: the cult of reproduction, amateurishness, vulgarity, ugliness, fragmentation. Pepi, who lived off her father but suddenly became forced to support herself, finds work in the media without any difficulty. She sets up her own publicity company, designing adverts for multi-purpose underwear and sweating, menstruating dolls. She also begins to write a script about lesbian lovers, her friends, Luci and Bom. Although Pepi's career is overshadowed by romantic trials and tribulations, we are led to believe that she will succeed, as will Bom, who is a singer in punk band Bomitomi, and various other people belonging to their circle. All of them shamelessly reproduce trashy novels, imitate beauty pageants or model themselves on British punk. And yet the products of their work come across as fresh and captivating, as does the film that documents it, *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, which kicked off Almodóvar's career as one of Europe's best directors.

The idea that everybody can be an artist is reinforced in *Labyrinth of Passion*, as shown in a scene when Riza, a young man without any formal training or experience in music goes to a gig and replaces on the spot the lead singer who has broken his leg. Another example is Queti, the abused daughter of the owner of a dry-cleaning store, who has plastic surgery to look like Sexi, a musician daughter of a rich gynaecologist. After her operation, Queti practically becomes Sexi, able

to take her place in a girls' band. What Paul Julian Smith describes as the 'multiplicity of identities and their tendency to uncontrollable reproduction' (Smith 2000: 24), exemplified also by Sexi's father, who specialises in cloning, allows art to be accessible to people from all walks of life and, indeed, inescapable. This endlessly reproduced art is, again, not worthless. It reflects accurately on its times, gives pleasure, breaks social barriers and enriches lives. We also get a sense that there is no place for 'high art' in post-Franco Madrid. On the rare occasions when it is alluded to, as in an episode in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, when a dramatic actress appears during the concert, it produces discord.

However, with the passage of time Almodóvar's attitude to media and popular art has changed. In *Kika* (1993), media become associated not with emancipation, but with exploitation of the most vulnerable. Almodóvar's own films have become more lavish and polished, more like those of Beineix. This shift can be interpreted as a sign that popular art did not fulfil its emancipatory potential in Spain or that Almodóvar simply lost interest in it. Before it happened, however, he made one more unpolished film, *¿Qué he hecho yo para merecer esto!!* (*What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, 1984), which undermines the optimistic message of his movies discussed in this section.

### **Desensitised workers at Europe's margins**

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I already drew attention to the impoverished lives of Polish workers represented in the films of Holland and Skolimowski, approaching the condition of Agamben's 'homo sacer'. The resources and choices of the characters in Almodóvar's *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* and Aki Kaurismäki's *Ariel* (1988) have also diminished so severely that their lives become reduced to 'bare life'. This reduction is a function of the combination of multiple marginalities: economic, social and geographical.

*What Have I Done to Deserve This?* and *Ariel* are both comedies, but their humour does not result from adding something 'funny' and 'improbable' to the situations of their protagonists, but rather from the contrast between what was expected from life at the end of the twentieth century and what we see on screen. This contrast produces surprise and laughter, exacerbated by the fact that it appears to be overlooked by the characters, who come across as if desensitised to the misery that befalls them (on desensitisation of workers see Mihailovic 2013). What is shocking is represented as normal, which makes it even more shocking.

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*What Have I Done* is set less than a decade after Franco's death, among the Madrid poor. Due to its plot and visual style, it was compared to the works of Italian neorealism, a movement representing the Italian working class after the Second World War (Smith 2000: 58). No doubt there is a parallel between the predicament of the Italian working class following the fall of Mussolini in Italy and the Spanish working class after Franco.<sup>8</sup> Both groups were particularly disadvantaged by the totalitarian authorities and improvement in their situation was slower than among other groups. Gloria, the main character, is married with two children and lives with her family in a drab apartment on a working class estate in Madrid, at the city's periphery, near a motorway. She works as a cleaner, does all the housework and occasionally assists her prostitute neighbour. Gloria usually goes to offices and private houses when nobody is there and even when there are other workers or customers, they treat her as if she were invisible or as a vehicle to fulfil their 'extra' needs. The film begins when she cleans the gym and is called by one of the men who subsequently has sex with her in the shower. He does not talk to her, does not even ask her name, as if for him she is less than a prostitute. This situation is repeated at home. Nobody asks what Gloria wants; she is only there to fulfil their needs: feed them, clean the house and provide sexual services for her husband Antonio. Antonio, who works as a taxi driver, does not help Gloria with the housework and nor does he give her any money – to get it, she has to steal it from his purse.

Gloria takes any work available, but she never earns enough to meet the basic needs of her family, of which a poignant sign is an empty fridge. The similarity between drudgery and the lack of appreciation and visibility she suffers at work and at home renders her life an unhappy continuum.<sup>9</sup> In this way she fits the model of a post-Fordist worker: flexible yet alienated, overworked yet poor. She even decides to sell her son Miguel to a paedophilic dentist, prompted by her realisation that he will have a better life with the wealthy pervert than with his own mother. This act demonstrates that in order to eke out a living, for those with bare life it is not enough to work, however hard. They have to extract surplus from their own lives or those of their families: exploit themselves. Although selling one's child is regarded as one of the gravest crimes a woman can commit, we do not see Gloria pondering on her act. She comes across as desensitised from everything she experiences (which is the main source of the film's dark humour) and to sustain this state, she uses cheap drugs, snuffing detergents and taking prescription pills. Numbness is a coping strategy for her condition of being a 'homo sacer'. However,

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while it helps her to survive materially, it further robs her of humanity. Gloria is not alone in accepting this reality of forcing poor people to exploit themselves and each other. Her son, whom she sold to a paedophile, accepts this solution with matter-of-fact sobriety, making sure that his new ‘father’ meets his material requirements.

Why is Gloria so unfortunate? An important factor is Franco’s legacy. This is evoked by Gloria’s admitting to being illiterate. At the time the film was made Spain had the highest level of illiterate women in Europe and the lowest percentage of those working outside the home or having positions of power. This resulted from patriarchy and severe exploitation of the working class under Franco’s regime, facilitated by the position of the Catholic Church, which entrusted women with the responsibility of safeguarding the morality of their families and spending their husbands’ money wisely while giving them practically no rights (Coverdale 1979; 130–33; Montero 1995: 381). Antonio, with his laziness and conviction that he is entitled to everything women are not, comes across as an eponymous ‘Francoist man’, as are all other men with whom Gloria enters any relations. If we are to believe Almodóvar, this despicable position of working class women was not reversed by the time he made his film.

The entire environment in which Gloria moves comes across as a concrete desert, with identical-looking, soulless blocks of flats, no greenery and no cultural facilities. In this neighbourhood the apartment of Gloria’s prostitute friend Cristal looks like an oasis of warmth and beauty, and Cristal herself ‘seems almost respectable’ (Allinson 2001: 53). The only sign that somebody ‘from outside’ cares about this environment is a camera crew shooting a film on Gloria’s estate. This ‘Godardian moment’, as Almodóvar himself put it, is typically represented as a sign of Almodóvar’s postmodern sensibility, of his distrust in the power of cinema showing life as ‘it really is’ (Smith 2000: 51). However, such a moment might also suggest Almodóvar’s allegiance to ‘committed’, political cinema, which attempts to document and intervene in social reality, in the vein advocated by Comolli (see Chapter 1). The very fact that Smith mentions Godard in this context, namely a director who never ceased making ‘political films politically’, points to such an interpretation.

*Ariel* begins with the destruction of a coalmine in Lapland. Although the reason for such action is not provided, we can deduce that Finland’s coalmining stopped being profitable, economically and politically, and was outsourced, possibly to South America, which is evoked later in the film. The remaining part of the movie

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presents the human cost of closing the mine and introducing neoliberal policies in Europe. Two workers, possibly father and son, react differently to the news about their redundancy. The father commits suicide (as Henri would later attempt in *I Hired a Contract Killer*), thus confirming the idea that the unemployed are waste. He leaves the younger man, Taisto, his Cadillac, a typical sign of the eccentricity of Kaurismäki's 'travellers' (Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006: 18–20), but also of a relatively high standard of living of industrial workers in the old monopoly sector.

After collecting his redundancy payment, Taisto travels in his car to Helsinki, seeking a better life there, but this hope is not fulfilled. His new life is full of misfortune and misery. His money is stolen, most likely by somebody driven to the world of crime by unemployment. The only employment Taisto can find is casual work in a shipyard, shown to be very dangerous, as workers perish in industrial accidents day after day, which can be seen as an effective way of dealing with surplus population. Yet even this work dries up and Taisto has to sell his most precious possession – his car. When at risk of becoming homeless, he attempts to retrieve his money from a man who stole it from him, and ends up in jail. If not for a conflict with a prison warden, living behind bars would almost make Taisto happy because prison is a 'Fordist universe'. Here the inmates have to follow specific routines, including working in an old style factory for prescribed hours. In return, they have a place to live, enough to eat and from time to time can even meet their loved ones. Nevertheless, encouraged by the man with whom he shares a cell, Taisto decides to escape, sentencing himself to more anguish and an uncertain future. Taisto's trajectory is that of being gradually stripped of his possessions until he is reduced to his bare body. The ex-miner reacts to misfortune in the same impassive way as Gloria; his desensitisation can be seen as a strategy for coping with adversity. That he is 'bare life' incarnated is also revealed by his negative answers to a series of questions he is asked in prison: 'Address?' 'None.' 'Closest family members?' 'None.' 'Previous convictions?' 'None.' Yet precisely thanks to the lack of any distinctive features, Taisto acts as a kind of common denominator of humanity and his plight evokes the idea of human rights, of universal entitlement to a minimal welfare, which is universally accepted but without providing any framework for implementing it.

The only happy event in Taisto's existence is a romance with a single mother, Irmeli. Irmeli's life is also hard, but while neoliberal politics caused the miner to be unemployed, it caused Irmeli, like Gloria, to be overworked. She juggles several jobs, all of them 'flexible': she is a cleaner, a car park attendant and a machine

operator in a meat factory. The flexible character of these jobs does not allow her to be creative, but only maximises her exploitation by allowing her employers to colonise her time to the extreme. Flexibility requires mobility, but this only adds to her constraint. She has no time to develop any interests, shop or cook; if she wants to fall in love, she has to do it during working hours, because she has no spare time for private passions. Such a gruelling routine is a correlate of neoliberal politics, consisting of lowering wages and encouraging consumption and, hence, debt, as demonstrated by the fact that everything in Irmeli's apartment is purchased on credit. Debt ensures that Irmeli and others like her will never free themselves from the clutches of their invisible masters, and it minimises the danger of political action on their part.

Yet Irmeli is not desensitised; she supports Taisto during his ordeal and helps him to escape from jail. Together, on a ship named 'Ariel', they sail to Mexico. The name 'Ariel' can be interpreted as a reference to an essay of the same title, written by Uruguayan author José Enrique Rodó Piñeyro in 1900, which draws on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In it, Ariel represents Latin America, whose spiritual values are contrasted with the crude materialism of North America (which neoliberal Europe adopted) (Jon 2007). Yet Kaurismäki is far from suggesting that



**Figure 4.3** Escaping the fate of 'homo sacer' in *Ariel*

Taisto and his new family would find these values in South America. We are rather to believe that preserving their 'bare lives' there would be a success.

### Defending 'our gulag'

I mentioned earlier that in the 1980s censorship in socialist countries was eased, which allowed filmmakers to touch upon previously taboo subjects or represent them in a bolder way. *Kornblumenblau* (1988), directed by Leszek Wosiewicz and *Kholodnoe leto pyatdesyat tretogo* (*Cold Summer of 1953*, 1987) by Aleksandr Proshkin are fruits of this new approach. Wosiewicz's film concerns life in a Nazi concentration camp, and in line with 'camp tradition', focuses on a single character, a young Polish man named Tadek, an engineer and a musician, who is sent to the camp as punishment for an anti-Nazi conspiracy. Yet Wosiewicz's film diverges from the earlier filmic accounts of camp existence made in socialist countries by representing it in a naturalistic way. An example is an 'initiation rite' consisting of shaving men's pubic hair and a nail pricking the protagonist's bottom after his photograph is taken. We are continuously exposed to naked male bodies, tormented, as well as used for (homo)sexual pleasure. The camera focuses on bodily functions: eating, defecating, vomiting, copulating, in other words, on the bare life of the inmates. Fittingly, the camera is situated near the floor, so as not to miss the lower parts of their bodies. Wosiewicz's interest in the body – trained, disciplined and tormented – chimes with the ideas of Foucault and Agamben, who argued that the body is the main subject of modern (bio)politics. Wosiewicz underscores the primacy of the body in the camp – the state of a body determines the way the prisoner is treated. Those with weak bodies are deemed worthless and disposed of.

Yet in this cruel and reduced world one can still progress or even make a career. Tadek's story is a narrative of his climbing the 'Auschwitz career ladder'. It starts, literally, at the bottom of the human pile and in a horizontal position. Tadek's first job is to take part in a medical experiment, testing an anti-typhus vaccine. Many inmates die as a result of being injected with typhus germs but Tadek survives and his life improves. This incident provides a pattern: Tadek enters a situation that proves deadly for many other prisoners, but he manages to survive thanks to a mixture of good luck and versatile skills. Each survival leads to an improvement in his work conditions and overall situation. After surviving the typhus experiment



he is moved to heavy manual work but thanks to being able to play the accordion he is chosen by a German kapo to entertain him by playing the titular German song *Kornblumenblau*. Although in due course the kapo leaves the camp to fight on the Eastern front, prior to his departure he makes sure Tadek is taken care of by another overseer and thus Tadek lands the privileged job of peeling potatoes for the Germans. The next stage is getting work as a waiter and a piano player, serving and entertaining SS men. Tadek even gets ‘camp money’ and is able to venture beyond the main camp to use the sexual services of female prisoners dwelling there. At this stage he lives in a bloc for artists that looks more like an army barrack with proper beds covered with bed linen. Each step, however, brings not only advantages, but also unpleasant surprises. The worst moment comes when he is punished for not informing his superiors of the escape of some prisoners working in the kitchen and ends up in a hunger bunker.

Tadek’s progression is depicted against the wide panorama of camp life. Wosiewicz oscillates between close-ups and long takes to allow us to see the connections between camp (macro)politics and (macro)economy and individual experience. We see different types of productive work, such as on a construction site, in service, in the kitchen or a restaurant, in transport, professional work, in an accountancy office and finally semi-artistic and artistic work, as a photographer and painter, performing in a small orchestra and playing solo on various instruments. Much of the work is a form of torture, as it is done under duress, in haste, without paying attention to the quality of the final product. However, on occasion prisoners enjoy their work. This happens when they are promoted, for example from work on the construction site to the kitchen. On this occasion work is described as ‘pure heaven’. They also enjoy their work when they manage to cheat their superiors by stealing food from the restaurant or spitting into the soup served to the Nazis. Most importantly, however, the film shows pleasure yielded to prisoners by holding positions of power: giving orders to fellow prisoners and managing their work. This almost absolute power renders kapos sadistic and vulgar – as sadistic and vulgar as the Nazis were portrayed in the earlier ‘camp films’. One prisoner with a Star of David on his striped suit ecstatically rides a cart, pulled by a group of fellow prisoners, who are driven by him with cries and a whip.

The camp in *Kornblumenblau* looks practically like a self-governing world, with the inmates ensuring that it works to their invisible masters’ satisfaction. Although we see walls with barbed wire at the beginning of the film, most of the time it looks like an open city, with normal streets, whose inhabitants clear snow in winter and

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decide for themselves how to organise their lives. Such a representation, coupled with the epigraph from Montaigne pronouncing that one always plays roles in one's life, encourages us to see in this film not only a description of a specific, camp experience, but a metaphor of living under any circumstances, because under every circumstance one has to perform and conform (Wróbel 2000). However, the fact that conformity is achieved mostly by what Foucault describes as technologies of the self and the enforcement by the camp's lower and middle-management, shows a special affinity between 'Wosiewicz's camp' and the neoliberal, post-Fordist world. Another point of correspondence between these two systems is the lack of any political activity on the part of the prisoners or, indeed, the camp's leadership. Nobody talks here about communism, Nazism or patriotism. Nobody mentions Hitler, Stalin or any other leader. Politics is all but forgotten amongst the camp's routines. This interpretation is confirmed in the last episode of the film, showing that the Germans, who forced Tadek to play their favourite 'drunken' song on the accordion, 'Kornblumenblau', have been replaced by Russians, who have brought with them to Poland their most beloved song, 'Kalinka', and teach it to Tadek and others like him. The passage from a Nazi to a Stalinist order feels somewhat regressive, as it means being thrown out from an almost mastered universe and having to start again from the beginning, learning to fight for the positions of power in the new order. Taking into account that Wosiewicz's film had its premiere only one year before the fall of communism in Poland, it can be regarded as a premonition of the Soviet rule being replaced by a new, neoliberal regime.

Superficially, *Cold Summer of 1953* fits the trend of films condemning the Stalinist past, as it focuses on the fate of two men who found themselves in the gulag not because of their vices but because of their virtues, such as fighting against the Nazis during the Second World War. Yet, contrary to expectations, Proshkin's gulag is not a bad place. It is not a prison, but a village, primitive, yet beautiful, on the edge of a huge lake (possibly Baikal), made of wooden cottages. The use of long takes underscores the pristine landscape, untouched by modernity. Its inhabitants are not punished with hard work, but practically left to their own devices and they take advantage of living in autarky – doing enough to ensure their physical survival and having time to enjoy lengthy, philosophical conversations. This is a male world, where men are served by women, who cook and do laundry for them. The crux of Proshkin's story concerns not liberating the inhabitants from the inhuman conditions of the gulag, but defending the gulag from intruders:

criminals freed from prison thanks to an amnesty, introduced after Stalin's death. The only man who proves able to stand up to the force of the attackers turns out to be one of the prisoners. His behaviour suggests that, although his life is hard, the future, encapsulated by the attack, is even worse. The sense that he defends something precious is reinforced by Proshkin's framing his story in the conventions of a western. The narrative brings to mind *High Noon* (1952) by Fred Zinnemann, with the brave prisoner looking more like Henry Fonda in *My Darling Clementine* (1946) by John Ford than a Soviet captain (Brashinsky 1992: 324).

Proshkin's film can be read allegorically as an expression of anxiety about the future of the 'land of gulags', the Soviet Union. This anxiety is justified in the light of Gorbachev's reforms and, subsequently, the dismantling of the Soviet Union. As Michael Brooke argues, quoting the poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, the choice left for Russians, as presented by Proshkin, appears to be either submit to brutal totalitarian rule or allow crime to flourish unfettered. And by positing the latter as the logical consequence of removing the former, *Cold Summer of 1953* prophesied the period following the collapse of the USSR just three years after its release (Brooke 2007), when 'mafia capitalism' replaced socialism. Proshkin suggests that the older system was better, even for those who were its principal victims.

### Leisure without pleasure

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In the seminal book on British cinema of the 1980s, *British Cinema and Thatcherism*, *Withnail and I* (1986), directed by Bruce Robison, is mentioned only in an essay by Leonard Quart, who lists it, alongside John Boorman's *Excalibur* (1981) and *Turtle Diary* (1985) by John Irvin, as films 'untouched by Thatcherism' (Quart 1993: 25). Other authors, primarily on account of the fact that it is set at the end of the 1960s, discuss it in the context of the 1960s counterculture (for example Self 1995; Smith 2005). A 1960s reading is also encouraged by its use of costumes (Smith 2005) and even by its financial backing by Handmade Films, a firm owned by 1960s cultural icon, George Harrison. For me, however, *Withnail and I*, as with all historical films, reflects more the time when it was made: the 1980s in this case, and the film even discreetly professes Thatcherite values.

Withnail and 'I' (or Marwood, as he is described in the script) live in London, in a Camden town flat and do not work. Yet they are not drop-outs who shun any remunerative activity, as the adherents of the 1960s counterculture did, but

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unemployed actors waiting for an opportunity to work. For Withnail and Marwood work is a privileged way of living, as promoted in the Thatcherite work ethos, yet being educated and not of working class origin, they do not want to take any job available, and especially not those pertaining to the working class. As Paul Dave observes, the film pervades an aura of upper class contempt for the proletariat, expressed, for example, by the grotesque portrayal of working class people visiting London pubs and cafés (Dave 2006: 112–15). Not only is there a clear class distinction between Withnail and Marwood on the one hand, and the working class on the other, but also between the two protagonists. Withnail's posture is distinctly aristocratic; he looks like Byron, drinks excessively and self-destructively, excludes women from his world and in a moment of crisis quotes Shakespeare.<sup>10</sup> The middle-class Marwood drinks less, is more humble and pragmatic in his dealings with the external world and for most of the film patiently endures Withnail's excesses. The relationship between these two men reflects Victorian and Thatcherite affirmation of class positions. Marwood's devotion to irresponsible Withnail bears a similarity to the devotion of Charles Ryder to Sebastian Flyte in *Brideshead Revisited*, and its screen version (1981), directed by Charles Sturridge and Michael Lindsay-Hogg, who also drowned his frustrations (resulting, however, from his homosexuality rather than the lack of a job) in alcohol. It is not an accident, in my view, that both *Brideshead Revisited* and *Withnail and I* were made during the Thatcher era. Although on both occasions the relationship between the men of different classes is depicted as a genuine friendship, it is not based on equality, but on the acceptance of superiority and impunity of a man of a higher class by a man of a lower class.

The pristine countryside of the Lake District, where the friends go, tired by their lack of prospects in London, is represented as a place where Victorian divisions prevail to an even greater extent than in London. Here the upper classes enjoy themselves, while the 'natives' work and attempt to minimise the damage caused by the unwanted visitors, although some of the natives are also well-to-do. There is little communication between the guests and the villagers and Withnail puts the natives off by his arrogance. When asked by a café proprietor to leave the premises due to being drunk, the man from London protests that they are not 'drunkards, but millionaires', apparently regarding it as an excuse for offending the country folk. And yet, although Withnail and Marwood indulge in leisure, their leisure is without pleasure, because even if they nominally live in the 1960s, they belong to the 1980s. Their leisure has no support in any ideology alternative to

capitalism (cooperative socialism, ecology, New World, psychedelia). Instead, they identify with two ideologies and lifestyles embraced by Thatcherism: one pertaining to the old rich, in the case of Withnail, one to the new entrepreneurial ethos, in the case of Marwood. This latter attitude is also embraced by their friend Danny. Although he is a tattooed drug dealer, whom we can take for a hippie, he presents himself not as somebody who opted out of materialistic society, but as a man who aspires to reach its higher rungs, only using short cuts by trading in risky goods. This is seen when Danny informs Withnail and Marwood of his new toy-making business, showing them a doll, the head of which comes off to reveal hidden drugs. This episode bears similarity to the way Salim in *My Beautiful Laundrette* went about his business of smuggling drugs. It is only natural that the film finishes with Marwood getting a job as an actor, embracing Thatcherite values and Withnail drifting off, in the 'best British aristocratic tradition' of Waugh's Sebastian Flyte. This is because for somebody like Marwood there is no alternative to paid employment, while the Withnails could still rely on the helping hand of their parents and uncles.

The hypothesis as to whether 'we', who have no inheritance or rich uncles, can survive in the 1980s is tested in Agnès Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabond*, 1985). At the same time, the film allows us to see the differences between England and France of the 1980s, with the second being somewhat behind in the race to the neoliberal ideal of total privatisation, financialisation and commodification. The main character is Mona, a young homeless woman, wandering through southern France in winter with a backpack containing a tent and a sleeping bag. Mona eventually freezes to death in a ditch and her body is found by a rural worker. The film takes the form of an investigation into Mona's identity, most likely conducted by the director herself. She interviews people who encountered the young woman in the last two weeks of her life. Mona talks about herself very reluctantly and the only words she uses to sum up her life are 'I move' (Smith 1998: 115). Such words convey the postmodern, flexible and fleeting identity, as theorised, for example, by Bauman (1996). Mona was a secretary who hated her bosses and work. We can guess that she chose life on the road to escape such a life, not unlike how nineteenth-century vagabonds tried to escape the life of factory toil (Pollard 1963; Bauman 2005: 7–8). At the same time she belongs to a large group of people who from the 1970s chose the life of marginalisation as an alternative to succumbing to a life lacking in creativity, flexibility and autonomy (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 174–75). In the 1980s, as represented by Varda, one could still exercise such

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a choice. For her female followers, such as Isa and Marie in *The Dreamlife of Angels* (which I will discuss in the following chapter), even life as a secretary is too beautiful to be true.

Mona's wandering through the French countryside is marked by occasional work, which allows her to buy food, find shelter and carry on travelling. Her occupations point to the choices available to migrant workers, such as rural work, sex work, washing cars and stealing. All of them come across as unsatisfactory, as they are only seasonal, poorly paid and involve subjugation to hierarchy, which includes male power over women. Nobody for whom Mona works treats her as an equal or gives her any rights. The leisure she enjoys is also very limited because there is no pleasure without money or a roof over one's head. Camping is especially difficult in winter, as is its alternative – sleeping in other people's homes – as nobody wants to keep her for longer than a couple of nights. The main reason why she is ejected or leaves 'voluntarily' is her rejection of the work ethic, professed by practically everybody whom she meets. They cannot stand the fact that she does not want to create surplus value and save for the future, but chooses to consume what she purchases or receives on the spot. Meaningfully, she is criticised not only by representatives of the capitalist classes (although she hardly meets any), but by those whom we might expect to be sympathetic to Mona's lifestyle, such as truck drivers, ex-hippies, servants and even fellow vagabonds. Their lack of sympathy points to the gap between supposed postmodern ideals and the prevailing values of Western society. As John Durham Peters observes, 'The nomad is explicitly a hero of postmodern thinking', but 'actual nomads arouse disdain and disgust from nation-states and their citizens' (Peters 1999: 36). This position is conveyed by the original title of Varda's film: 'Without roof or rights'. Having no roof automatically deprives the worker of rights; hence migrant workers suffer the greatest exploitation. To alleviate it, they try to exploit each other, as shown by a homeless man (possibly a middle-class drop-out) who dreams about using Mona in prostitution or porn. The most sympathetic person to Mona's plight is a university professor, looking after diseased trees. Only she is able to save her, perhaps suggesting – too optimistically, in my view – that knowledge is the best defence against capitalist exploitation.

## CHAPTER 5

# The 1990s, the 2000s and Beyond

## Moving towards the Unknown

### **The age of mature neoliberalism**

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In Chapter 3 of my book I referred to David Harvey, who quoted Richard Nixon saying in the early 1970s that ‘we are all Keynesians now’. Harvey contrasts this pronouncement with the 1990s, when ‘both Clinton and Blair could easily have reversed Nixon’s earlier statement and simply said “We are all neoliberals now”’ (Harvey 2005: 13). In the case of Blair, this was symbolised in 1995 by his winning a battle over the abandoning of Clause IV in the Labour Party constitution, which had committed the party to national ownership of key industries. These Western leaders were joined by their Eastern counterparts, who, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, embarked on a programme of privatisation of state-owned assets, encouraging the accumulation of private capital and luring foreign investment by curbing the power of trade unions.

There is a paradox in the fact that the workers’ revolt in the 1980s, epitomised by the Solidarity movement in Poland, ultimately led to the defeat of the forces that were at the forefront of this revolt. But such a paradox is not exclusive to Poland or the socialist world at large. As I argued in the previous chapters, the workers’ revolt of the late 1960s in the West also facilitated neoliberalisation, leading to the undoing of the industrial working class and to the disciplining and pauperisation of the middle class. How does one explain the repetition of this trajectory, albeit in a different setting? According to one theory, neoliberal (‘pure’) capitalism was what the striking workers and their leaders genuinely wanted, regarding it as a highly superior system to the crude communism they had previously endured (Eyel, Szelényi and Townsley 1998). There is thus no contradiction between what happened in 1989 and what followed in subsequent decades, meaning that everybody ought to be content and enjoy their new freedom to sell their labour power inside and outside their countries. Such a view is espoused by the ruling elites in practically all the countries in question. The second theory can be summarised as a ‘betrayal of masses by their leaders’ (Ost 2005), which is reminiscent of the common narrative concerning the situation of

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Soviet Russia after the October Revolution. According to the third theory, the labour-friendly Eastern European had no choice but to give in to powerful pressure from abroad to go the neoliberal way. As Valerie Bunce observes, 'We cannot understate the impact of this reigning ideology on the postsocialist world. With its weak states, shattered economies, and fragile regimes, this scared new world would seem to be unusually receptive to international guidance' (Bunce 1999b: 757), and the guidance was that 'there is no alternative'. Gay Seidman sketches an analogy between the situation in postcommunist Europe and countries such as Brazil and South Africa. There 'elected officials also came to power promising redistribution, and found themselves restructuring and privatizing instead' (Seidman 2007: 98). A few postcommunist politicians tried to preserve some vestiges of the socialist welfare system. In Poland, the prime example was Jacek Kuroń, the well-known dissident and the minister of social security in the first postcommunist government, who introduced unemployment benefit, popularly known as 'kuroniówka' and who is also remembered for distributing soup among the new (and old) Polish poor. Yet Kuroń's soup can be seen as an emblem of the neoliberal attitude to one consequence of its policies: growing poverty. Rather than regarding poverty as a matter for the state to solve, it renders it a problem for the poor themselves and for voluntary, charitable individuals and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, the end of communism in Eastern Europe coincided with a mushrooming of NGO and charity organisations.

The advantageous position of the forces of neoliberalism in the postcommunist world has been facilitated by two factors, which were also of importance in Thatcher's seizing power in the 1980s (see Chapter 4). One is the failure of the past, communist in this case, which is used to explain any current problems as the legacy of communism and to blackmail anybody who resists the neoliberal solutions as being reactionary. By blaming communists for the hardships of capitalism, the myth of 'real capitalism' could be preserved intact (Ost 2005: 72). The second factor is an ability of political elites to exploit identity politics along the lines of nation, religion, language, gender, sexuality and so on, to introduce neoliberal (class) politics (Ost 2005; Greskovits 2007; Seidman 2007). The most extreme example is Yugoslavia, where to facilitate their transformation from the old communist *nomenklatura* to the new political and financial elite, the communist authorities manipulated the citizens into accepting the break-up of their country and the war (Allcock 2000: 429–31). In Poland, on the other hand, religious bigotry, homophobia and restrictive abortion law promoted by the parties that promise



some economic redistribution and protection of the most vulnerable sections of the society has been exploited by politicians of neoliberal persuasion to present themselves as the only ‘civilised’ alternative to these ‘forces of backwardness’.

The consequences of the neoliberal march in postcommunist Europe, as in the West, are the concentration of income and wealth in the upper echelons of society and the concentration of poverty and insecurity at the bottom, although, of course, there are geographical differences within the ex-Soviet bloc. Russia and the Baltic countries lead the way towards unfettered neoliberalism, while Slovakia and Poland cling to some remnants of a welfare state and so far have managed to avoid the worst of the capitalist crises of the twenty-first century.<sup>2</sup> There are also some important differences between the old East and the West, which might never be overcome, such as a larger proportion of the population of ex-communist countries being employed in agriculture. But this fact only confirms Harvey’s view that neoliberalism is not uniform – it is different in the United States, Chile and China (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalisation is accompanied by a decline in the political and economic sovereignty of nation-states, as epitomised by Eastern European countries joining the European Union, with East Germany being the first to join this institution as part of a united Germany. The year 2004 saw the European Union’s biggest enlargement to date, with countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and the former Baltic Republics all joining. The ‘surplus of sovereignty’, so to speak, resulting from a weakening of the nation-states, is also transferred to an amorphous body that Harvey describes as ‘neoliberal elites’ and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri label ‘Empire’ (Hardt and Negri 2000), epitomised by nondemocratic and secretive institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which use ‘remote control’ to avoid confrontation with the disaffected masses.

Since the late 1990s we have also lived in a period of perpetual crisis for capitalism, resulting from the over-accumulation of capital and lack of effective demand. To quote Harvey again, this time writing in 2010:

*Real problems of finding adequate outlets for surplus capital began to emerge after 1980, even with the opening up of China and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. The difficulties were in part resolved by the creation of fictitious markets where speculation in asset values could take off unchecked by any regulatory apparatus. Where will all this investment go now? ... What spaces are left in global economy for new spatial fixes for capital surplus absorption? ... What*

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*new lines of production can be opened up to absorb growth? There may be no effective long-term capitalist solutions (apart from reversion to fictitious capital manipulations) to this crisis of capitalism. At some point quantitative changes lead to qualitative shifts and we need to take seriously the idea that we may be at exactly such an inflexion point in the history of capitalism. Questioning the future of capitalism itself as an adequate social system ought, therefore, to be in the forefront of current debate. (Harvey 2010b: 217)*

In this fragment Harvey echoes Rosa Luxemburg more than Marx, as Luxemburg regarded capitalist expansion as a conquest of the new markets: ‘accumulating at their expense and pushing them aside to take their place’ (Luxemburg and Bukharin 1972: 60). For Luxemburg, expanding capitalism prepares its own destruction, due to making further accumulation impossible and aggravating the situation of the working class to such an extent that it eventually rebels (ibid.: 60). Harvey, by contrast, is aware that an entirely dispossessed, thwarted and fragmented working class might be unable to rise; rebellion needs unity and strength (Harvey 2006b).

The continuous erosion of the welfare state and the onslaught on the have-nots are met with increased opposition. Political campaigns, rallies, marches, strikes and riots are on the rise. Typically they are an effect of mobilisation around a specific goal, such as protesting against introducing draconian emigration laws or changes in pension rights, and they are short-lived and lack charismatic leaders (Bucci and Tronti 2009). That said, there are also signs that new connections are forged thanks to new means of communication across geographical and class divisions, to prolong and give more shape to these protests. Such actions tend to operate outside the traditional organisations of the left and are rarely endorsed by them, for example the Labour Party in Britain, not least because these organisations created the very conditions of the protest by welcoming neoliberalisation.

The last years also brought debates about the future of capitalism, in which we can identify two principal positions. According to one, there is a need to return to Keynesianism, to curb the excesses of capital. According to the other, the accelerating crises are either a normal feature of healthy capitalism, which needs a fair dose of creative destruction to progress, or are an unfortunate aberration, but the neoliberal ideas should not be blamed for that, but rather external circumstances, such as too much state intervention in the working of the markets. Adherents of the latter position, who could be compared to the defenders of the

gold standard, as discussed by Polanyi, whom Slavoj Žižek describes as ‘market fundamentalists’, ‘demand nothing less than an even more radical implementation of their doctrines’ (Žižek 2009a: 19).

Even if one observes a growing disillusionment with neoliberalism, it does not feed into government policies. On the contrary, when I was writing the first draft of this chapter (summer 2011), the Greek government voted to approve the next wave of austerity measures and Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, announced that Italy would follow suit. In effect these changes, emulated across the whole of Europe, confirm the neoliberal logic of taking away from those who already have little, including their hard-won pension rights, to give to those who already have so much that they would not be able to consume it in hundreds of years. By and large, the current situation confirms the views of authors such as Rancière, Harvey and Tronti that ‘capitalism only produces capitalism’ (Rancière 2010: 135).

The ascent of neoliberalism, as I indicated in the previous chapter, was facilitated by technological changes, especially in communication and knowledge economy and conversely, neoliberalisation led to further changes in working practices. There is an immense literature tackling these links (for example Lazzarato 2006; Liu 2004; Rancière 2010; Gregg 2011) and it would be impossible even to summarise it. I would like, however, to point to the fact that new technology is effectively making workers the tools of their own oppression, forcing them to internalise guilt for being unable to meet the demands of their employment. Another effect of the technological changes is the increased speed of the circulation of capital, which adds to the privileged position of finance capital in comparison with other forms of capital, and is a factor in the acceleration of capital. To put it simply, the more immaterial is work and the ‘lighter’ the capital, the stronger is capitalism.

After several decades of hegemonic status, it is also clear that neoliberalism pertains to a specific form of popular culture – one driven solely by profit. It is not an accident, in my view, that the most commercially successful film of the last two decades, *Avatar* (2009) by James Cameron, can be regarded as a symbol of mature neoliberalism. It is extremely ‘over-accumulated’, boasting a budget of \$237,000,000 (U.S.), and successfully colonised cinemas across the whole world, displacing the local product, while preaching respect for otherness, nature and the need for the strong to protect the vulnerable. Equally, I regard it as symptomatic that the last two decades are marked by a decline in auteurist cinema, both as a

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production and promotion strategy and as an approach to studying cinema. As well as revealing a previously inadequate awareness of and insensitivity to the complexities of filmmaking, the shift towards non-auteurist cinema can be viewed as giving in to an idea that even in the sphere of artistic production individual talent is of secondary importance. Another media product that accurately captures the logic of mature neoliberalism is television shows such as *Pop Idol* or *X Factor*. They follow the same scenario, in which an ‘ordinary guy’ ruthlessly eliminates many competitors, as in a gladiatorial contest. Programmes like these inculcate viewers into the neoliberal world, where a few win a lot thanks to many losing everything. These changes pertain to Eastern cinema as much as to Western cinema and media at large. Focus on profit, deregulation and fragmentation, exacerbated in some cases by break-up of the countries, render postcommunist cinemas polarised and fragmented (Tsyrukun 2006; Mazierska 2007).

The new culture is also epitomised by what Marc Augé describes in his widely cited essay as ‘non-places’. In his view, we live in a world, where:

*transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps); where a dense network of means of transport, which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral. (Augé 1995: 78)*

Comparing the films from the 1960s on the one hand and the 1990s and 2000s on the other confirms this view. While the former come across as embedded in a distinct architecture, the locus of the latter are places of transit and ‘temporary abodes’. There is, of course, as Augé notes, a connection between the culture and identity of those submerged in it. Jean-François Lyotard, a thinker at the forefront of capturing social changes, in his late-1980s book entitled *The Inhuman*, aptly observes that the development of technology, characteristic of this period, does not lead to an increase of knowledge, sensibility, tolerance and liberty, but to their opposite: ‘a new barbarism, illiteracy and impoverishment of language, new poverty, merciless remodelling of opinion by the media, immiseration of the mind, obsolescence of the soul’ (Lyotard 1991: 63). Lyotard even goes as far as to point to the danger of becoming inhuman as a result of adhering to neoliberal logic

(which he describes as ‘development’) (ibid.: 2). Other authors, such as Lutz Niethammer, associate neoliberal capitalism with the world emptied of any new political projects and social ideals – with the end of history (Niethammer 1992). But, of course, there are others, like Francis Fukuyama, who regard it as a happy ending of history (Fukuyama 1992).

The theme of the inhumanity of neoliberal capitalism is a frequent motif of European films of the last twenty years. In contrast to the 1980s films, which pronounce that ‘something bad happens’, but are unable to find out what causes the problem, numerous films of the 1990s and 2000s attempt to account for systemic oppression suffered by people thrown into the neoliberal world. They give voice to the defeated characters or allow them to remain silent, if silence is regarded as more eloquent. They often turn to melodrama, in common with the films discussed in the previous chapter, but not to show that love is able to stop the economic tide, but rather to underscore the crushing force of economic circumstances and the need to unite beyond the borders of the family in order to counteract them. Melodrama, as O’Shaughnessy observes, drawing on seminal work by Peter Brooks, is also used to move beyond surface appearances, to allow for open confrontation between the characters and to restore moral legibility (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 132). For the same reason, some films discussed in this chapter depart from the realistic mode and move towards allegory. Many also revisit the past, but not so much as to nostalgically ponder on the ‘good old days’, but to draw lessons from history.

### **Scraping a living after the fall of communism**

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I shall begin my discussion with the films made in the Eastern part of Europe as this was the part most affected by the fall of ‘crude communism’. There it led to an increase in economic and social polarisation in the previously socialist countries, as observed in the West from the 1980s. Particularly strongly hit were communities built around the heavy industries, which were privileged during the socialist period, such as mining, shipbuilding and steelworks. I am emphasising the word ‘communities’ rather than workers themselves, because those who served them and were supported by them, their families and, to use O’Connor’s term, ‘competitive industries’ coexisting with them, experienced the negative effects of the neoliberal regime even more than the workers themselves (Kideckel 2002).

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Working class women, in particular, had to suffer the brunt of the shift to the neoliberal order more severely than men and they constitute the majority of migrant workers, whom Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild describe as ‘global women’ (2003).

I will list three types of narrative used to describe the plight of ‘useless people’. One is a ‘compensation narrative’, which I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Thatcherite cinema – stories about people who have very little and are tested by fate, but who triumph over their circumstances thanks to their nonmaterial resources, such as their essential goodness. The second can be described as a narrative of reduction to ‘bare life’; the third, resistance. Compensation narratives flourish in Polish postcommunist cinema (Caes 2005; Mazierska 2012b). Their ideological goal is to show humanistic concern for those who comprehensively lost out in the race for prosperity, while accepting the overall neoliberal framework in which they operate.

The most celebrated example of the compensation narrative is *Edi* (2002) by Piotr Trzaskalski. *Edi* is a homeless scrap collector who lives in Łódź, a city that before the fall of communism was the main centre of the Polish textile industry (known as the Polish Manchester), as well as a symbol of the Polish capitalist past. After 1989 Łódź undertook the same path as British industrial centres under Thatcher – de-industrialisation, leading to high unemployment and poverty. *Edi*’s situation is harsh, therefore the film can be regarded as an indictment of the capitalism that caused it. Yet capitalism is also presented as beneficial for *Edi*, as the ‘crumbs from the rich people’s table’ allow him to survive. *Edi* and his companion *Jureczek* virtually live on what the consumer society discards. The more affluent people buy and throw away, the more the dispossessed salvage. As *Edi* tells *Jureczek*, ‘There is no point looking for scrap on the estates where poor people live. We should go to the places where the affluent classes dwell.’ *Jureczek* himself is surprised that people throw away functioning refrigerators and television sets but, ultimately, he is glad that they do so, as wealthy people’s rubbish is their livelihood.

*Edi* survives emotionally thanks to a large collection of books, most likely also discarded by the new rich. His knowledge and good character, however, lead to further deprivation, when a local gangster asks him to tutor his sister for a final college exam. In due course the young woman accuses her teacher of raping and impregnating her. Her brother and fellow gangsters punish *Edi* by castrating him and forcing him to look after the young woman’s baby son. Soon the gangsters

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reach him again, upon learning that the baby's mother lied, and take away the child, leaving Edi with neither the child nor the physical ability to conceive one. The gradual dispossession of Edi of everything he has, and the ruthless, criminal behaviour of his masters can be viewed as a metaphor for the 'mafia capitalism' ruling the postcommunist world. Yet Edi does not fight with the status quo, but like a true saint he accepts his lot, telling Jureczek that he still has his life and he can do anything he wants with it. On several occasions Edi also preaches to his homeless friend that in a fundamental sense all lives are equal, because every person is unique. There is no point being envious of the success of others or trying to change the world. Capitalists should be allowed to go on amassing their wealth by dispossessing the poor, because in a fundamental sense such behaviour does not affect either those at the top or the bottom of the pile: they will always remain who they are. As in Leigh's compensation narratives, discussed in the previous chapter, Trzaskalski also reveals a distaste for 'new money', represented here by Polish gangsters. The house where the gangsters live is filled with tawdry ornaments and several large television sets. Their quantity and sheer size, poignantly contrasting with the lack of books in their house, draw attention to the superficiality and, ultimately, worthlessness of postcommunist culture. By contrast, the pristine landscape of Edi's home village, where the scrap collector moves for a short while with his adopted son, shot in long takes and long shots, is presented as a true treasure, to which Polish capitalists have no access. Such representation, by rendering the rewards of participating in postcommunist economy unattractive, and its most severe deprivations bearable, can be seen as advocating accepting the status quo. However, although *Edi* was widely praised for its humanism and accomplished style, rarely seen in directors' debut productions, the critics wondered if in contemporary Poland there exist people able to behave like Edi (Sobieszek 2002; Piotrowska 2002).

Other filmmakers were less eager to portray poor but content Eastern Europeans. Instead the norm shifted to showing how desperate they became after the neoliberal flood destroyed their livelihood, as in *Elvjs e Merilijn* (1998), directed by Armando Manni, *Lilya 4-Ever* (2002), directed by Lukas Moodysson, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), directed by Stephen Frears, *Rezervni deli (Spare Parts)*, 2003), directed by Damjan Kozole, *Grbavica (Emma's Secret)*, 2006), directed by Jasmila Zbanic and *Iszka utazása (Iska's Journey)*, 2007), directed by Csaba Bollók. A majority of them concern Eastern European sex workers. Their proliferation in cinema, as well as in press and literature (Goscilo 1995), can be viewed as proof

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that the ‘East moved West’: socialism was replaced by capitalism, as according to Marx and Engels prostitution is a common fate for ruined female proletarians, and a metaphor for the condition of labour under capitalism (Marx 1977).

Édes Emma, drága Böbe – vázlatok, aktok (*Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe*, 1992) by István Szabó inaugurated the trend about postcommunist ‘bare life’. The film is set in 1989 and concerns two teachers of Russian, Emma and Böbe. They live in a shared room in a squalid, cramped hostel and have to get extra work to supplement their meagre wages. They perform body work: Emma works as a cleaner and Böbe as a part-time prostitute. Böbe also auditions as an extra in a film that will depict a scene in a harem. The parade of naked flesh acts as an indictment of the new type of body discipline, replacing the earlier bondage of mind, and as a sign of a loss of individuality under the new order, despite its championing individualism. All women seeking this work are nurses or teachers, pointing to their miserable wages despite the importance of their work for the physical and cultural survival of society. To add insult to injury, Emma and Böbe’s human capital becomes obsolete following the crumbling of the Soviet Union. They have to undergo intensive retraining to be able to teach English – a transition acting as a metaphor for the reduction of the once proud socialist East, willing to export its allegedly superior communist system to the world, to the position of a humble student of capitalism.

Both women are able to survive emotionally thanks to their mutual support and romantic illusions. Emma is having an affair with the director of the school where she works, while Böbe hopes that one of the affluent men with whom she has affairs will turn out to be her prince. This, however, leads to her arrest and imprisonment for illegal currency dealing and prostitution, and finally to her suicide, by throwing herself out of a window, in a scene anticipating Marie’s death in *The Dreamlife of Angels*, discussed later in this chapter. The film ends showing Emma reduced to selling newspapers in a Budapest Metro station. Although the ending of the film is grim, the director claimed that it contains a kernel of hope because Emma is still alive. John Cunningham, who quotes these words, finds Szabó’s utterance bizarre, wondering how preserving bare life can be regarded as a happy ending (Cunningham 2014: 92). It is unacceptable in the context of socialist or humanistic values, which the film evokes, but under neoliberal conditions, whose birth in Eastern Europe *Sweet Emma, Dear Böbe* bears witness to, this indeed might be regarded as a success, because in this world only the fittest survive.

While Szabó renders the situation of Hungarian teachers as pertaining to the socialist East, Ulrich Seidl in *Import/Export* (2007) sees it in a wider, pan-European



context. He also illuminates the workers' resistance to the crushing neoliberal machine. His film tags onto the heels of two characters: Olga from Ukraine and Pauli from Austria. We see first Olga trudging through snow from her socialist apartment block to her work as a nurse, where she is only paid forty per cent of her wages. Seidl does not explain why her salary is reduced, but we can guess that this is a consequence of the budgetary restraint as a means to fight high inflation, for which the most vulnerable have to pay – the poor and the public sector. Olga works on a ward with newborn babies, saving prematurely born children. The fact that she and others like her are not paid adequately can be translated into the state's lack of care for its weakest citizens, as well as its future. We are thus faced with the neoliberal life-death economy, where the good life of the strong few is paid for by the death of the weak. Seidl also shows that by not being adequately paid for saving other people's children, the nurse cannot provide for her own baby.

Olga then undertakes different jobs, which, unlike work as a neonatal ward nurse, require her body rather than her mind. She tries her hand at internet porn, joining a group of Ukrainian women who respond to the calls of Western men. In this new form of colonial exploitation the employers are physically removed from the workers, yet in total control of their bodies for the duration of their sessions. Unlike viewers of old-fashioned pornographic films, who after buying a ticket to the cinema have no influence on what they watch, they can demand from the actresses specific behaviour, leaving them no scope for invention or showing their 'human' side. At the same time, due to the use of digital cameras, which are operated by the actress herself, it appears that she is the tool of her own abuse. As the customers pay per minute, they do not want to waste their money on looking at what they can get for free, such as the women's faces, or on following even a rudimentary narrative, but only to see the women's genitals in extreme close-ups, which apparently represent the best value for money. Consequently, in online pornography the rule that the performer's body is fragmented and reduced to its erotic parts (Kuhn 1985: 36), is applied in an extreme way. The final sign of the subjugation of the performer to a distant power is the request to speak her clients' language. Indeed, Olga loses her job because she does not understand the commands barked at her by the German-speaking customer. Leaving her child behind, Olga then goes to Austria where she works a number of menial jobs, again under the close supervision of her colonial masters, who do not lose any opportunity to humiliate her. Eventually she becomes a cleaner in a hospital for old and demented patients, as despite her qualifications she is unable to get work

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as a nurse. There Olga provokes the anger of her co-workers when, breaking the rule to remain silent, she attempts to make contact with the elderly patients.

Meanwhile we meet Pauli going through training as a security guard. Working in security, protecting private property against the attack of the ‘hungry masses’, became a paradigmatic job for the former male industrial working class. The move from production to security signifies the growing social divisions between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ and the use of the ‘have-nots’ to police other ‘have-nots’, which



**Figures 5.1 and 5.2** Olga's work in *Import/Export*

adds to the fragmentation of the working class. As with internet porn, this is a job that involves much more violence than the old-style work in service or industry, bearing a resemblance to the role of the kapo in Nazi concentration camps. Pauli turns out not to be fit for his 'profession' – he is fired after being beaten up and humiliated in a car park. Seeming to owe money all over town, he takes the opportunity to go to the East with his stepfather Michael, to sell outdated videogames. While Olga goes to the West essentially to serve, Michael and Pauli go to the East to exploit and penetrate. Olga goes as 'labour'; Michael and Pauli as 'capital'. This is underscored by the fact that Michael combines business with an encounter with a Ukrainian prostitute. Their session goes beyond ordinary sex services, as Michael asks her to behave like a dog; a scene that recalls Pauli's training as a security guard and Olga's training in internet pornography (Goddard and Halligan 2012: 181). Seidl, like Szabó, thus sketches a world in which work comes across as life-long learning, in which the worker never achieves the position of a craftsman who is a master of his skills, and which involves a high degree of violence. It is worth mentioning that life-long learning is a particularly neoliberal concept, whose advocates give it a positive spin by stressing its liberating potential. Its obverse, however, is a hidden demand to forever be capable of paying for new skills, and the ever-growing, and increasingly likely prospect of unemployment, and its 'educational', namely disciplinary role (Dooley 2011). Yet both Olga and Pauli resist the pressure to accept this inhuman logic, even if their resistance is purely personal and does not have wider repercussions. The extreme exploitation of a prostitute by Michael disgusts Pauli so much that he decides to leave his company. Olga resists the inhuman rule that she should not talk to patients, makes a real connection with one of them and fights back when one of the nurses attacks her in a fit of xenophobic resentment.

By showing the similarity between the situations of Pauli and Olga, Seidl illustrates a tendency for capital to become spatially homogenous. The more advanced capitalism is, the more it looks and feels the same both to its victors and its victims (Lash and Urry 1987: 85). Seidl represents this growing uniformity as a negative phenomenon, responsible for the lack of genuine culture in either Austria or Ukraine. The only type of culture available is mass culture, offered by television and the internet, which renders its consumers passive or 'cannibalistic', feeding on others' misery. The decline of culture understood in positive terms, and its replacement with one that is sterile and morbid is symbolised by a collection of stuffed animals in one of the houses where Olga works.

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Producing the same despicable conditions in the old and ‘new’ Europe and among people of different levels of education and types of occupation, neoliberalism (as previously state socialism) creates masses of disaffected people: in Ukraine and Austria, among nurses and industrial workers, and especially among young people. The challenge for those opposing the current system is to enable them to meet or, to use Harvey’s term, ‘fix them spatially’, so they can form new communities of resistance. On the level of diegesis this does not happen in *Import/Export* – Olga and Pauli do not meet, nor do they even learn about each other’s existence. Yet the fact that Seidl places them in the same film suggests that such a meeting might happen one day.

In a sense, Ken Loach’s *It’s a Free World...* (2007) synthesises the three narratives that I mentioned previously, drawing attention to the bare life of Eastern Europeans, experiencing the shock therapy of neoliberalism, pointing to love as something that can compensate for material deprivation and resistance to the forces of capital. The title of Loach’s film refers to equating the fall of the Berlin Wall with Eastern Europeans regaining their freedom. However, it is imbued with irony, because the new freedom means not only freedom to travel, but also to be exploited, as observed by Marx.

Loach’s main characters are two young owners of an employment agency, Angie and Rose, acutely interested in migrants. The pair make their living by finding casual employment for them. Of this group Poles are in a relatively privileged position because, thanks to Poland being part of the European Union by this point, they can work legally. Others, such as Iranians, have to arrange false documents and put up with despicable wages and working conditions. Nevertheless, all foreigners in Loach’s films end up being exploited by the agents, ruthless employers who take every opportunity not to pay them, the Mafia and the capitalist system as a whole. Moreover, Loach shows that exploitation carries ruthlessness and the need for revenge on both sides, an example being the Poles who beat up Angie and later kidnap her son to force her to pay them a large sum of outstanding wages. This can be seen as an act of political resistance by the new proletariat against the forces of capitalism, or as an act of self-exploitation, because the harmed workers take revenge on those who are in a position not much better than themselves. Of the migrants special attention is granted to a young Polish man named Karol, with whom Angie spends the night in the Silesian town of Katowice and whom she later meets in London. Karol is open-hearted and generous, despite being poor and unlucky. He helps Angie in her dealings with the

migrants and invites her to his caravan, where he offers her Polish alcohol. Handsome and articulate, he awakens sexual attraction in Angie. However, their romance does not blossom because, as the woman puts it, they met at the wrong time. This statement most likely refers to the fact that after numerous romantic disappointments and ending up as a single mother, hardly able to look after her son, Angie associates romance with trouble. The impossibility of their romance might also symbolise the insurmountable gap between the exploiters (even as inept as Angie is initially) and those who are exploited. Neoliberal exploitation, as shown by Loach, spreads and deepens over time. While at the beginning Angie is most interested in Poles (or rather their labour power), later she casts her eye towards even more desperate and work hungry people from the ex-Soviet Union.

Loach employs a *mise-en-scène* that conveys a sense of the restricted lives of the emigrant. Most of them live in a caravan park and such accommodation is depicted as desirable, as the alternative is squatting in cold, disused factories, or complete homelessness. The caravan park renders the lives of migrants claustrophobic and tightly controlled. The very space of a caravan is limited; there is hardly enough room to eat or sleep there. Moreover, the caravans stand close to one another, leaving practically no space for privacy. The caravan park is surrounded by a wire, which, on the one hand, serves as protection from hostile English neighbours, and on the other, marks its territory as a confined place, bearing a resemblance to a concentration camp. While the lives of the emigrants come across as restricted and claustrophobic, Angie and Rosie are extremely mobile. Angie in particular is always on the move, criss-crossing the whole of London several times a day on her motorcycle. The women are also in charge of vans that take the migrants to their work places; the workers have to wait there passively until the vans are full. Moreover, Angie and Rose ‘penetrate’ Eastern Europe, as shown in the last scene, where the two women are recruiting people from Ukraine to work in London. In accordance with his credentials as chief socialist realist in British cinema, Loach assesses this movement utterly negatively, as leading to the exploitation and misery of migrants and the lowering of moral standards on both sides of the divide: host country and donor country.

## Beyond bare life

While in the East, as shown in the aforementioned films, the condition of bare life befalls unprepared characters, in the West it is represented as the order of the day, as a permanent state. The challenge is to learn to live with it rather than overcome it. One such example, the full-length feature debut of television director Peter Cattaneo, *The Full Monty* (1997), concerns the case of unemployed steelworkers from Sheffield. The film begins with a kind of advert, which using documentary footage encourages viewers to work and settle in Sheffield, not much different from those advertising life in Nowa Huta, as presented in Wajda's *Man of Marble* (see Chapter 3). It shows this Yorkshire town at a peak of Fordism–Keynesianism, when it was prosperous thanks to the production of steel. The steelworks served as a springboard to other types of industry, such as building new housing estates in place of Victorian slums. Its success allowed for a rise in consumption and entertainment, enjoyed by the whole city. After this short coda we are transported to a period '25 years later'. At this point fiction cinema displaces documentary and the representation of the life of the whole city gives way to a story of only a handful of people. Framing fiction with a documentary suggests that the former is firmly embedded in the latter: the fiction is true. Or, perhaps, the documentary coda is meant to introduce irony into the film, suggesting that everything shown on screen is ultimately propaganda.

In the fictional part we see the empty shell of the old steelworks, from which two men, its previous employees and a boy who is one of the men's son, Gaz, attempt to steal some metal bars. Their theft, however, is interrupted by a brass band that passes the factory when the men try to load the bars. The brass band, consisting of factory workers, is a symbol of an old culture, pointing to the fact that the 'superstructure' (culture) might outlive the 'basis' (economic arrangement), a theme elaborated on in *Brassed Off*, which I will discuss later. It turns out that the thieves lost their jobs when the steelworks was closed. Other ex-steelworkers cast in the film include their old foreman, Gerald, who still pretends to his wife that he is working and every day leaves his house with a briefcase after breakfast. His inclusion in the group is a poignant sign that untempered capitalism leads to polarisation, transferring to the proletariat the bulk of those from the lower middle class.

Initially Gerald keeps his distance from those who used to be his subordinates, but eventually he joins them, as if to confirm that material situation affects class

consciousness, if not immediately, then after some time. The men recognise that the closure of the steelworks will lead to their extinction, not only as a class but also as physical beings. One of them reaches this conclusion earlier than the others and attempts to commit suicide, but is rescued by his ex co-workers and they form a small circle of mutual support. The men themselves link their demise to the rise of women's power. Such a conclusion is supported by their being surrounded by women apparently doing better in life than they, and taking over what they regarded as their space and property. They see that the men's club has become a women's club, and that Gaz's ex-wife lives in a detached house and is threatening to deprive Gaz of his paternity rights due to falling behind with child support. This antifemale sentiment is a replica of the antimale sentiment bursting in the wake of the late 1960s feminist movement, which was, as I argued in Chapter 2, a reaction to privileging the male-dominated 'monopoly sector'. On each occasion, however, the objects of resentment of the oppressed group are not those who establish the rules (the capitalist class and the government), but those whom the workers regard as their immediate competitors for capitalists' favours. Likewise, the film does not look for the real culprits of the characters' demise, but pits emasculated men against powerful women, which blunts and twists its political edge. We see that Gaz's son has become so used to the affluence provided by his mother and stepfather that initially he is scornful of his dad, who cannot afford to buy him a ticket for a Manchester United match or even the food he likes.

Yet the story does not end with the men perishing. Inspired by the Sheffield success of the Chippendales, the male troupe specialising in erotic dance, they come together and set up a Yorkshire Chippendales, whose act includes baring themselves completely (the eponymous 'Full Monty') in front of an audience consisting solely of women. As unemployed industrial labourers they have nothing but their bodies – they are only bodies. But rather than lamenting how low the men have sunk, the film shows that their work fulfils many conditions of nonalienated work. One advantage is the men's taking responsibility for the whole process of work – from planning to execution. We see the 'core' of the group auditioning additional performers, learning new skills, putting posters up for their act. They do everything together, practically without any division of labour or hierarchies. Unlike in the old-style leftist establishments, which were white and heterosexual, the group embraces heterogeneity. Among the performers there are gay men, an older man and a black man. Finally, they do not allow others to

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**Figure 5.3** Body work in *The Full Monty*

appropriate the fruits of their labour but plan to divide it among themselves evenly. Ultimately, their work gives the men purpose and pleasure, as well as providing the means for material survival.

*The Full Monty* is a comedy and Cattaneo respects its rules by furnishing his film with a happy ending, showing that the performance of the Yorkshire Chippendales attracts crowds of women. Yet he does not present the full show, as the frame freezes at the very moment the men are about to bare their genitals. Thanks to this discretion the performance comes across more as a traditional dance act than sex work, in this way tacitly admitting that the latter is degrading.

During the course of the film we see what employment opportunities await the 'Yorkshire Chippendales' if their stripping act is unsuccessful or if they decide not to pursue this particular path. Except from Gerald, who eventually gets a job as a manager, the career prospects of the remaining men are unappealing, financially and morally. Gaz is offered work for minimum wage in a factory, where his ex-wife works as a supervisor. The majority of ex-steelworkers are employed in security. One is guarding the empty shell of the steelworks and another gets a job as a guard in a supermarket. As I already mentioned, the move from production to security signifies the deep division of society and the need to police the dissatisfied masses.



Guarding the disused factory can be viewed as a purely ideological activity because its purpose is to prevent workers from salvaging what will be useless for the new owners of the factory. This fact illustrates a wider rule of neoliberalism: everything has to belong to somebody and even if the owners cannot put their property to use, it should be off-limits to those who might need it. This focus on security points to the contradiction of neoliberalism – although it preaches freedom, it has to rely on a huge apparatus of repression (army, police, private security firms) to ensure its existence (Polanyi 2001; Harvey 2005: 64–86; Hardt and Negri 2006).

Out of a group of six men only Gaz is a father and he fights to retain his paternity rights which he is about to lose due to his inability to pay child support. Such a situation, contrasting with that offered by Mike Leigh in the films discussed in the previous chapter, where the working classes and those on the left proliferated and the upper classes were rendered sterile, can be regarded as symbolic of the decline of the traditional industrial working class. It appears as if the working class drew the right conclusion from the fact that their reproduction would only lead to the production of ‘useless people’. Gaz intuitively grasps this situation but articulates it as a gender issue: instead of talking about the extinction of the working class, he talks about the extinction of men – because he equates men with the privileged monopoly sector of the industrial working class and this sector with the working class as a whole. In light of the fact that the working class (or men in Gaz’s sense) is sentenced to extinction, non-reproductive sex appears to be the best method of fulfilling one’s sexual needs, as proved by the immense popularity of the Yorkshire Chippendales’ performance and the gay affair between two of its members. On the other hand, the fact that Gaz manages to regain the affection and respect of his son during the course of the narrative and Dave overcomes the crisis in his marriage and his impotence might suggest that there is a future for the working classes. Such an optimistic message, however, can be attributed to the film’s need to conform to the convention of a comedy.

*La vie rêvée des anges* (*The Dreamlife of Angels*, 1998) was Erick Zonca’s first feature after many years of working in documentaries. Unsurprisingly, the film has a documentary feel, thanks to the use of a ‘documentary camera’, with many episodes shot on location and naturalistic acting, for which the actresses who played the main parts were rewarded at Cannes. According to the director, *The Dreamlife of Angels* was also rooted in reality as it was based on the lives of two women who he met, including one who auditioned for an earlier short film (Zonca 1999). His two main characters have struggled with their precarious positions

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practically since they reached adulthood. Isa is in her early twenties and moves from town to town with all her worldly belongings in her backpack. In her life as a traveller she resembles Mona from Varda's *Vagabond*, but unlike Mona, who chose life on the road because she disliked regular employment, Isa is moving from place to place because she has no home and no permanent job and she yearns to have both. Her life takes a turn for the better when she gets work in a textile factory and meets Marie, another young woman without a stable job. Marie allows Isa to stay in the flat that she is 'sitting' since its occupants, a mother and daughter, have been involved in a car accident. During this period they become friends and attempt to improve their lot, developing two distinct strategies. Isa reveals what can be described as a nascent socialist consciousness. She socialises with people of her class, such as bouncers working in a club for 'rich kids' and a girl who is doing another part-time job with her. Although her friendships do not lead to political activity, one can conjecture that this is where political activity begins: with exchanging grievances and having fun together. Isa also repeatedly reminds Marie about the importance of adhering to the principle of reciprocity and showing



**Figure 5.4** Isa searching for work and a place to live in *The Dreamlife of Angels*

solidarity with those who suffer. For her even bare life is a precious gift, as expressed in her last letter to Marie.

While Isa remains embedded in her social milieu of working class people, reduced to ‘flexible’ – and in reality precarious – employment and privileges friendship over love, Marie has an affair with a rich playboy named Chris, the owner of a club where Isa’s friends work. Chris, however, only exploits her, offering her neither emotional nor financial support, and eventually abandons her. He does not even have the courage to tell Marie that their relationship is over, preferring to simply disappear from her life, which is emblematic of the way bad news is conveyed to the working classes nowadays – by silence. It is only when confronted by an angry Isa that he admits his guilt. Isa’s verbal attack and his remorse is a small victory for the have-nots. For Marie, however, being abandoned by the man whom she loved is a final blow. She commits suicide by jumping out of the window, mirroring the fate of Szabó’s Böbe. In the last scene we see Isa in a similar scene as that shown at the beginning of the film – on her first day in a factory. This time, however, it is not a sewing factory, but one producing electronic components and she is not shouted at by a supervisor but praised for doing her work well, as if she has been doing the job all her life. Isa’s trajectory thus shows some improvement, thanks to both moving to the higher sector of production and being treated more gently. Martin O’Shaughnessy, however, interprets this scene as pointing ‘towards an alienation that has become so total that it can no longer be spoken of’ (O’Shaughnessy 2007: 84).

Isa and Marie’s different trajectories have much to do with their families. Isa remarks that her father left her mother for another woman when she was young. This fact inevitably affected her life prospects, as poverty befalls single-parent families more often than those with two parents, but it also made her stronger and more self-reliant. Marie had an abusive father who victimised her mother, which made her repeat her mother’s mistakes by falling for an abusive man. The film thus shows that for people like Marie the price of surviving is breaking with their family’s legacy. Yet this renders their situation even more difficult, as it means reinventing their lives with a lack of material resources and almost non-existent cultural capital. This lack is underscored by showing Marie as if she did not know what to do with her body, as if she had superfluous limbs. This contrasts with Isa, who is always busy, moves with a natural grace and usually holds something in her hands: a notebook, a tray of food or a pair of scissors. Comparing the young women brought to my mind a description of life in a concentration camp by Primo Levi.

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He maintained that those who kept busy and remained curious about the surrounding world, who refused to be reduced to bare life, like himself, had a higher chance of survival. Those who resigned, perished (Levi 1988).

In common with other directors discussed in this chapter, Zonca shows that for working class males, the most common available employment in the neoliberal world is in security, as demonstrated by the case of Isa's bouncer friends. Zonca is even more conspicuous than Seidl and Cattaneo in showing that a poor man's job is protecting the world of the affluent from the intrusions of the 'underworld', as we see the bouncers not allowing Marie, Isa or others of their kind to attend concerts and night clubs. Such security work has two advantages from the perspective of neoliberal 'masters': it insulates them from the unwelcome intrusions of the have-nots and prevents solidarity among the working class by making the proletarians inflict violence on each other. However, Zonca shows that the process can be subverted, for example by allowing those who have no ticket for the concerts to come in through the back door.

It would be difficult to omit *Rosetta* (1998) from this section, the most celebrated film about bare life at the centre of industrial Europe, made by Belgian filmmakers Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne, probably the most famous European directors documenting the dismantling of the working class by neoliberal conditions. We meet Rosetta when, despite her protests, she is sacked from her trainee job in a food-processing plant. The teenage girl is not made redundant because she works badly, but because the factory does not need more staff, or perhaps prefers to employ another trainee, who can be paid less than a regular labourer. Rosetta returns to the caravan where she lives with her alcoholic mother. She keeps asking for work in the nearby businesses and develops skills to help her to survive without money, such as catching fish with bait put in a bottle. In this way the Dardennes show that while life for the affluent might get more and more saturated with technology, for those at the bottom of the pile it means retreating to a primitive stage. Rosetta wants to get work at any cost; she does not mind if her employment would result in making somebody else redundant. At one point she even hesitates over whether to rescue the drowning Riquet, a man who helped her in her struggle to find employment. The girl seems to reason that his death might increase her chance of getting his job at the van selling waffles. The reduction of Rosetta's existence to bare life also leads her to question her identity, as shown in a scene when she speaks to herself when lying on a couch: 'Your name is Rosetta – My name is Rosetta. You have found a job – I have found a job'. This dialogue

reminds me of Irena in Holland's *A Woman Alone* asking herself 'Who am I?' and answering 'Nobody'. And yet, it feels like Irena's life, despite all the disappointment, was richer than Rosetta's, who feels that she must kill to save herself.

*Rosetta* is filmed in the old Belgian industrial heartland town of Seraing, the setting for most of the Dardennes' films. According to Luc Dardenne, it was meant to be 'the portrait of an epoch', tapping into the employment malaise of 1990s Europe (quoted in Mai 2010: 65). In 1998, the year *Rosetta* was shot, more than half of Belgians under twenty-five had not found a job six months after finishing their schooling, with the worst figures in French-speaking Wallonia (ibid: 65–66). Yet, as Martin O'Shaughnessy notes:

*There is little or no sense of this historical working class heritage. The working class past is simply not available as a resource or a reference. In the same way as Rosetta is trapped in her circumstances, she is locked into a pure present. Collective narratives of class struggle have given way to a story of competing and colliding atoms. Although work retains its centrality, the old inclusive order has given way to the institutionalized struggle of all against all. If unemployment implies a social non-being, and if employment means the displacement of the other, then social life becomes murderous or suicidal. (O'Shaughnessy 2012: 162–63)*

This conclusion is confirmed by Jean-Pierre Dardenne:

*Employment today is like a game of musical chairs. There are seven chairs, and eight people. When the music stops, the person who can't find a seat is eliminated. So it is with work. The only way to find a job is to take someone else's. So when Rosetta sets out to look for work, it's as if she's going off to war. For her it's a matter of life or death. She thinks that if she doesn't find a place in society, she'll die, she'll simply cease to exist. (quoted in Camhi 1999)*

If we look only at *Rosetta*, we have to reach such a conclusion. However, turning to a secondary character of the film, Riquet, shows another, less murderous possibility for survival. Riquet, who works in a van selling waffles, earns extra income by cheating his boss. He suggests to Rosetta that she joins him in this 'sabotage' and they split the earnings between them. His behaviour resembles the way of letting penniless friends attend events for the rich through the back door, as shown in *The Dreamlife of Angels*. In a Marxist reading, depriving the capitalist

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of part of his surplus value is morally justified by the fact that surplus value is expropriated from the workers – morally it does not belong to capitalists. However, Rosetta rejects Riquet’s reasoning, saying that ‘moonlighting is not work’.

As with Isa and Marie, for Rosetta family is not a resource to draw on, but a burden. She has to take care of her mother, which is as draining for her as looking for work. In common with the heroines of Zonca’s film, we also get the impression that Rosetta will not get pregnant easily, knowing what it means to be a ‘useless person’, threatened with extinction. This refusal or inability to proliferate is underscored by the motif of the recurring stomach cramp Rosetta suffers. Luc Dardenne describes Rosetta’s cramps as the ‘birthing pains that deliver no child’ (quoted in Mai 2010: 74). It appears that women like Rosetta are deprived of all the joy of having children, but not the pain, not unlike ‘subaltern women’ hired as surrogate mothers by rich women, to which I will turn later on in this chapter.

In Belgium Rosetta prompted a debate on employment problems for young people. Belgium’s then minister of labour, Laurette Onkelinx, conceived the ‘Rosetta Plan’ to help young, unskilled people enter the labour market (Hessels 2004: 244). While the idea of helping the unemployed is commendable, I am critical of its execution, which focuses on the victims of neoliberalism, the poor, unemployed and disempowered, rather than on the culprits: the rich and powerful, who accumulated their wealth by dispossessing the poor.

The three films discussed in this part conform to a realistic tradition, but they reveal a different attitude to their characters and surroundings. In *The Full Monty* the characters are figures in a landscape and the landscape is represented in a way that harks back to the tradition of the British New Wave, with the obligatory image of the city from a hill, as a place that the character is hoping to conquer. Although the film’s main character is Gaz, other men from the team of strippers are almost as important and we often see them together and in smaller assemblies, as if they were a community made up of smaller groups. The purpose of such representation is to underscore the connections between the characters and their natural and cultural environment. By contrast, the young women, represented by Zonca and, to an even larger extent the Dardennes, are cut out from their wider environment. They are unable to think about themselves historically, or to link their personal stories to the histories of their city, country or region.

## Analysing the change

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A number of films from the last two decades examine the shift from Keynesian capitalism to neoliberalism. Two films that conform to this model are *Brassed Off* (1996) by Mark Herman and *Ressources humaines* (*Human Resources*, 1999) by Laurent Cantet. They are set in industrial towns where the future of the factories is at stake, and they focus on young and upwardly mobile characters from working class backgrounds who return to their roots to work with the management for what, they believe, will be a better future for everybody.

Gloria in *Brassed Off* is a newly qualified surveyor who in 1992 comes to the Yorkshire mining town where she was born, to conduct a survey on the economic viability of the local mine threatened with closure. Gloria comes to the conclusion that the colliery is profitable, yet her study does not affect the decision to close the pit down, which was made two years previously. Her work is used only to cloak the management's actions with the appearance of apolitical rationality. Outraged, Gloria denounces her employers and protests against such immoral appropriation of her labour by handing the money she earned to the local brass band, consisting of the now unemployed miners. Yet, as Paul Dave observes, 'What is given in this film cannot contain the destructive forces of what is taken' (Dave 2006: 63). This, of course, confirms the neoliberal logic of accumulation by dispossession and the idea that some of its most negative consequences should be alleviated by acts of charity, as is the case.

As the ultimate goal of neoliberalism is upward redistribution of wealth and consolidation of class power, not preservation and development of efficient enterprises, and especially not of those with strong unions, it does not matter that the colliery is profitable, as is the case on this occasion. In a British context, as Dave observes, drawing on Seumas Milne's book, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners* (2004), the:

*Tories' 'economic' arguments against the miners were hostage to their anti-union political project. Ironically, given the principles of neo-liberal capitalism, to finally bury the miners and establish the futility of resisting market imperatives, it had been necessary to 'fix' the energy market. Thus, in the period after 1984 subsidies had been provided to gas and nuclear power companies so that they could compete with coal ... If for the New Right coal was 'history' this*

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*was first and foremost because of its determination to see through to the bitter end a political struggle with the working class. (ibid.: 64)*

The industries that replaced coal production were much more convenient to the neoliberal elites, as they required a leaner workforce and thus were less susceptible to unionisation. *Brassed Off* also shows how neoliberal realities force those on the receiving end to collaborate in their downfall. The case in point is Phil, a miner and father of three children, who is so indebted after the strikes of 1984 that he votes in favour of his own redundancy. His situation suggests that, contrary to Marx and Rosa Luxemburg's assessment, the more advanced a society is on its road towards the capitalist extreme, the more difficult it is to divert from this path, because the wretched, downtrodden proletariat does not have the strength to fight. Yet this is not the case here yet. Most of the workers do not passively await their extinction but resist it. Two interconnected strategies are presented as a means of counteracting the status quo. One is the everyday solidarity between workers and their families, represented by paying for each other's drinks in the pub and the local women keeping a vigil in protest against the plan to close the pit. The second strategy, favoured by Danny, the old conductor of the local brass band, is focusing on music. For Danny, playing in the brass band is a way of transcending oppression and publicising the plight of the miners, as demonstrated in his final performance when he addresses the audience criticising the Tory government. However, although the miners respect Danny, they regard him as detached, unable to see what is going on or react appropriately. His age and fatal illness, a sign of which is coughing blood, symbolises the futility of his noble strategy. Danny's insistence on putting music first increases the misery of his own son, Phil. This is because Phil, in order not to disappoint his father, buys a new instrument, rather than paying for more pressing needs. What is missing among the miners is any straightforward political action involving large left-wing organisations, such as the Labour Party. But this is not due to the miners shunning such organisations, but rather to the mainstream left betraying their cause – a widely known fact at the time Herman made his film. *Brassed Off* is essentially a melodrama, full of love stories presented with pathos. The use of this genre is meant to illustrate the link between political and personal: the break-up of families and death due to fulfilling the neoliberal project. At the same time, showing Phil and his wife reconciled in the last episode points to the importance of personal bonds in resisting the political.

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**Figure 5.5** Brassed off in *Brassed Off*

Franck in *Human Resources* returns to his home town from Paris, where he has studied economics, for a work placement in the human resources department in the mechanical factory where his father Jean-Claude and sister work. In his first talk with the head of HR Franck muses on the time when he was a child and used to receive Christmas presents from the company and went on the subsidized *vacances* (holiday camps for the workers' children). Such memories point to the Keynesian order, marked by paternalism, redistribution of wealth from the top to the bottom and the existence of spheres of social life that were not subjected to financial regimes. These reminiscences are interrupted by the head of HR who claims that all these perks for the workers had to be stopped because things are now less rosy: the company was recently forced to let twenty-two people go. Gradually Franck familiarises himself with the new regime. His trajectory is that of disenchantment. In common with Gloria, he begins his work by naively assuming that the management and workers collaborate for the common good, which is the prosperity of the factory and the country at large.

Franck himself takes on the task of helping the factory management and workers by promoting a new working regime, which allows for a shorter working

week of thirty-five hours and greater flexibility, through organising a referendum among the workers, bypassing the unions, which he regards as forces of conservatism. This idea is met with enthusiasm by the factory director but, inevitably, not by the unionists, who see it as a means of undermining their function within the factory and splitting the workforce. It is also treated with distrust by Jean-Claude who prefers to continue working in a 'Fordist way'. In due course, Franck learns that the new shorter week is to be used by the factory management as an alibi to sack more workers, including his own father. Franck thus learns that under the conditions of neoliberalism every form of rationalisation of work is used to shift power from labour to capital.

On learning about his father's dismissal, Franck joins forces with the union leader and organises a strike in the factory. Franck's father, however, does not support the strike. We get the impression that Jean-Claude would rather sacrifice his survival for his son's success as a manager. This is because he too, finally grasps and accepts the neoliberal logic, which states that one's advancement must be at somebody else's expense. Cantet, however, does not limit himself to revealing the moral dilemmas befalling the old industrial class and their families, but also the logic of (post)modern management. This is reduced to turning the screw on the workers in search of what is described as higher productivity and sustaining foreign competition, but what amounts to increasing the wealth of the capitalist class, overaccumulation of capital, economic crises and a need to turn the screw even more to 'balance the sheets', which according to Marx cannot be balanced. To ensure the success of the neoliberal project, the management have to work in secrecy, while conveying the fiction of openness and cooperation. This is shown by a motif of including Franck in some meetings at the top, while excluding him from others – the most important ones, in which the future of workers is at stake. Cantet shows that disrupting the play of visibility and concealment, as in a scene when Franck illegally accesses his boss's computer and finds a list of the workers who are to be fired, is a necessary condition to challenge the status quo in the workplace. The split between the superficial openness and benevolence and real secrecy and viciousness of the management can be compared to the way in which important political and economic decisions are made in the neoliberal world. Those less important decisions are still made by democratically elected governments; those which matter more by unelected and secretive institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, who further the interests of the financial elites.

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The director of the factory is aware of the morally unappealing position of the factory's management and warns Franck that if he wants to succeed in his profession, Franck will have to be as ruthless as he. Franck, like Gloria, decides not to follow this example, but we do not see further consequences of his action. *Brassed Off* and *Human Resources* can be seen as merciful works, sparing the viewers the pain of witnessing their characters' defeat or as pre-revolutionary works, showing that progressive social movements can be created not only by horizontal, but also vertical unification of workers and managers, or people with low and high human capital, united in a desire to live in a more just and stable world. I shall add that such a possibility was discussed by Karl Polanyi as a reaction to the introduction of the gold standard and, by extension, at any other attempts at disembedding economy from society. This line of thinking has been continued by Hardt and Negri in their discussion of 'multitude' (Hardt and Negri 2006). It was also shown by Wajda in his *Man of Marble* and *Man of Iron* (see Chapters 3 and 4). It was recently examined by Andrew Ross, who drew attention to the joint interests of the well educated 'creatives' and migrant workers, employed in sweatshops, together constituting the new proletariat – or 'precarariat' (Ross 2008; Berardi 2008).

### **Deadly postcommunist world**

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While *Brassed Off* and *Human Resources* compare the neoliberal order with an earlier, gentler version of capitalism, *Komornik* (Bailiff, 2005) by Feliks Falk and *Stara škola kapitalizma* (*Old School Capitalism*, 2009) by Želimir Žilnik compare it with Eastern European socialism in its two versions, Polish and Yugoslav. *Bailiff* premiered sixteen years after communism's collapse in Poland, when the new political and economic system solidified. The film attempts to show how this happened and what the consequences were. The vehicle of this exploration is an ambitious character from a humble background named Lucjan Boehme, who during his climb up the social ladder exposes various types of malaise in the surrounding reality. Such a character bears a resemblance to those in *Brassed Off* and *Human Resources*, yet unlike Gloria and Franck, who are uncorrupted by their work for those in positions of power, Lucjan begins his cinematic life as somebody who 'sold his soul to the devil' a long time ago.

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Falk previously used a similar character in his two best known films, *Dance Leader* (discussed in Chapter 3), and its sequel, *Bohater roku* (*Man of the Year*, 1986). They featured Lutek (diminutive of Lucjan) Danielak, who tried to make a career first in the 1970s, gnawed by greed and corruption and then in the post-martial law 1980s, which were no less ‘rotten’, but more chaotic. Falk’s Danielak was a living incarnation of late socialism. He took and paid bribes, acted as a pimp for his girlfriend and prostituted himself. From time to time he also had pangs of conscience, but silenced them, regarding his misdemeanours as a condition of his survival. Danielak, like ‘real socialism’ in its final stage, was also very malleable and social. He tried to adjust to different circumstances and craved popularity; his very profession as a ‘dance leader’ testified to that. People who knew him despised him, but were able to live with him.

Naming *Bailiff*’s protagonist Lucjan suggests that in Poland history repeats itself – the sickness, pertaining to late communism, poisons Polish society under the postcommunist order. However, Lutek matured and has to be treated with respect, which points to an opposite trajectory of history to that offered by Marx: not from tragedy to farce, but from farce to tragedy. His German surname Boehme reflects the fact that *Bailiff* is set in Wałbrzych in Lower Silesia, a town that before the Second World War belonged to Germany, and makes its bearer appear more menacing. Wałbrzych was prosperous during the communist period thanks to its rich seams of coal, but after 1989 declined; the coalmines were closed, leading to high unemployment, poverty and a high level of crime.

Lucjan’s profession of bailiff nominally existed in the People’s Poland, but then there were fewer bailiffs than after 1989 and their actions were conspicuous due to the ideological dogma that every citizen in a socialist country has the right to a dignified existence free from economic worries. In Polish cinema, the figure of a bailiff was first tackled in the documentary *Urząd (Office)* by Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz, made in 1986, when socialism in Poland was crumbling and the filmmakers attacked the myth more boldly of a decent life enjoyed by working people in the workers’ state. During the postcommunist period bailiffs cropped up as secondary characters in many films. The figure of a bailiff can be seen as a literalisation of Harvey’s idea of neoliberalism as accumulation by dispossession, demonstrating that many must lose in order for one to gain. Often it appears that the loss and punishment of the poor is a more important goal than the gain of the wealthy, as shown by piles of repossessed furniture and household utensils, which

had great value for their previous owners but for those who expropriated them are worthless garbage.

The deadly character of a bailiff's actions are nowhere presented more effectively than in the first scene of Falk's film, when Lucjan repossesses life-saving machines in a hospital, causing the death of some patients. Lucjan's subsequent decisions have comparable gravity. Determined to prove that the signature of an elderly woman who had taken bank credit and then disappeared was falsified, he digs up her corpse buried in a field belonging to her family. His discovery ruins the fraudulent family, including a promising footballer who then commits suicide. Lucjan also repossesses the accordion of a disabled child, which is tantamount to the girl's 'spiritual death'. Wherever Lucjan appears, he awakens fear and disgust, but nobody can resist his power. On each occasion we see individuals or small groups of people looking passively at him doing his job or protesting without effect. These images can be viewed as a reflection of the state of the working class (or rather all working people of low human capital irrespective of being blue or white collar) after the fall of the Berlin Wall as fragmented, powerless and dispirited (Bunce 2000: 124; Kideckel 2002). They provide a poignant contrast to the old, strong, united and fearless Solidarity, as shown in Wajda's *Man of Iron*.

The difference between the late socialist past and early capitalist present is also reflected in the contrast between Lucjan and his old mentor Robert, who is now terminally ill. Robert claims that he was no angel and always worked to have a good life, but he also respected the need of others to survive. As he says, he would never switch off a life-support machine. Thus Robert stands for a world that was far from perfect, but bearable and comprehensible. Lucjan represents a new world, which is frightening and impossible to grasp, and which is not even fully understood from within, as demonstrated by the fact that Lucjan cannot explain what prompts him and whom he serves, except by referring to an abstract value of 'keeping his files in order'. Needless to add that in such a world only the fittest survive. The connection of Robert with the old system and Lucjan with the new one is augmented by casting. Robert is played by Marian Opania, an actor whose popularity was at its peak in the 1970s and 1980s, who played Winkel in Wajda's *Man of Iron* (see Chapter 4). Falk cast in the role of Lucjan Andrzej Chyra, whose most memorable role was that of a menacing collector of debts in *Dług* (*Debt*, 1999), directed by Krzysztof Krauze, who in the end is killed and dismembered by the men he had tormented. While Opania's character stands for the old world of

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small crooks who inhabited a grey zone between legality and criminality, conformity and dissidence, Lucjan represents a polarised world, in which one either wins or loses everything. That said, Lucjan conforms more to the individualistic model of early capitalism than corporate capitalism, which Fredric Jameson associates with late, neoliberal capitalism, as he works alone and is accountable only to himself, rather than to any organisation or corporation (Jameson 1983: 115). As such, he represents the ideal of an ‘entrepreneurial individual’, promoted in the official rhetoric after the collapse of communism in Poland and Eastern Europe at large. His individualistic attitude is contrasted with that of the other lawyers working in Wałbrzych, who act as a corporation, representing a united front and curbing individualistic excesses on the part of any of them. Falk compares their modus operandi with that of the late socialism of the 1970s, when those seeking power formed cliques and, consequently, corruption and nepotism reigned in Poland. Thus in Falk’s conceptualisation, what was worst in Polish history returns, because postcommunist elites are made up of the old *nomenklatura* (on this hypothesis see Wasilewski 1995).

Moved by the plight of the child of his ex-girlfriend, whom he deprived of an accordion, Lucjan tries to undo his actions by financially helping those whom he caused misery. For this purpose he uses money that one of his rich customers, a dishonest businessman, attempted to bribe him with, dividing it between his victims. Yet nobody wants Lucjan’s money; poor people avoid him as much in his new Robin Hood costume as they avoided him in his ‘punishing angel’ garb. The refusal to take Lucjan’s money can be seen as proof of the honesty and dignity of working class Poles, a sign that they should not be helped by acts of charity, but by structural changes in the economy. Or it might suggest that this class is beyond help – it is condemned to extinction. Lucjan’s attempt at a charitable redistribution of his earnings leads him to jail. He is freed thanks to the effort of local lawyers, who help him in the expectation that from now on he will conform to their ways and become ‘corporatist’. Yet in the last episode Lucjan angrily disrupts Robert’s funeral, as if rejecting their values. What path Lucjan will ultimately choose is impossible to predict, as the film finishes there – in a gesture of refusal. By extension, Falk’s film offers no positive vision for postcommunist Poland. It rejects as unworkable and/or immoral three different political-economic systems: the individualistic, ‘modern’ capitalism, represented by Boehme at the beginning of the film, the ‘new socialism’, encapsulated by the contrived and reformed bailiff, and the new, corporatist capitalism, represented by the members of the Wałbrzych

establishment, which Falk regards as a continuation of the old ‘real socialism’. This comprehensive criticism, without offering any positive solution might be explained by Falk sticking to his pessimistic formula, developed during the period of Moral Concern and a reflection of the lack of any positive political scenario for Poland and Eastern Europe at large (Zarębski 2005: 33).

I regard *Old School Capitalism*, shot and set in Serbia about a decade after the end of the Balkan wars, as a companion piece and critique of Falk’s *Bailiff* because it privileges the plight of the workers following the fall of communism as opposed to focusing on the agents of their downfall. The different representational priority of Žilnik can be explained by his background. Throughout his career his mission was to give a voice to those who were ignored in official discourses. In 1967 he directed a documentary short called *Žurnal o omladini na selu, zimi* (*Journal on Village Youth, Winter*) because he was interested in people in the countryside who were ignored due to the accepted Marxist thought that the peasant class would naturally disappear as a result of communism. In 1968 Žilnik made another documentary, *Nezaposleni ljudi* (*The Unemployed*), about migrant workers and those who were struggling to find employment both in Yugoslavia and abroad. In contrast to Falk, he showed little concern for the class of intellectuals that he himself represented, regarding them as sufficiently equipped with rhetorical powers to speak for themselves. Through blending fiction with documentary, cinema with theatre, film with television, employing amateurs from different walks of life to play either themselves or characters invented by the director, switching between pathos and comedy, Žilnik created a unique political cinema. He does not patronise his characters by treating them with pity, nor does he situate the viewer in the superior position of one who knows what is happening and can help the underprivileged. Rather he forces the viewer to reflect on his or her own position in the world. For Žilnik the economic situation has always been the most important criterion dividing people, but he does not ignore other factors such as ethnicity and sexuality (DeCuir 2010).

*Old School Capitalism* summarises Žilnik’s assessment of the period he depicts in his film – it comes across as a repetition of the old style capitalism, as depicted by Engels at the beginning of the chapter on ‘The Great Towns’ in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England*:

*What is true of London, is true of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, is true of all great towns. Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand, and*

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*nameless misery on the other, everywhere social warfare, every man's house in a state of siege, everywhere reciprocal plundering under the protection of the law, and all so shameless, so openly avowed that one shrinks before the consequences of our social state as they manifest themselves here undisguised, and can only wonder that the whole crazy fabric still hangs together. (Engels 2009: 69)*

Žilnik's take on neoliberal capitalism is not dissimilar to that of Harvey, as conveyed by the film's title. But as Marx aptly observed, every repetition of history is a repetition with a difference, and Žilnik is as interested in what links the situation in Serbia in 2008–09 with that of Manchester, as in what divides them. His point of departure is the idea and reality of Yugoslav type cooperative (self-managed) socialism, in which the workers invested in their own factories. Yet new laws, introduced under Milošević, only recognised state ownership. As Žilnik himself puts it:

*Everything was privatized and then given to the new capitalist buyers and most of those, as we can now see, had been either criminals or those who gained their wealth in Milošević's system, when during the sanctions the state gave privileges to some functionaries. These new owners are aware that the legitimacy of their ownership is questionable. What is going on now in Serbia is very close to a class war. (quoted in DeCuir 2010)*

The main characters in *Old School Capitalism* are just such dispossessed workers, not unlike the dispossessed people shown by Falk. Branislav Dimitrijević compares them to the lumpenproletariat from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Dimitrijević 2010). However, Marx regarded the lumpenproletariat as a margin of the proletariat, and as a reactionary force. Žilnik, on the other hand, suggests that under postcommunist neoliberalism, or at least its Serbian version, the lumpenproletariat expanded – practically the whole old communist proletariat 'lumpen-proletarianised'. Yet unlike in Falk's film, which represents the dispossessed people as passive, dispersed and apolitical, in Žilnik's film they do not lend themselves to such easy categorisation. They are not passive, but fight back, literally trying to force the owner of the factory to return what he owes them. They dismantle the factory building in order to sell the bricks, and visit the house of the factory's owner to demand that he pays their salaries. However this strategy does not bring the expected fruit as the capitalist is absent and all they get is bags of



groceries from his wife – typical neoliberal charity. Subsequently a group of young anarchists approaches the disgruntled workers claiming that its members share the workers' objectives. The workers challenge them to kidnap the factory owner and his associates to prove that they are on the same side. They do so, bringing them to the workers' base, but in the end the workers reject the anarchists' programme of taking over the factory and govern it by themselves, as a workers' cooperative. Instead, they agree to work in a new enterprise of their dishonest boss, this time on a large farm, which most likely is another privatised cooperative. The farm becomes the scene of a final tragedy – the leader of the group of anarchists is killed by a plough operated by a worker, on the request of the owner of the farm. The capitalist asks the workers to keep the act secret or risk being prosecuted for murder and, reluctantly, they give in to his demand. The story of the rebellion and defeat of the workers, due to their lack of confidence in their ability to govern themselves, their distrust of any pro-labour ideology (here represented by anarchists) ultimately links them, as Dimitrijević observes, to the lumpenproletariat, as defined by Marx: a social stratum open to manipulation (Dimitrijević 2010). Their intervention can be seen as a metonymy of the recent anticapitalist actions across the world, which tend to be short-lived and suffer from a weakness of ideological underpinning, and hence are presented by the media as blind and unnecessary violence by unruly 'subalterns', who need more discipline.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 5.6** Workers and postcommunist capitalists in *Old School Capitalism*

The narrative of the rebellion and the pacifying of the workers is enriched by – typically for Žilnik’s essayistic cinema – subplots that locate the main story in a wider political context. We see documentary footage of demonstrations by the workers against the privatisation of their factories, discussions about the plight of the workers in Tito’s Yugoslavia and the presentation of the anarchists’ vision of society. All these motifs help us to understand why the Yugoslav workers are defeated and the capitalists win over and over again. As in Marx’s scheme, crucial factors are the competition between workers, here represented by the competition between different trade unions, and the power of the dominant ideology, which makes the workers act against their vital interests. By including a scene depicting the burning of an American flag and a character who returns from the United States to Serbia, as well as businessmen from Russia who offer their troubled Serbian comrades assistance and protection, Žilnik points to the international situation as an important factor in promoting neoliberal policies in Serbia and bringing back memories of the recent war, which acted as a means of speeding up neoliberalisation. As in the schemes offered by Harvey, Žižek and especially Hardt and Negri, Žilnik emphasises the importance of force in preserving the neoliberal order. The capitalists whom he shows employ a private army of bodyguards, and they themselves carry weapons. There is not much difference between private and state forces because, unlike in previous times, when armies protected national borders, they are now employed to protect capitalist elites and maintain internal order. This is shown in an episode when the captured capitalists assume that they are freed by the police, but in reality they are liberated by the private security force of one of them. Of course, the tight security lays bare the fragility of the current order and the fear and bad conscience of those who use it. Žilnik obliterates the difference between honest and dishonest capitalists – all of them come across as criminal or, to use Harvey’s adjective, ‘feral’ (Harvey 2011a) – in common with the political authorities that align themselves with business, sidelining the welfare of ordinary citizens. By the same token, the conclusion from Žilnik’s work is that in order to ensure justice for workers (for Hardt and Negri’s ‘multitude’) the whole political order has to change. This is a difficult task, as Žilnik demonstrates time and time again, and it will not be achieved without a change in human consciousness. Yet, *Old School Capitalism* can be seen as a step in this direction.

## Bringing the 1970s back

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My last example of a film that compares the current situation with the better past is *Potiche* (2010) by François Ozon. The film is set in the 1970s, the decade dividing the pro-labour 1960s and neoliberal 1980s. As the director explains, keeping the action in the 1970s provided distance and allowed him to make references to the current economic crisis in a humorous way: ‘Setting the action in the present would have made for a heavier film. And it wouldn’t have made sense for the Babin character [the Communist Party politician] to be so important: in France back then, the Communist Party carried 20 per cent of the vote’ (Ozon 2011). The film tries to capture the specificity of the 1970s through the story of a family owning an umbrella factory in northern France. The factory was founded by the father of Suzanne Pujol and is now run by Suzanne’s husband, Robert, with Suzanne being relegated to the role of a decorative (trophy) wife – the eponymous *potiche*. The history of the factory thus illustrates the disinheritance of women by men, an attitude against which the feminist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s protested.

The film begins with the factory in crisis. According to Robert Pujol, this is due to the excessive demands of the workforce, which he is unable to meet. In the opinion of the workers, the guilty party is the management who refuse any negotiation, leaving them no option but to strike. Such a dispute brings to mind many films from the 1970s, such as *Coup pour coup* and *Carry On at Your Convenience*, as discussed in Chapter 3. The disgruntled workforce even locks the owner up, in the same way as in Karmitz’s film. There, however, the similarities end, as Robert suffers a heart attack, is forced to go to hospital and take a long holiday. During his convalescence, Suzanne takes over running the factory and makes it a great success. Her management style takes us back to the 1960s and 1970s, when there was some balance of power between capital and labour, but also offers a recipe for overcoming the perpetual crisis and human misery, resulting from applying neoliberal rules. Suzanne’s approach to work is collective. She meets the striking workers and is prepared to compromise, but finds their demands so modest that she accepts them entirely. She also allows the employees creative freedom, mixing business with art, as seen in a new line of Kandinsky umbrellas and raincoats, thus diminishing the threat of alienation at work. Unlike her husband, who has an affair with his secretary, blatantly abusing his position as the owner of his workforce, Suzanne treats the secretary with respect and does not expect the woman to work

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for her beyond normal office hours. Finally, against the advice of her daughter, she refuses to relocate the factory to the Third World, where the workforce is cheaper, because she regards her own harmonious and prosperous life and that of her workforce as a superior value over maximising profit.

Despite her successful management, Suzanne is pushed out of the business by her newly returned husband and her daughter Joëlle, who conforms to her father's wish as a means of ensuring her husband's position in the Pujols' business. Ozon thus shows that Suzanne's daughter proves more conservative than the eponymous 'potiche'. The joining of forces between Robert and Joëlle in a campaign to oust the workers' friendly, 'Keynesian' Suzanne can be seen as a symbol of the coalition of the old patriarchal capitalist elites and the young managerial class, who since the late 1970s have systematically dismantled the Keynesian order. Yet Suzanne does not give up. When she loses her factory, she moves into politics and becomes mayor of the town where she lives, promising to protect local businesses and secure a better deal for women. She is supported by her gay son and her former secretary. In this way Ozon shows that identity politics can further rather than fragment the leftist cause. *Potiche* taps into the feminist slogan that personal is political, as well as showing that political is personal, arguing for following the same moral rules in private and public lives. By contrast, neoliberal capitalists tend to separate these spheres: while they boast about their charitable work, reflecting their personal side, they tend to keep quiet about their (predatory) business practices, which they regard as having nothing to do with them personally.

*Potiche* can be seen as an invitation to contemporary capitalists to change their ways: curb their greed by imposing limits on their capital, treat workers with respect and become all-round individuals rather than vulture-dove hybrids. Fifty or forty years ago these demands were regarded as modest, but this is no longer the case; today they appear almost revolutionary. The shift is underscored by the film's form – *Potiche* looks like a nostalgic, 'bourgeois' movie, an impression given by a nod to *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* (*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*), the 1964 Jacques Demy musical, in which a young Catherine Deneuve, who plays Suzanne, worked in her mother's umbrella boutique. Yet such a style makes its 'revolutionary' message more palatable and suits the film's idea that happiness is achieved not by promoting competition and individualism, but cooperation. For example, *Potiche* shows the characters in groups, rather than separately, sitting in one room or dancing as if they truly existed only through interaction with others. A song started by one person is taken over by another, suggesting the need for communication

and collaboration. Such style pertains to musicals and soap operas, to which Ozon's film was compared, but also brings to mind the 1970s 'militant films', such as *Coup pour coup* and *Tout va bien*. The use of musical conventions in *Potiche* discussed in this book, in common with melodrama and comedy in other films, support the opinion that a progressive message can be conveyed by different types of films. Of course, there is a question as to whether the use of a familiar, and for this reason conservative, form does not rather bland the film's political message. This question, however, as I have indicated, cannot be answered by a simple yes or no. The answer should always be 'it depends on the context'.

### **The culture industry then and now**

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European films of the last twenty years concerning popular music, film production and the media are also often set in the 1970s, the last decade before the triumph of the neoliberal order and a period of great artistic ferment, thanks to breaking the barrier between high art and popular culture and developing an ironic, self-referential style. Examples are *Velvet Goldmine* (1998), directed by Todd Haynes, *Le pornographe* (*The Pornographer*, 2001), directed by Bertrand Bonello, *24 Hour Party People* (2002), directed by Michael Winterbottom, and *Control* (2007), directed by Anton Corbijn. These films are about memory rather than (solidified) history; they openly adopt a contemporary perspective, comparing a usually innocent past with a corrupted present. I will focus here on *24 Hour Party People* and *The Pornographer*, as they clearly demonstrate the contrast between then and now.

*24 Hour Party People* shows the rise and fall of the music enterprise of Tony Wilson, the founder of Factory Records and the Hacienda club in Manchester. The film is narrated by Wilson himself, who addresses us as an omniscient narrator, with knowledge of what would happen to him and his friends in due course. Sometimes he reveals that he is not the real Wilson, but his impersonation, as in the moment when we see the real Wilson along with Steve Coogan, the actor playing Wilson. Such distancing techniques, however, do not undermine the realism of Winterbottom's film but rather add to it, like the documentary introduction in *The Full Monty*.

At one point Tony quotes Scott Fitzgerald saying that in America there are only first acts, meaning that those who lose their first chance are deprived of a second. But he adds 'We do things differently here'. He means Manchester, but

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we should regard it rather as a spatio-temporal unit: Manchester in the late 1970s–early 1980s. Pronouncements of this kind abound in *24 Hour Party People*. Tony insists on doing things his own way, claiming that history is made by innovators, who disregard existing trends and go it alone, to be gradually followed by the crowds.<sup>4</sup> Whenever he is criticised for not being able to attract enough people or not extracting enough profit from a business opportunity, he retorts by saying ‘How many people attended the last supper?’ or ‘Did they have tickets for the Sermon on the Mount? Of course they didn’t, people just turned up because they knew it would be a great gig’. Like Jesus, Tony also wants to be known by his name, not by his profession and he gives credibility to this ambition by becoming the subject of a legend.

Although Winterbottom avoids linking the story of Tony Wilson to a wider political, economic and cultural situation, it can be mapped to the changes that took place between the 1970s and 1990s in Britain and Europe: de-industrialisation, profit-driven cultural democratisation and first the weakening, then the strengthening of the centre. Inspired by the first concert of the Sex Pistols in Manchester in June 1976, Wilson starts to organise gigs of his musical protégés in a disused factory (most likely previously producing textiles) and names his record label ‘Factory Records’. In this way he prolongs the life of industrial sites, provides the performance of his bands with an aura of authenticity and reflects the continuity between Manchester as a ‘cottonopolis’ and its later character as a centre of popular culture (Haslam 1999; Redfern 2005). That said, such practice confirms and adds to the decline of the Fordist model. ‘Factory’ with a capital ‘F’ is also a nod to Andy Warhol’s ‘Factory’, the project that was informed by the idea of making art on an industrial scale and bridging the gap between artistic production and consumption. Drawing on the work of Dave Haslam, Nick Redfern argues that such cultural democratisation was the specificity of a wider Manchester cultural scene in the 1970s:

*The popular music scene that developed in Manchester in the wake of the Sex Pistols transgressed traditional cultural boundaries. It was comprised of a mixture of people from diverse backgrounds, and included working class Mancunians (e.g. Rob Gretton), art school graduates (e.g. Malcolm Garret, Peter Saville), and the self-conscious Situationism of university-educated intellectuals (e.g. Tony Wilson). It also mixed musical genres, bridging the divide between rock and dance music, as punk was crossed with electronica (e.g. New*

*Order) or Northern Soul (e.g. Happy Mondays). The development of Manchester as ‘pop cult city’ also blurred the distinction between producers and consumers of cultural products, and created opportunities to aestheticise everyday life. People began to see it as increasingly more viable to work in the production of their leisure time as managers, promoters, visual designers, fashion designers, DJs, sound technicians, lifestyle journalists, bar and club architects and designers ... Fans have become bands, consumers have become producers. (Redfern 2005: 291)*

Wilson and others of his ilk created conditions in which it became typical for bands to remain in their hometowns and become closely identified with them (e.g. Joy Division and Manchester, The Specials and Coventry, The Farm and Liverpool). In doing so, they created a powerful voice for those outside London. However, despite his successes as a music producer, fashion-setter, and even politician, Tony failed in business. The crucial factor in his demise was his disregard for money. He did things ‘differently’ because they pleased him, and he regarded his actions as a service to the arts, not as a way of producing surplus value. A case in point is his release of the single ‘Blue Monday’ by New Order. The record sleeve was so expensive to produce that it exceeded the price charged for each record. Tony commissioned such a sleeve because he perceived the record as a work of art, not as a commodity, and he believed that an artwork should sometimes be subsidised.

He also claimed it would not matter that instead of profit the record would produce loss, as Factory Records would sell only a few copies. Instead, the single went on to become the biggest-selling twelve-inch record of all time, generating a huge loss and crippling Tony’s enterprise. The second example of when a hugely successful cultural plan failed to bring financial rewards was the operation of the Hacienda club. It took off when Tony discovered the indie dance band Happy Mondays. Their performance filled the Hacienda with young people; Manchester became Madchester and its rave scene became famous all over the world. Yet the fans, instead of buying alcohol, sold officially in the club, preferred to buy drugs, sold there illegally. The drug gangs had no desire to share their profit with the owners of the Hacienda and caused a lot of problems for them, as the drugs’ revenue fed a gun culture. To halt the gun problem, the gangs were given the task of policing the club. As a result, Tony lost control of drug deals made in the Hacienda and of the entrance to the club. The penetration of the music scene by the drug business acts as an analogue of the neoliberal penetration of culture by

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capital, small businesses overtaken by big ones and displacing honest enterprises with, to use Harvey's term, 'feral' ones. In this case we see that big capital first attaches itself to successful enterprises as an ally, but only to devour it. At the same time, the rise of gun and drug culture reflects the onslaught of Thatcher on the working class, which resulted in an increase in criminality, as shown in films such as *My Beautiful Laundrette*, discussed in the previous chapter.

*24 Hour Party People* finishes with the selling of Factory Records to London Records. This act symbolises the subjugation of the English regional music scene to the centripetal forces of London in the 1990s, and of privileging the wealthy metropolis over the more socialist, working class North. Yet Tony's encounter with the man from London is also an act of resistance to the neoliberal order, as it turns out that Factory Records was not really a company, but as Tony puts it, 'an experiment in human nature'. It did not act according to any conventional business plan, in which the capitalist owner has exclusive rights to the labour of his employees. There were no contracts with the bands and the only written rule about the way Factory Records operated stated that the musicians owned everything, the company owned nothing. Such a description comes across as a fulfilment of the Marxist ideal, in which power and freedom is on the side of labour. In his conversation with the man from London interested in buying Tony's company Tony says that he protected himself against the dilemma of selling out by having nothing to sell out. This statement can be seen as advice to future generations of entrepreneurs, who would like to avoid a slide towards unabated greed whose ultimate consequence is, as Harvey argues, poverty and misery at the labour pole. The case of Tony also shows that although there is a historic link between post-Fordism and neoliberalism (regarded as a shift from production of things to production of signs), this link is not causal – post-Fordist work can be performed in various macroeconomic settings. Such an idea is also conveyed by Winterbottom's putting a highly self-reflective, postmodern style in the service of an old-style socialist ideal.

In one of the last episodes of the film we see Tony mixing with a crowd of guests at the Hacienda in the last concert taking place there. Among the crowd we see people from Tony's happy past, including his ex-wife, Lesley and Ian Curtis, all showing Tony affection. Later the music Svengali talks to God, who looks like him and praises his achievements. These scenes, by their mock-religious connotations suggest that for his legend, Tony's financial failure matters little. After all, Jesus is not remembered as a successful entrepreneur, but as a religious and moral leader.



From the closing titles we learn that Tony attempted to revive his music business in the 1990s, but failed. *Winterbottom* spares us any closer encounter with Wilson's 'post-heroic' period, most likely in order not to spoil his legend.

By contrast to *24 Hour Party People*, *The Pornographer* is most preoccupied with a failed artist's 'after-life': his struggle to survive in new circumstances. By looking at the life and career of the eponymous pornographer, it also attempts to account for the wider transformations in French and Western society. Most critics, however, argue that this ambition remained unfulfilled – Bonello's film is merely pretentious (Williams 2002). Even if this is the case, it lends itself perfectly to my investigation, beginning with the choice of the actor playing the famous pornographer: Jean-Pierre Léaud. Léaud's Jacques came to Paris in 1967 from Lyon and started making films soon after 1968. He regards himself as a child of '68, in common with Léaud's earlier characters, most importantly Alexandre in *The Mother and the Whore*, discussed in Chapter 3. He tells his son, almost repeating the lines from Eustache's film, that 'when people demonstrated in May '68, it was beautiful, romantic'. He also says that then sex was regarded as revolutionary, hence why he became a pornographer. On another occasion he reminisces about how easy it used to be to make films: people met by chance, exchanged ideas and immediately started to put their projects into practice. Finding actors for pornographic films was not difficult, because his friends regarded them as more pleasant than orgies and young women from bourgeois families preferred to play in such films to becoming secretaries; pornography thus at the time epitomised nonalienated work. Yet Jacques stopped working in the 1980s, after his abortive effort to shoot *An Animal*, a film in which a woman is chased like a fox by a hunting party. The cause of this failure is not explained, although it is implied that the subject was not acceptable in the morally conservative 1980s. Following his withdrawal from the film business Jacques became a 'kept man', supported by his architect wife, again not unlike Alexandre in *The Mother and the Whore*. Financial problems forced him to resume work in the new millennium.

One can notice a similarity between Jacques's biography and that of the Polish-born filmmaker, Walerian Borowczyk. Borowczyk also came to Paris as an outsider and mixed with people for whom the year 1968 was crucial for their careers, most importantly so-called Left Bank directors, such as Chris Marker and Alain Resnais (Owen 2014). However, while they devoted their efforts to making political films, Borowczyk was practically confined to 'erotic films' (albeit not to

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the same extent as Jacques), regarding making them as a revolutionary pursuit. Like Jacques, he also had his heyday in the 1970s and made a porn film with a narrative suspiciously similar to that of *An Animal*, titled *La bête* (*The Beast*, 1975). In the 1980s, Borowczyk's career declined, yet he continued working to support himself, on account of his reputation as somebody who created the genre of 'art pornography', marked by shooting in picturesque châteaux and using a sophisticated *mise-en-scène*. Equally, near the end of his life he became somewhat bitter and disengaged from reality, as suggested by his memoirs, published in Poland, which intermingle anticommunist prattle with the condemnation of globalisation, domination of culture by business, and a desire to return to a past of simpler work, which uses people's minds and hands, rather than technology (Borowczyk 2008) (a sentiment shared by many emigrants from the communist part of Europe, including this one). In my view, an equivalent in Bonello's film to Borowczyk's incoherent 'book of thoughts' is Jacques's rather unsuccessful attempt to build a house for himself with his own hands.

Somewhat paradoxically, what puts Jacques off the new porn industry (as it presumably disgusted Borowczyk) is that it is not pornographic enough, because it does not believe in what it sees. By contrast, he always wanted the viewers to see natural, 'raw sex'. The difference between Jacques's and the new pornographers' attitude to their craft is shown in an early part of the film, when Jacques instructs an actress to wear no nail varnish on the set and not to engage in any dirty talk, and then starts shooting with a static camera and no music. His producer, who is also Jacques's assistant, stops shooting, puts on sappy music, asks the actress to polish her nails and simulate excitement and moves the camera to get close-ups of her erotic parts. He thus, effectively, wants Jacques's film to look like internet porn, even if, as some critics noted with derision, the film appears unaware of the changes that took place in this genre as a consequence of the use of the new medium. Not surprisingly, Jacques finds himself unable to adjust to the new regime and quits. Of course, even present day pornography, as rendered by Bonello, comes across as gentle in comparison with that offered in Seidl's *Import/Export* or by a film like *Demonlover* (2002) by Olivier Assayas, where the theme is not sex and pleasure but torture and death, and when it is an arena of corporate warfare rather than cottage industry squabbles.

Jacques's story is juxtaposed with that of his son, Joseph, played by Jérémie Renier, an actor who in French-speaking cinema, largely thanks to the films of the Dardenne brothers, gained in the 1990s and 2000s a position similar to the one

that Léaud enjoyed in the 1960s and 1970s. (Renier also plays in *Potiche*.) Joseph would like to emulate the generation of his father, as shown by him joining a small group of political protesters, living in a rented flat in Paris, not unlike the cell shown in Godard's *La Chinoise* (1967). Yet the young man is aware that this has become futile. He asks what sense does it make to protest against the constraints of work when work becomes rarity? What purpose is there in shouting political messages when nobody denies people's right to voice their political programmes, but nobody pays attention to them? Faced with the difficulty of revolutionary action, Joseph chooses silence, believing that it is the best political weapon in the new circumstances. This decision is followed by his withdrawal from the city into a rural, bucolic space, not dissimilar to the environment where his father used to shoot his 'blue movies'. The last time we see Joseph is in a night club, where he practically dissolves during a solo dance into a stream of colourful lights, a symbol of the ultimate futility of 'postmodern rebels'. By contrast, the bulky shape of Jacques-Léaud with his distinct hairstyle lingers on, preventing us from forgetting the rebellious 1960s and 1970s.

### Neoliberal capital on trial

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The representative of the capitalist or managerial class is a common character in European cinema of the last twenty years. In this part I will discuss three films that include such a figure: *White Material* (2009) by Claire Denis, *L'emploi du temps* (*Time Out*, 2001) by Laurent Cantet and *Püha Tõnu kiusamine* (*The Temptations of St. Tony*, 2009) by Veiko Õunpuu. These films represent different national traditions and personal styles, with the first two leaning towards realism and the third being surrealistic. Yet all three are auteurist endeavours, showing an ambition to create an allegory and, as much as the capitalist in question is concerned, they represent important connections. Each shows a 'post-world': postcolonial, in the case of *White Material*, postcommunist (and no less postcolonial for that) in *The Temptation of St Tony* and postnational in *Time Out*. They ask what the 'post' means: what economic, social and cultural opportunities are closed and opened by the ending of one epoch and the beginning of a new one. Together they represent a wide spectrum of possible positions for a capitalist (and his sidekick, the manager) in a neoliberal world. They include the manager of a large coffee plantation in Africa, a financial speculator/embezzler and dealer in counterfeit

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products operating between France and the rest of Europe and the manager of a factory in Estonia, which previously belonged to the state.

Maria in *White Material* looks after a coffee plantation, which belongs to her father-in-law, somewhere in Africa, and hopes to inherit it when the aged patriarch passes away. She begins her cinematic existence alone on a road, 'already divested of whatever colonial aura she once may have possessed' (Martin 2010: 50). The black inhabitants of the country refer to people like her scornfully as 'white material'. Ironically, this term calls to mind the period of slavery, when black workers were bought and sold as if they were merely bodies, and evokes the biopolitical idea of people reduced to bodies, to bare life. The end of the colonial era and a civil war are compelling reasons for the white people to return to their home country – France. Maria, however, obstinately refuses to do so, because the coffee crop is ready to be processed and she counts on a handsome profit. In addition, the plantation allows her to engage in, to borrow from the title of another Denis film, 'beautiful work' – nonalienated work. Maria claims that she would not have such an opportunity in France, where she would be out of place and grow lazy. It is also likely, as Denis herself noted, that in France Maria's human capital would not be recognised – unlike other white people living in Africa, such as teachers, doctors or writers, she does not have transferrable skills. Instead, she has many possessions that practically cannot be transported, such as seeds and machines. Her case brings to mind Doris Lessing, whose life and novel *The Grass Is Singing* inspired the director, because Lessing returned from Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to France, unlike her farming parents and brothers, who remained in Africa (Denis 2009).

We see Maria overseeing and performing all the tasks required for processing the coffee, such as finding the workers, driving a tractor to the fields, collecting and washing the beans, using complex machinery. We sense the woman's pleasure in touching the coffee beans and seeing how they change colour in different light and during their processing; even before making this film Denis is renowned for creating 'a cinema of the senses' (Beugnet 2004: 132–96). In the 'happy colonial past', when life was more predictable, Maria probably went to sleep in peace, satisfied that her work benefited herself and the workers whom she paid a 'just wage' (meaning exploiting them in a moderate way). The latter is suggested by the reasonably friendly attitude of the black workers towards her, as well as her providing shelter to Boxer, the leader of the rebels. Yet in her cherishing of work so highly she is alone. The three men in her family, Henri, her father-in-law, André,

her ex-husband and Manuel, her son, all shun work. Henri does so because he is old and he comes to the conclusion that the days of colonial masters are numbered – soon they will lose their land, home and possibly their lives. André is of the same opinion and wants to return to France at all costs, as demonstrated by his attempt to sell the plantation to a corrupt local politician. Finally, Maria's son sees no point in working or even going to school. He eventually joins the rebels, not because of political convictions, but rather to have a more adventurous, new life. The black people are not hostile to work, as shown by Maria's success in assembling a handsome group of them, but they regard it merely as a means to earn money. As they put it, they will not die for work. Maria's work ethic ultimately proves fatal, as all the members of her family die because of her stubborn attachment to her farm. Denis thus makes us believe in the ennobling character of work, only to shatter this belief in the end. If there is any lesson to draw from her film, it is that in order to assess the value of work, it is not enough to look at work itself: one has to locate it in a wider socio-political context. It is worth adding that not for the first time Denis shows the gap between 'work in itself' and 'work in a political context'. Such was the case in *Beau travail* (1999), where the French Foreign Legion carries on with routines consisting of, among other things, building roads that are already built, 'unaware ... of the folly of its labour, the meaninglessness of its industry which the indigenous people watch speechless and perhaps bemused' (Hayward 2001: 162).

Denis's preoccupation with gestures of work brings to mind the feminist theory and practice of the 1970s, most importantly *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (*Jeanne Dielman*, 1975) by Chantal Akerman, which was renowned for edifying ordinary women's gestures (Quart 1988: xiii; Owen 2013: 237). Denis's film can be regarded as a mirror image of Akerman's film. Both directors define their characters by work – work fills their lives, giving it purpose, as well as causing them disappointment. Yet while Akerman cuts her heroine off from any wider socio-political reality, Denis foregrounds Maria's relationship with the outside world. Akerman entraps Jeanne in the domestic space; Denis situates Maria in the open air. Jeanne is passive, Maria is hyperactive. The difference might be regarded as reflecting the three and a half decades that passed since Akerman made her film, marked as much by female liberation as a growing necessity for women to work and be mobile. Yet ultimately, both female directors present their characters as losers, which can be viewed as an indictment of the social realities in which these women operate.

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Vincent in *Time Out* also begins his cinematic life on the road, in his own car. Yet unlike Maria, who is seeking a way back to her place of work, Vincent tries to escape it. He used to work as a financial consultant, a profession encapsulating the current dominance of financial, speculative capital over any other form of accumulated surplus value. Vincent could not stand the requirements to keep appointments, meet clients, persuade them to invest in specific projects, work in a team and rise to the challenge of creating profit for his company and customers. He admits that he most liked the moments in-between, for example when he was travelling to meet clients. He wanted to prolong those intervals and kept missing appointments. He stopped being useful to his company and was sacked. This story of a successful and then failed professional would not be so fascinating if Cantet had finished it there. But Cantet asks what happens after the failure – what options await his protagonist and, by extension, those immersed in the neoliberal game.

The first choice Vincent makes is to hide from his family that he has been made redundant. His secrecy, reminiscent of the behaviour of Gerald in *The Full Monty*, demonstrates that the pressure to win is so great that failure cannot be revealed even to loved ones. Vincent's concealment of his failure is also emblematic of a persistent denial by the leading economists and politicians of any deeper, structural problem in the neoliberal project. All failures are presented as failures of weak, incompetent individuals or a necessary milestone to move to a better position. This is also the tag Vincent adopts when the truth about his job loss is revealed. Rather than admitting that he was sacked, he claims that he gave up on his work in order to work in the United Nations' headquarters in Geneva, in a team advising developing countries. In reality however, to keep going, literally and metaphorically, Vincent convinces his relatives and friends to entrust him with their savings, which he promises to invest, but instead embezzles. Vincent's 'progression' from legal to illegal advising can be seen as a metonymy of the way neoliberalism has matured, by moving from 'ordinary' businesses to shady and highly risky schemes, such as hedge funds, ensuring great income for a few and impoverishing masses who invest their hard-earned savings in them. Cantet, however, does not exonerate Vincent's victims, rendering them as naive in their trust that capital will multiply forever, and greedy, seeing in Vincent a means to enrich themselves.

Vincent then strikes up a friendship with Jean-Michel, a man smuggling counterfeited goods, who suggests that he joins his business, thanks to which the failed financial advisor recuperates some of the losses resulting from his 'investment

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schemes'. This man, played by Serge Livrozet, an ex-convict, journalist and media personality who collaborated with Michel Foucault to introduce prison reform (Vincendeau 2002: 30), is the most sympathetic character in *Time Out*. Unlike Vincent's family and friends, Jean-Michel is able to understand and help Vincent. Also unlike the others, who strive for maximum profit, Jean-Michel is an instinctive socialist, dividing the fruits of his and his collaborators' labour evenly and even agreeing to give Vincent much more than he earned, as in the Marxist slogan, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need'. There is a human touch to everything Jean-Michel does. He knows the names of the people who work in the hotel, while for other customers they are anonymous, barely visible serving bodies. Due to his counterfeited trade and previous involvement in business and politics, which led to his imprisonment, Jean-Michel better understands the nature of the whole neoliberal economic-political complex.

As he puts it in his talk with Vincent's wife, it is practically impossible to differentiate between true and counterfeit goods because they look the same and tend to be produced in the same factories. The 'true' article is only different from the 'fake' in how it generates profit. It is likely that fake articles benefit the workers who produce them for their own advantage using capitalists' machines, and small businessmen who subsequently smuggle them and sell them for less than in official 'designer outlets', allowing people on low incomes to buy necessary commodities. It is also possible that fake goods increase exploitation by forcing producers of the 'real goods' to lower the prices at the workers' expense. Nevertheless, presenting the counterfeiter as the most positive character in the film can be seen as Cantet's criticism of the neoliberal enforcement of private property rights, especially in the form of the TRIPs agreement, which, as Melinda Cooper observes, 'generalizes the exorbitant price demands of the United States' most profitable and politically influential industry: Big Pharma' (Cooper 2008: 55). Such stringent protection of 'real products' has tragic effects for HIV sufferers in the Third World and for practically all the world's poor. Ultimately, one conjectures, under capitalism, all production is fake because it is based on a concept of surplus value (see Chapter 1). If Vincent got a job in the United Nations, it would also be within the neoliberal framework because helping developing countries amounts to forcing them to accept rules, which leads to an increase in social inequalities and the destitution of already poor people by making them pay tribute to the countries that supposedly helped them. Vincent finishes his cinematic journey being interviewed for a job similar to that from which he was sacked at the

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beginning. Hence his travel proves to be circular, suggesting that there is no escape from the neoliberal shackles or at least that this is impossible for people like him.

From Vincent's UN manuals and his journeys between France and Switzerland we conjecture that wherever capital reaches with its tentacles, it imposes certain working practices and functionalist architecture. Architecture and interior design serve to enhance competition between the workers and ensure a separation between insiders and outsiders. Examples are guard booths fitted with CCTV cameras and open-plan offices with huge windows, allowing scrutiny of workers from corridors. The anonymous, functionalist architecture renders the workers interchangeable and intimidates outsiders. This neoliberal order not only permeates the world of adults, but also of children. Their education by teachers and parents follows the same pattern as disciplining their parents. This is shown in an episode in which Vincent peers at his son's judo training in an equally soulless building as the one in which he dwells himself, and his excitement during the tournament when the boy beats his opponent. Neither Vincent, his wife, nor their son show any concern for the boy who lost the game. It transpires that the purpose of the culture in which they operate is the production of obedient, yet competitive bodies. We also see Vincent telling his younger son never to sell anything for less than he can receive. The way Vincent's children are educated, and everybody talks about profit on their investments and career prospects, testifies to the dependence of capitalist development on people's real and emotional investment in the neoliberal project, which blinds them to other possibilities.

*The Temptation of St Tony* by the leading and most arthouse-minded Estonian director, Veiko Õunpuu, casts as its main character an affluent manager who enjoys many privileges of the European East taking a neoliberal turn, including the privatisation of state assets. Such a character not long ago was the 'new man' of Eastern European cinema, signifying the new vitality of this part of Europe, but by the time Õunpuu embarked on his project, this 'new man' had lost most of his charisma. The eponymous Tõnu (Tony), played by the leading Estonian actor, Taavi Eelmaa, signifies the postcolonial power of Estonians (or rather its elites) over Russian workers living in Estonia liberated from Soviet rule.

The film is elliptical, leaving the viewer the task of filling the gaps in the narrative, which refer especially to Tõnu's work as managing director of the factory. Such omissions are in the tradition of Godard (one might think of *Vivre sa vie*, which is about work, but hardly shows work), which most likely inspired



Õunpuu, but equally they can be seen in the context of excluding industrial work from cultural discourses in Eastern Europe, a phenomenon that I discussed in the previous chapter. We see that Tõnu's boss assigns him the task of shutting down a supposedly inefficient factory, because it creates a profit of 19.6 per cent rather than the required 20 per cent. However, we do not see how Tõnu goes about this assignment, instead we only get a brief image of morose men exiting the plant's gates. The brevity of this episode which, however, appears to have a crucial influence on Tõnu's subsequent state of mind, might be seen as Õunpuu's reflection on the fact that workers ceased to matter in the postcommunist world. It should be mentioned that Russians in Estonian contemporary cinema play the main victims of the postcommunist turn to neoliberalism, not least because they constituted a high proportion of the industrial working class in Estonia.

By the time Tõnu sacks the workers, he comes across as a spiritual zombie, as shown in a party sequence in his large, functionalist villa located in the middle of nowhere, where he dances in a mechanical way, wearing a morbid expression on his face. Yet following his decision to close the factory down, he undergoes a moral awakening, reminiscent of Dostoevsky's characters. He embarks on a journey, in space and in his imagination, which includes an attempt to save Nadezdha, a daughter of one of the redundant Russian workers. Õunpuu, like Cantet, shows that redemption and escape from the clutches of modern business are impossible; the more the fugitive tries to redeem his act, the more he harms himself and those around him. Tõnu becomes estranged from his wife and daughter and precipitates Nadezdha's downfall. He cannot prevent her abduction to a grotesque club, ironically named *Golden Times* (*Das Goldene Zeitalter*), where together with a herd of other young women, Nadezdha is to serve as a sex slave to rich customers. Later Tõnu looks on passively as Nadezdha commits suicide.

The mise-en-scène adds to the apocalyptic character of the narrative. Wherever Tõnu turns he encounters corpses, such as human limbs in the forest and the body of a friendly dog he brought to his home (Tõnson 2010). Even Tõnu himself is about to be chopped to pieces and perhaps sold for a profit at a hospital turned into a dissecting room. Such a fate can be seen as a literalisation of Agamben's view that in the contemporary world human life does not have an autonomous value, but is used to prolong and improve the quality of the lives of others. Tõnu, however, manages to escape when a man with an electric saw, about to dismember the hapless manager, slips and kills himself. The film finishes with Tõnu in the middle of nowhere, not knowing what will happen to him or the world.

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Characters shown by Õunpuu use a plethora of languages, such as Russian, German, English and, of course, Estonian, a reference to Estonia's past as an object of numerous colonisations and a sign that the grim diagnosis offered in *The Temptation of St Tony* concerns not only Estonia or even Eastern Europe, but the world at large.

All three films discussed in this section offer us a vision of a chaotic world, in which even the supposed winners, those with significant monetary and human capital, are disempowered, unhappy and lost. They provide a stark contrast to the bourgeoisie from *The Communist Manifesto*, which 'has played a most revolutionary role in history'. Their attempts to change their lives prove even more disastrous than if they had flown with the tide. The lesson is that if there will ever be deliverance from this world, it will not come from 'their headquarters'.

### **Camp as new factory, new factory as old camp**

In the previous chapters I discussed films about Nazi concentration camps and Soviet-type work camps as commentaries on the character of work in periods concurrent to their making. In this chapter, alongside a film set in the Nazi past, *Pramen života* (*Spring of Life*, 2000) directed by Milan Cieslar, I will discuss one set in contemporary France, Nicolas Klotz's *La Question humaine* (*Heartbeat Detector*, 2007) about modern day business, as they appear to comment on each other. It is worth adding that Klotz's work belongs to a growing body of films comparing contemporary capitalists to the Nazis; another notable example of this trend is the Greek production, *Kynodontas* (*Dogtooth*, 2009) by Giorgos Lanthimos.

*Spring of Life* recollects an early Nazi experiment in eugenics coded 'Lebensborn', whose purpose was to breed perfect children, able to carry on the Nazi project well into the future. Lebensborn is thus an extreme example of what Foucault and Agamben term biopolitics – politics whose objective is deciding which lives are worth living and which should be eliminated. We know all too well now that Nazi politics was biopolitics *tout court*. Yet as Melinda Cooper persuasively argues, biopolitics is also central to the neoliberal project. It promises life beyond death for those who can afford it, while neglecting environmental damage caused by capitalist penetration (Cooper 2008).

Cieslar shows that for the fulfilment of the Lebensborn programme the Nazis chose predominantly Slavic girls who conformed to the specific physical and

mental criteria, being fit, healthy and blond. In the film the selected girls are sent to a special camp, situated in an old spa, where they undergo an indoctrination programme, combined with extensive physical exercise and, prior to their impregnation, surgically performed defloration. Subsequently they are assigned their mating partners: German soldiers, who after a very short courtship, lasting just one afternoon, take the girls to their bedrooms, where they have sex with them, only to abandon them the next day to fight in the war and most likely die. The children born from these relationships are briefly cared for by their mothers and then placed in the families of 'true Aryans'. The villages from which the mothers come and the 'insemination camp' are set in apparently tranquil rural locations, suggesting the premodern times of pacified social order. But Cieslar uses this location to underscore the depth of penetration of the Nazi order into the tissue of Europe, indicated also by the plethora of languages used in the film.

The story focuses on one victim of Lebensborn: a young orphaned Slovak girl from the Sudetenland called Gretka. She accepts her assignment to become mother to an *Übermensch* due to her naivety and because she has no choice – the Nazis do not ask their victims for their opinions. Yet upon arriving in the camp, Gretka discovers that the programme is closely linked to the elimination of those whom the Nazi assigned the role of *Untermenschen*, the Jews. This category is represented by a boy her age called Leo, whose father was the chief doctor in the spa before the Nazi takeover. Leo is first reduced to performing manual jobs around the camp and then sent to a death camp. Before this happens, however, Gretka has an affair with him and instead of becoming impregnated by her Nazi lover, she gives birth to a Jewish child. As punishment, she is sent to a labour camp and loses contact with her child. However this tragic story, pointing to the danger of people selling their own bodies during the times when 'ordinary' labour is devalued due to an extreme imbalance of power between the rulers and the ruled, is undermined by the romantic character of the film, which finishes with a semi-happy ending. Gretka survives until the liberation, and although she does not find her son, she becomes reunited with a girl handed to her by an unknown woman before her own departure to the spa: another victim of Lebensborn.

The programme of creating superhumans for the privileged members of society, using fit 'subalterns', as presented in *Spring of Life*, resonates in contemporary times, when many young and poor women rent their bodies to produce children for rich women, who are too old or unwilling to undertake the pain of pregnancy and giving birth and, in a wider sense, points to sex and

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reproductive work as a means of supporting one's family (Brennan 2003). The difference between the Czech, Slovak and Polish girls as represented by Cieslar, and those who choose to be surrogates under conditions of neoliberal capitalism, lies in the different tools used to coerce them. The Nazis had to use a distinct ideology and appeal to the girls' patriotic spirit; the current very rich do not need such 'niceties' – it is enough that they are able to pay the desperate women several thousand dollars for their labour. German eugenics was comprehensively condemned; the current practice of 'womb-renting' is typically presented as morally neutral because undertaken under conditions of 'freedom'. Yet as Giorgio Agamben argues, comparing medical experiments on the prisoners of Dachau and those in 'free countries', such as the United States, on prisoners sentenced to death, the difference is meaningless, as on both occasions the people subjected to such experiments are coerced (Agamben 1998: 181–88). The fact that such experiments are undertaken in democracy does not condone the German Nazi doctors (as their defenders argued during the Nuremberg Trials); rather their importance for the Nazi project demonstrates that they should be forbidden under any circumstances.

While *Spring of Life* is set during the Second World War but alludes to practices common in contemporary times, *Heartbeat Detector*, whose literal title is 'The question of a human' or 'A human question', is set in the present but points to the past. It draws comparisons between the present dominated by corporations that reduce governments to the role of strengthening and legitimising their power, and the Nazi past dominated by politicians and the military class, yet assisted by German industry. For both of these systems the question of producing the right type of people, able to carry on their projects, is paramount. Both embark on this task by educating promising candidates and eliminating the unfit.

Klotz's film is set in a fictitious global conglomerate called 'SC Farb', a thinly veiled reference to the German chemical company, the IG Farbenindustrie AG, the first civilian firm in Nazi Germany that used the labour of the prisoners of Auschwitz. The film begins with a high-angle tracking shot of a series of faded numbers on concrete or tarmac. It probably shows the company car park, but its movement seems to set the numbers in sideways motion to summon up the phantom of numbered railway wagons. This impression of a ghostly haunting is reinforced by its echo of the famous tracking shots of Alain Resnais's *Nuit et brouillard* (1956) (O'Shaughnessy 2011: 432). Subsequently we see smoking factory chimneys, people lying on the street, as if they have been shot or died of hunger,

although they are only drunk or drugged after a night of clubbing, others mopping the courtyard as if after an execution and a woman in a warehouse taking some shoes from a large pile, again as if they belonged to those who have been gassed.

The Nazi past is also evoked by including two characters with direct connections to Nazi biopolitics. The director of the company, Mathias Jüst, is the son of someone who took part in the Final Solution, and Karl Rose, his second-in-command and the voice of cold, economic rationality, is one of the *Lebensborn*. Their 'heritage' points to two poles of Nazi biopolitics: the cleansing of the undesirables and the creation of the right race. Klotz demonstrates, confirming the ideas of Giorgio Agamben, that these two eugenic strategies have their contemporary equivalents. The first, negative eugenics, is repeated through rounding up illegal, black immigrants in cafés, most likely to be deported to places where they will be sentenced to death or utter poverty, and through discussing placing heartbeat detectors in the lorries in which illegal immigrants are likely to be smuggled to the West. The detectors represent immense progress, in comparison with the Nazi methods, in identifying and preventing *Untermenschen* from reaching places that are ascribed to people of a higher social order.

Simon, the psychologist employed by SC Farb, receives the task of cleansing the firm during its restructuring or downsizing to remove those who show such faults of mind or body as a penchant for alcohol, weak nerves or even having a family, which prevents them from committing themselves entirely to serving their employer. Again, in comparison with the crude methods of the Nazis, Simon's procedures are refined, of which the clearest sign is the fact that the subjects of his investigation are not aware of his objectives and treat him as an ally. Simon is also instrumental for the second, 'positive' strategy of creating a new man by working with the company's lower cadres to help them overcome their personal limitations to become, as he puts it, 'competitive subalterns' (*des subalternes compétitifs*), again evoking Foucault and Agamben's theory that the objective of sovereign power is the creation of people who collude with violence inflicted upon them.

The overall message of the film is that the neoliberal world of corporations is like the Nazi universe, only more sophisticated. The closest cinematic predecessor to the 'camp' offered in *Heartbeat Detector* is that shown in *Kornblumenblau*, as discussed in the previous chapter, where the prisoners run the camp practically by themselves. This is a sad place, even for those in power, as shown by the fragile mental state of Jüst, Rose and Simon. Although it is oppressive and its inhabitants are aware of that, they are unable to leave it – it becomes their inner prison.

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*Heartbeat Detector* has all the markers of a thriller, including solving a mystery, but it does not provide a resolution. The world, as represented in the film, does not change when the culprits are discovered.

It is worth mentioning that not long after Klotz's film it was widely revealed that Ingvar Kamprad, the founder and owner of one of Europe's most famous and successful furniture companies, IKEA (a 'perfect immobile equivalent of Volkswagen', due to being known as practical and affordable), was a member of the Swedish Nazi party. Some of the newspaper articles on this subject even showed Kamprad in a woolly hat, looking like an aged Nazi criminal, hunted by the international police and eventually brought to justice; an image that brings to mind the popular novels of Stieg Larsson. In the Swedish context, Kamprad's appearance of self-effacing modesty is regarded as proof that there is no meaningful difference between the richest capitalists and ordinary people. However, as I indicated in the introduction, in my view people like Kamprad constitute the most dangerous type of capitalists, because their ascetic lifestyle allows them to accumulate more and to exploit more than if their lifestyle were less frugal, and they successfully project an image of a billionaire who is 'one of us' and innocuous.

In the case of Kamprad, there was no attempt to compare him to the captured Nazis. If anything, the press only reported his anger that nosy journalists would not leave his past alone. There was also no attempt to connect Kamprad's supposedly immature *Weltanschauung* with his mature views, despite the fact that IKEA, along with corporations such as Walmart, was added by labour rights group International Labor Rights Forum to the infamous Sweatshop Hall of Shame. Kamprad's frame of mind suggests that the stories of tormented capitalists, discussed in this and the previous part might be merely 'compensation narratives'; in real life capital feels no remorse and has no desire to change.

### **The toil of leisure**

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*Trainspotting* (1996), directed by Danny Boyle, is one of the most analysed films of the 1990s, both due to its subject – the use and abuse of drugs – and its sophisticated, hyperrealistic style, drawing on both arthouse and popular cinema (Smith 2002). Based on the acclaimed novel by Irvine Welsh about the lives of Edinburgh drop-outs in the 1980s, it can be seen, however, as a metaphor for life under the neoliberal condition not only in the 1980s but also in subsequent decades.

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The main characters, all in their twenties, Renton, Spud, Sick Boy and Begbie, reject a mainstream lifestyle in pursuit of drugs. Several times the film's main protagonist, Renton, utters the words 'choose life', adding 'choose a career' and 'a three-piece-suite' and 'an electric tin opener'. This is a combination of a slogan, used to encourage a rehabilitation programme for drug addicts, with fake adverts for various consumer goods. Such fake mottos mock Thatcherite ideology, which pronounces that life is about consumer choice and is itself an object of consumer choice. The irony results from the assumption that there should be more to life than collecting gadgets (an idea conveyed also by the film's ironic title; 'trainspotting', a byword for trivial pursuit) and that life itself should not be compared to material objects. The slogan 'choose life' also evokes Foucault's preoccupation with technologies of the self, understood as an 'exercise of self upon self by which one tries to work out, to transform one's self and to attain a certain mode of being' (Foucault 1988: 2) and further elaborations of this concept, which point to the shifting of responsibility for any deprivation and misfortune experienced by the poor from society to the individuals concerned (Cruikshank 1996).

That said, it is a matter of interpretation how critical of Thatcherism and its later incarnation, Blairism, *Trainspotting* really is. Carl Neville sees in it an affirmation of the individualist and consumerist ethos, claiming that it casts poverty as a 'consequence of individual lack of graft or get-up-and-go' (Neville 2011: 10) and that 'for the protean middle classes, everything is fluid and opt-into and out-able' (ibid.: 11). It is also worth adding that while the film attacks neoliberal culture as consumer culture at the level of content, it partakes in it and promotes it through its form, by presenting itself as a perfect consumable object. Even introducing the characters by their nicknames, which became a recurring trait in British 'youth cinema', resembles a kind of consumer 'branding', mocked by Renton. On the whole, in Boyle's film we can find both disgust for the Thatcherite reduction of life to monetary exchange and fascination with its cult of a successful individual, whose success is confirmed by his wealth and his ability to consume in style. The character of Renton epitomises these contradictory impulses. This was also, in my view, one of the factors that ensured the film's popularity.

Renton began his career as somebody who chose not to choose worthless material goods and decided instead to take drugs. After choosing drugs one has only one option – more drugs. He opts for the hard core end, heroin, which further reduces his choice, because after heroin one does not want to switch to softer options. Yet Renton's choice, and the one to which the advert 'choose life' lures

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naive consumers, are similar in important ways. Taking heroin is an act of absolute consumerism. This drug, like the objects of many adverts, such as new cars, fashionable clothes or mobile phones is expensive and ages quickly, disappearing rapidly in the veins, leaving a desire for more and compelling its user to go to great lengths to procure the precious substance. Mark and his friends, despite their professed rejection of a life of work, thus have to work a lot, using a variety of skills, to earn enough to afford their favoured object of consumption. They have to cheat, rob, extract, sell, exchange, and do it all with increasing speed, mimicking capital's frantic pursuit of profit. In these circumstances, decency, as Renton comments, is a luxury one cannot afford. Such toil of idleness also pertained to the characters in *Withnail and I*, as I argued in the previous chapter, but in *Trainspotting* it is greatly exceeded. Comparing these two films suggests that the art of idleness deteriorated over the decades, reflecting the changes in the lives of British people.

The link between selling and taking drugs and 'normal' capitalist behaviour is also underscored by Renton's career following his overcoming of a drug addiction. He becomes an estate agent in London, as he puts it, 'letting, selling, sub-letting, subdividing, cheating, screwing others'. Again, his job reflects the character of neoliberal capitalism, where the greatest profit is made not by the production of goods, but by financial operations. Such a practice pertains especially to Thatcher's times, when property speculation was the most common way to make money (until it gave way to more 'abstract' speculation, such as dealing with 'futures'). Commenting on this period, Renton says that 'he almost felt happy', pointing to the pleasure of high earnings and endorsing the Thatcherite ethos. Yet this stage ends when his pals Sick Boy and Begbie visit him, disrupting his lifestyle and bringing him back to Edinburgh. The negative influence of a group upon a successful individual is, again, in tune with Thatcher's edification of individuals and scorn for communal bonds.

Renton's last job consists of carrying a large amount of heroin to London with his three pals and selling it at profit to a professional drug dealer, and then running away from his friends with all the money they earned. His behaviour brings to mind the stories of many capitalists, who amassed a great fortune by robbing their customers and collaborators, and disappeared, either physically, by moving to faraway places or simply by transferring their fortunes to places that their victims could not reach. Also, like many of them, Renton redeems himself by an act of charity, namely leaving some of the stolen money for Spud, who plays in the film the role of a 'deserving poor' (ibid.: 12). To show the similarity between legal and illegal business, the drug



dealer, who buys the heroin from Renton and his friends, looks and behaves like a normal businessman and acts with impunity, unlike the small crook Begbie, whom the police catch when the big dealers are already far away.

It is suggested that the authorities want to rehabilitate Renton and his friends by forcing them to work. But the choices young people have in this respect are very limited. This is reflected in the episode of Spud's interview for a job in the leisure industry. Although he claims that 'others people's leisure is his pleasure', he does not really want the job because 'leisure industry' is a byword for the lowest rung of the capitalist economy, reflecting the Marxist idea that the capitalist's leisure is the working man's hardest work. We are shown places of leisure rather than of work: night clubs, Princes Street in Edinburgh, which is the city's main shopping area, and the touristy part of London. Although the characters of Welsh's novel all come from Leith, once the industrial centre of Edinburgh, there are no signs of any material production there. One meaningful detail in this respect was offered by Danny Boyle himself. He mentioned that the episode of Renton's visit to the worst toilet in Scotland was shot in an old cigarette factory, the disused Wills factory in Glasgow, commenting that most British films of the 1990s were shot in such decayed industrial spaces and that in due course the one where his film was made was transformed into an area of luxury flats (quoted in Solomons 2008).

Although *Trainspotting* is about low life – its authors even indulge in describing its sordid features – there is something larger than life about the story. It feels like a Greek tragedy, recreated in distinctly unheroic times. The source of its pathos is precisely the gap between the stature of the cynical yet human Renton, and the everyday 'postindustrial' gutter in which he and his friends float. However, the way out, as suggested by Boyle, is an individual escape, which will strengthen capitalism, rather than collective work to change things at the bottom.

*Beli beli svet* (*White White World*, 2010), a Serbian-Swedish-German coproduction, directed by Serbian director Oleg Novković, is based on a similar premise to *Trainspotting*: it attempts to furnish lowly lives with pathos. This ambition is conveyed by the choice of its setting: Bor in Eastern Serbia, the same location where almost half a century earlier Dušan Makavejev set and shot his first and one of his greatest films, *Man Is Not a Bird* (see Chapter 2). Back then Bor was a tough, yet lively place, boasting the largest copper mine and processing plant in Europe. In Bor, as Makavejev made us believe, passions ran deep, leading to betrayals and murders. In Novković's film, unlike in *Trainspotting*, industry is not extinct, as demonstrated by the smoke coming from tall chimneys, enveloping the

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town in white fog and hundreds of men still wearing helmets. Yet the film follows those who never properly started their working lives or left the industrial working class a long time ago. The principal character is a young woman, Rosa, brought up by her grandfather, as her mother serves a jail sentence for killing her husband. Rosa does not work and fills her days searching for drugs, alcohol, sexual partners and, as we also learn, meaning. The people whom she meets are ‘fellow travellers’, who also lost hope of a better life and numb their pain by alcohol (in the case of the older generation) or drugs (the young ones).

Novković portrays Rosa and those close to her as if they were characters from an ancient tragedy. This effect is achieved by choosing for the role an actress of unusual beauty and a Sophoclean twist in the narrative. Rosa falls in love with, becomes pregnant by and, finally, kills a man who turns out to be her own father. The ancient feel is added by the characters singing songs about themselves as if they were a chorus, possessing knowledge of their future and from this perspective assessing their current situation. The sense of tragedy also comes from the unique *mise-en-scène* of Bor, where everything appears to be of superhuman proportions: deep pits, huge tips, tall chimneys, melted metal flowing down the pits as if it were a wound in the tissue of the town. The industrial or postindustrial landscape, with its labyrinth of artificial mountains and holes, imprisons the characters. Unlike people in the 1960s, who were immediately sucked up by the factories, they cannot find their place there any more and cannot find it elsewhere either. Novković employs jump cuts, splicing together one shot with another almost identical one, only the characters and objects in it are in slightly different positions, or the camera angle is just a little off. This gives the impression that time has skipped, that the proceedings have jumped five seconds – or five minutes or five hours – from the previously perceived moment (Petkovic 2010). The characters thus appear to be trapped in the present – unhappy in it, yet unable to transform their fate.

To conclude, these two films condemn neoliberal conditions for sentencing young people to idleness and, at the same time, validate a neoliberal ethos that presents idleness as unhealthy for an individual and dangerous for society. They also suggest that if their characters find a way out of this conundrum, it will be through individual action rather than cooperation; their success will not change the status quo but confirm it.

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## CONCLUSIONS

# Towards the New Cinema of Work and Idleness

*'Enough of crimes and bloodshed, enough of Kigali ... Long live holidays!'*

*Jean-Luc Godard in Film Socialisme*

*'Workers of all countries, call it a day!'*

*Krisis-Group, Manifesto Against Labour*

In the conclusions to this book I would like to return to Marx's concept of fetishism. The author of *Capital* uses it to illuminate the fact that every commodity placed on the market hides the labour that was put into its production. There is a mystique to a commodity. Consequently, capital is also fetishised; its origin and development and, especially, its menacing, destructive aspects are obscured. We can thus infer that in contrast to commodities and capital, labour is a simpler and more transparent concept – labour is, more or less, what it appears to be, as suggested by the title of Marx's magnum opus – 'Capital', not 'Labour' or 'Work'. Even if we agree with Hardt and Negri's argument that Marx discusses wealth before discussing labour for reasons of heuristics and not because he regards labour as less important than capital (Hardt and Negri 2006: 64), the aforementioned impression remains.

Yet as many authors have noted and as my investigation confirms, work is far from a simple concept, and the dominant discourses from both the right and the left do not represent it as so. It tends to be rendered as a necessary and ennobling, empowering and liberating activity for everybody – as something without which a man is not truly worth his name. A small but symptomatic example of this approach is the recent information, circulated in practically all British mainstream media, that one of the most privileged members of British society, Prince William, almost immediately after his wedding returned to work as a helicopter pilot. The idea behind such a swift return to one's toil was to demonstrate to the public that the royals are by no means an idle bunch. On the contrary, they respect the 'labour idol' more than the Christian God, with his concept of labour-free Sunday too Fordist for current standards. The clear message to the rest of the population is

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that they should abandon their idle lives and try to match the hardworking residents of Buckingham Palace. This message is also conveyed, in a more heavy-handed way, by introducing schemes such as ‘workfare’, which forces unemployed people to work for less than a living wage in jobs with a high degree of alienation, at the sanction of withdrawing their benefits.

I do not deny that work can give people pleasure and provide their lives with purpose, as well as with a sense of material and psychological security. But such nonalienated work is a rarity and opportunities for it are diminishing every day. Academic professions, and many of the so-called ‘creatives’ and members of the ‘cognitariat’, which became integrated into the regime of producing profit, are good examples to illustrate this trend (Ross 2008). For the majority of the working population work has always been a source of pain, or at best tedium. It does not enrich, but impoverishes our lives as demonstrated by the fact that those who can afford not to work, except a small circle of martyrs and researchers, take up this opportunity.

Equally, I agree that work is needed to sustain the world’s population materially and culturally, but I see a great imbalance between the edification of work in the dominant discourses and the real need for work in contemporary society. I also observe an asymmetry between the material and cultural rewards that certain occupations afford their performers and their social usefulness. The rule appears to be that the less work is needed, the more it is advocated and the less clear the benefits of certain types of work or even the more unnecessary and environmentally unsustainable their products, the more rewards they bring the workers. A case in point are the huge salaries of stock market speculators, scientists working on extreme forms of life or production of new types of weapon, lawyers specialising in copyright protection, movie stars or journalists engaged in repackaging trivial information. By contrast, sectors dominated by women and immigrant workers, such as agriculture, food processing, construction work, childcare, caring for the elderly and cleaning, which are indispensable to every society, are paid poorly and bring little social recognition. The contrast between high material and cultural benefits of superfluous or harmful work and low rewards for useful toil, to use William Morris’s term (2008), demonstrates that differences in work rewards are a function of the political power of its performers and recipients, hence of a capitalist class system. This rule can be seen as reflecting what is known as the Lauderdale Paradox, arising out of the inverse ratio of the two kinds of value (use value and exchange value), as one of the chief contradictions of capitalist

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production. Exchange value dominates use value: making more money (at whatever cost to human or environment) is deemed more important than doing useful things (Sugiyama 1996).

The edification of work by forces of capital can thus be explained by a simple fact that capital feeds on labour, to evoke Marx, like a vampire on a living body, so it always needs more labour, real and potential, and ideology is one of the means to achieve this goal. The less work is needed to sustain the population, the more capitalism needs pro-work ideology to obfuscate the reality. This explains the near-religious zeal with which neoliberal governments and the economic elite preach that 'any job is better than no job' (Krisis-Group 1999). Conversely, widespread withdrawal of labour, coupled with its moral and cultural downgrading brings a risk of collapse of the capitalist system (ibid.).

The extolling of labour on the part of the mainstream left, on the other hand, which manifests itself, for example, in demands to lower rates of unemployment rather than increasing unemployment benefits (never 'idleness benefits'), can be seen in part as a legacy of 'crude communism' or 'Bolshevism', the system inaugurated by Lenin, which was meant to be merely the means to a future free of alienated labour, but which became a permanent feature of living in the socialist East (Harrington 1974). It also has to do with the conviction that without aiming for full employment the working class will lose all its remaining political and moral power. Such a view is partly supported by the fact that trade unions are still important, perhaps even the central point of resistance against capitalism, more so than the old left-wing parties and organisations of unemployed people. Nevertheless, the fight for jobs, rather than for fairer distribution of the surplus product and value, the defence of the welfare state and the demonetisation of social and cultural life demonstrates that the left has been reduced to fighting the right on the right's terms.

Ensuring full employment is not a Marxist ideal, far from it. For Marx and his followers, under conditions of capitalism, workers lose their real and potential power through work, and the development of machines and science only speeds up this process. To quote Marx, 'The increase of the productive force of labour and the greatest possible negation of necessary labour is the necessary tendency of capital' (Marx 1973: 693). We can see clearly that such a claim perfectly suits contemporary, post-Fordist times, when great advances in technology are accompanied by an unprecedented loss of political power for the workers and the highest level of unemployment. Conversely refusal to work, used on a large scale,

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forces the employers to negotiate the conditions of work and often leads to an improvement in the workers' conditions and political position. Such a programme has a higher chance of success, the more widespread it is; the further capital has to search for a surplus population willing to replace the striking or reluctant workers. Ultimately, as Marx predicted, socialism would only win if it became a global movement, matching the global character of capitalism. As long as it is not, namely as long as there is a lack of solidarity between different types of workers, as well as workers and nonworkers, it is doomed to failure.

To repeat, we do not need more work and, especially, we do not need work that produces high profit, but less of it. Equally, as Karl Polanyi proclaimed, we need economy embedded in the needs of society, not the other way round – the needs of the economy, which means the needs of capital, have to dictate what society can afford and at what cost. For that, however, the neoliberal project, which gained a near-hegemonic status in the current world, should be abandoned and replaced by a new regime, which imposes limits to capital and hence limits to economic inequality, and time and strenuousness of work. This system should ensure the existence of zones that are outside of the market regime, such as health and education, and regulate trading in essential resources such as land and water. In order for such a programme to work, however, it should be universal, so there are no safe havens for billionaires nor 'special economic zones' where poor people can be exploited with impunity. What will the social cost be of such a programme? Inevitably it will affect the working practices and social position of those whose main work is to create capital and those who constitute privileged sectors of workers by, for example, creating technological innovations or producing art. The overall results might not be to everybody's liking, but in my view the so-called privileged West will lose less than it fears. Besides, inculcating and cultivating the fear of a possible loss of privileges and in this way preventing solidarity with those who do not have them, has always been an important weapon of capitalism. The likely alternative to this programme is widespread misery, conflict, impoverished culture and the accelerated depletion of the Earth's natural resources, which might be deadly not only for those at the bottom of the human pile but also for those at the top. We already see some of these dangers materialising in the rise of terrorist attacks and other types of violence, such as riots, apparently lacking political purpose but in reality pointing to the failure of nominally democratic governments to represent the whole of society. Yet the clearer the problems and risks of continuing the current politics, the more

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forcefully presented is the argument that any alternative is economically unsustainable or even illogical.

What is the role of cinema in fulfilling a programme of reversing neoliberalism and preventing other systems of similar effects? In order to answer this question we should realise that cinema is a part of the economy and a system of signification, a powerful ideological tool, being able to change people's minds, the latter being of special importance to me. Although it is widely conceded that it plays this role now to a lesser extent than it used to, nevertheless it has hardly become superseded by any other form of art. Not a long time ago Alain Badiou, echoing the old pronouncement of Lenin, maintained that it is a 'mass art', where 'mass' is a political category, or more precisely a category of activist democracy, of communism, because the artistic productions that the erudite or dominant culture declares incontestable are seen and liked by millions of people from all social groups at the very moment of their creation (Badiou 2009).

I will divide its role of affecting the masses into three interconnected tasks: documenting, analysing and projecting; the same tasks that many authors cited in this book also took upon themselves, such as Marx, Polanyi and Harvey, in their respective fields of research. The crux of the matter is to establish how best to fulfil it in the direction that I outlined: by whom and how. In this book I privileged the role of filmmakers and professional interpreters, namely critics and film historians, although this role can and should be fulfilled by other individuals and groups, such as policy makers and ordinary viewers, who construct in their heads their own versions of the film and share them with fellow viewers.

European films considered in this book are not lacking in material documenting the exploitation of workers and undervaluation of labour. Much more rarely films depict the pleasures and advantages of work; such representations are limited to certain films from the 1960s, usually made in the East, and even there the rewards of work are coupled with disappointments. They show that from the 1960s the position of workers has deteriorated: their lives are less stable, their political power has diminished and they are squeezed out from the places where they could share their experiences. Films about concentration camps included in this study further illuminate the link between work, dehumanisation and extermination. In the same way they point to the temptation to use other people's work as a means of not only amassing material wealth but a sense of importance and impunity, of playing god. By and large, the films discussed show that classes understood as groups of people of strikingly different standards of living, political power and opportunities to

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change their lives exist, and class divisions have solidified in the last thirty years or so.

Yet the condemnation of alienated work is not balanced in these films by extolling its opposite – idleness. In most cases idleness is not depicted as a different, pleasant and potentially permanent mode of functioning in the world, but as an aberration from the norm and a temporary state. The typical scenario for the protagonist of a film about idleness is for him or her to either become disillusioned about idleness and join the world of paid employment with extra enthusiasm, thus presenting it as a state that capitalism can easily take advantage of, as argued by Marx, or mental breakdown and spiritual or even physical death. Hence, they ultimately show that idleness as an alternative to work is not truly possible in the current system.

European cinema scores somewhat lower as an instrument for analysing the realities of work. In a smaller proportion of films we see the links between the vicissitudes suffered by the workers or advantages enjoyed by them and the character of macroeconomy. The majority of filmmakers limit themselves to showing only one part of the equation – the situation of the worker in his or her immediate environment, or of a capitalist detached from the worker. Notable exceptions are films from the 1970s, as exemplified by *Man of Marble*, *O Lucky Man!* and *Tout va bien*, reflecting the fact that this was a period when dramatic change was expected, yet when it happened it was not always in a way hoped for by the workers. This unwillingness or inability to analyse the situation of work after the 1970s is projected onto the heterogeneous styles of the discussed films, with fewer and fewer films using epic narratives and the vast majority limiting themselves to painstaking depiction of an individual in his or her immediate environment (for a discussion of this trend in French cinema see O’Shaughnessy 2007), as if pointing to the heterogeneity of grievances and the difficulty of creating a coherent strategy for acting upon them.

Finally, the majority of filmmakers, even those ostensibly committed to the left-wing cause, do not encourage viewers to change the capitalist status quo by illuminating advantages of the action in the right direction. Projecting a ‘radiant future’ is hardly on the agenda in the films discussed, especially after the 1970s. An attempt to change things by collective action ends up in defeat, as in the case of the anarchists and workers presented in *Old School Capitalism* by Željimir Žilnik. By and large, it appears that the filmmakers accept, to paraphrase the opinion presented in *O Lucky Man!*, that revolution is opium for the masses and intellectuals



alike. If anything, the past is radiant, as in the depiction of the 1970s in films made in the 1990s and 2000s. This does not mean that improvement cannot be enjoyed by an individual, but this happens on capitalist terms, namely thanks to him or her rejecting solidarity with ‘fellow travellers’. Improvement is thus always at the expense of sacrificing universalist ambition, and in a way reinforces the capitalist ethos.

In addition, improvement can happen by an ‘internal revolution’ or ‘limited utopia’ – finding an outlet for one’s frustrations, enjoying some short-lived victories, working on one’s self. Such a solution also suits a capitalist, as this does not undermine the drive towards the creation of capital, in the same way that internal exile suited the authorities of countries that adopted ‘crude communism’. However, even this scenario is used more rarely as we approach the present day. Again, the style of films from this period, which feeds on earlier styles, rather than attempting to revolutionise cinematic language as, I believe, was the ambition of modernist filmmakers such as Antonioni or Makavejev, betrays a withdrawal from large political agendas into small life projects.

This unwillingness to project a better future for the working class can be explained by these films’ attempted realism, both in the sense of focusing on what is going on here and now and in being supposedly realistic about the chances of changing the world, namely accepting that it is today easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism (Jameson 2003; see also Badiou 2007: 4–5). One such factor is the consequence of earlier revolutionary movements, such as the protests of 1968 and the Solidarity movement of the 1980s. Although they were, in the short term, successful, in the longer term they facilitated the victory of the forces against which they fought. For many their failure confirms the idea that, to return to Leszek Kołakowski’s phrase, ‘the skull of communism will never smile again’ (Kołakowski 1999: 418) or that, as Jacques Rancière claims, the only actuality of communism is the actuality of its critique (Rancière 2010: 136). Films from the 1980s point to the success of neoliberalism’s ability to present itself as non-ideological, rational, as economical science and common sense, rather than a distinct ideology serving a specific class. Consequently, anybody who opposes it risks being taken not for an idealist in a positive sense, but for a madman. Another factor contributing to the success of neoliberalism is its extolling of individualism, pronouncing that everybody can be a winner if only she or he tries really hard – as proved by the cases of so many winners, from Bill Gates to J.K. Rowling. Individualism is thus painted as a

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universalist project – as the most just system one can imagine. Simultaneously, it projects an image of people who attempt to unite as if they were a mob made up of those who renounce their most basic human right of being an individual and pose a threat to democracy. A widespread association of crowds with totalitarian orders – Nazism and crude communism – strengthens this association. I concede that marching together makes one feel less of an individual than engaging in an individual activity, for example writing a book, a sentiment which, I believe, is shared by many academics and intellectuals at large, and most likely by representatives of many other categories of workers. Yet as Marx argued, only by coming together and fighting in the name of all workers do we increase the chance that everybody one day will be treated like an individual and his or her alienation will be overcome.

To quote Harvey again, ‘In a time when the class struggle has receded as a unified force in the advanced capitalism, ... is this not also a time when the painting of fantastic pictures of a future society has some role to play?’ (Harvey 2000: 49). In this passage Harvey appeals to everybody interested in and capable of engaging in ideological work or, as one can say, in producing pro-communist propaganda, but for me his words come across as particularly directed to the ‘painters’ of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – filmmakers. I certainly crave such fantastic, future-orientated cinema, in order not to lose hope that change is possible, a hope especially important for those who care for future generations, more likely to suffer from insecurity and alienation than those who live now. I would like it to show a world where nonalienated work prevails over alienated, the alienated work is shared, and there is plenty of scope for idleness, which is treated not as an appendage to work, but activity (or passivity) in its own right, and which does not need to be paid for by a sense of shame or guilt.



# Notes

## Introduction

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1. That said, issues of production and reception would play a much larger role in my next planned monograph devoted to cinema and work, where I want to discuss at length a limited number of filmmakers working in different political, economic and industrial conditions.

## Chapter 1

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1. A thorough presentation of the changing meaning of work is offered by Herbert Applebaum in *The Concept of Work: Ancient, Medieval and Modern* (Applebaum 1992; see also Joyce 1987).
  2. A similar observation was made by Joseph Stiglitz, winner of a Nobel Prize for economics, adviser to Bill Clinton and generally an apologist for capitalism, although increasingly disillusioned by its neoliberal incarnation, who writes about the WTO, an organisation epitomising this form of capitalism: 'Those who seek to prohibit the use of nets that harvest shrimp but also catch and endanger turtles are told by the WTO that such regulation would be an unwarranted intrusion on free trade. They discover that trade considerations trump all others, including the environment!' (Stiglitz 2002: 216).
  3. Marshall Berman goes as far as to claim that Marx 'manages to praise the bourgeoisie more powerfully and profoundly than its members have ever known how to praise themselves' (Berman 1988: 92). It is true that Marx shows appreciation of capitalist achievements but the context of his praise is always the condemnation of its barbarity – the harm it inflicts on humans and environment. They are, in fact, two sides of the same coin.
  4. The use of filmic metaphors to expose the lies of the ruling elites became a tradition among Marxist thinkers. For example, Alain Badiou wrote: 'The way the global financial crisis is described to us makes it look like one of those big bad films that are concocted by the ready-made hit machine that we now call the "cinema"' (Badiou 2010: 91).
  5. That said, his manuscript breaks off shortly after these words and so Marx's ideas of classes remain unfinished.
  6. Increasingly, the studies offer a comparative approach, which I also use in this book. One such study, authored by a young Polish historian, Błażej Brzostek, compares the lives of Polish and French workers from the end of the Second World War to the mid-1960s (Brzostek 2006).
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7. Harvey's views are frequently criticised, not only from the right but also from the left. The most valid argument from the left concerns the fact that his idea of 'over-accumulation of capital' can be in fact reduced to the Marxist hypothesis of 'tendency of the rate of profit to fall' (TRPF), presented in volume 3 of *Das Capital* (<<http://kapitalism101.wordpress.com/2012/03/13/the-enigmaticism-of-the-enigmatic-or-more-on-david-harvey/>>). I regard this criticism as valid, but my point is that whether we go for Harvey or Marx's original explanation of the workings of capitalism, its consequences for labour and capital are practically the same, such as more intense exploitation of labour, the growth of a relative surplus population and consolidation of mature industries into an oligarchy of survivors.
8. This statement also refers to the representation of work offered in this book. I have no pretence to objectivity. I believe that by choosing a different framework, for example following ideas of Schumpeter, Hayek and Friedman, rather than Marx and Harvey, and choosing different films or even 'my films' but situating them in different contexts and using different tools to analyse them, one can reach a different set of conclusions. Hence, when I use words such as 'truth' and 'truly', this should be read as shorthand for 'coherent with a specific ideology that appeals to me most'.
9. During my research I encountered, for example, an excellent discussion by Benjamin Noys of a spaghetti western as a metaphorical rendition of work relations (Noys 2011).

## Chapter 2

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1. A similar theory to that of Keynes was formulated before Keynes by the Polish economist, Michał Kalecki, but due to the fact that Kalecki published his early work in Polish and his most important works reached the English-speaking readers as late as in the 1990s, he remains a much less well-known figure than Keynes.
  2. An indication of the similarity between the Western and Eastern economic systems in the discussed period was the fact that in 1957 Kalecki was appointed chairman of the Committee for the Perspective Plan in Poland. The plan's horizon covered the period 1961 to 1975, and was meant to implement Kalecki's 'Keynesian' theory.
  3. Alcoholism was a serious problem in Poland throughout the whole communist period, especially in these places where workers lived far away from their families and there was little to do after work. However, this is not shown in any of the films.
  4. They also sound ominous in the context of the 1990s, when during the Balkan wars Yugoslav women were recipients of a similar attitude.
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### Chapter 3

1. In due course, the leaders themselves would be associated with obscene consumption, unavailable to the rest of the population.
2. There is a similarity between Havel's idea of people under state socialism being complicit with the regime and Foucault's concepts of governmentality (on Foucault see Chapter 3).
3. The English title of Karmitz's film is *Blow for Blow*, but most authors use only its French title and I will follow this custom. The same concerns Godard and Gorin's *Tout va bien*, which is translated as *All's Well*.
4. Kluge's attitude to women, as reconstructed by Sander and Schlupmann, has much in common with the construction of the 'Polish Mother' in Polish culture and with constructions of femininity in other countries, such as Spain. The Polish Mother is also a noble figure, who, like Kluge's female patriot in *Die Patriotin*, guards the country's memory, and by bearing and rearing children takes care of its future, but in the present she has to accept her subservient position to a man (Ostrowska 1998; Szwajcowska 2006).
5. This opinion is not shared by all critics. For example, Christian Braad Thomsen claims that 'In no way does he [Fassbinder] as a film director, exploit Emma Küsters's tragedy, as his characters do. He might have done so if he had filmed the material in the style of his favourite Hollywood directors, with the emphasis on the action scenes. But the director of *Effi Briest* consistently spurns the filmic possibilities offered by murder, suicide and gun battle' (Thomsen 1997: 188). Clearly, Braad Thomsen here equates exploitation with the Hollywood style, sparing European arthouse cinema such a danger.
6. In the 1980s, this idea would be elaborated by Pedro Almodóvar, one of the most important European directors of the 1980s.
7. I came from the countryside and my father was a farmer, owning a ten-hectare farm. As far as I remember, it brought minimal income and we survived thanks to the salary of my mother who worked in the local pharmacy. That said, in the 1970s my father bought his first and only car, a Polish Fiat 125 and we acquired running water and central heating in our house, which made me remember the 1970s as a decade of real, rather than fake prosperity.
8. Such words are even uttered in Pasolini's *Salò*.

### Chapter 4

1. Both Foucault and Marx pay special attention to the eighteenth century as a paradoxical period of the greatest individuation and the greatest socialisation of a man, captured by the term 'civil society'. In *Grundrisse* we can read that 'Only in the

eighteenth century, in “civil society”, do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations’ (Marx 1973: 84).

2. Not surprisingly, some authors regarded Thatcher as a man hidden in a female body. Her nickname ‘Iron Lady’ augments this masculine association (Booker 1980: 184).
  3. The apartment, invaded by continuous noise from passing trains, brings to mind the precarious position of the Basts in *Howards End* (1992) by James Ivory. They also lived near the railway line, which symbolised their immobility in an age of mobility.
  4. Thatcher visited Poland in 1988. She met the Solidarity leader, Lech Wałęsa, and put flowers under the monument to workers killed during the anti-government demonstrations in 1970. At the time, few Poles saw the irony of Thatcher’s concern for Polish workers in the light of her viciousness towards British miners and shipyard workers. Most likely the British Prime Minister regarded this popularity (which also extended to the old Soviet Union) as proof that her policies were advantageous to the world at large.
  5. Such sidelining of women can also be detected from the reports of Western observers on Polish political life in the 1980s; see, for example, Daniel Singer’s description of Krystyna Lityńska and the whole Solidarity political scene in the 1980s (Singer 1985).
  6. The best known example of such a ‘turncoat’, who joined the multitude of Solidarity is Leszek Balcerowicz, a former member of PZPR (Polish communist party) and the chief architect of the Polish postcommunist neoliberal reform.
  7. Postal workers continued to be poorly paid after the fall of communism, to the extent that in some more affluent Polish towns, such as Krakow, customers must themselves collect mail from the postal centres.
  8. Although Almodóvar provocatively said that he makes his films as if Franco never existed, his films are furnished with numerous references to the Franco period of Spanish history.
  9. Testimony to the obliteration of the division between Gloria’s work and housework is the fact that authors discussing this film describe her as a ‘housewife’, rather than as a ‘cleaner’ (for example Allinson 2001: 233).
  10. The need to convey Withnail’s nobility affected casting decisions. Richard E. Grant was chosen for the role of Withnail because, in the words of the director, he ‘looks like fucking Byron’ (quoted in Jackson 2004: 40).
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## Chapter 5

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1. This attitude is conveyed by the concept of the ‘big society’, promoted by the current British prime minister David Cameron, justly derided as a smokescreen to cover up the onslaught of neoliberalisation on the remnants of the British welfare state, which results in growing disunity in society.
2. It is interesting to read a book by Swedish economist and advisor to the Russian government of strongly neoliberal persuasion, Anders Åslund, *How Capitalism Was Built: The Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia*, published in 2007. Åslund praises all features of neoliberal transformation in the ex-communist world, including the power of Eastern European oligarchs, and he criticises everything that evaded this trend, such as welfare provision. Accordingly, for Åslund the greatest success story of Eastern Europe was the Baltic states, where neoliberalisation was most extreme (Åslund 2007: 306). Ironically, shortly after the publication of his book, these countries experienced the most severe economic crises, from which they still cannot recover, while the ‘communist dinosaurs’ such as Poland and Slovakia, fared much better.
3. Example of such actions are the riots in many British towns in the summer of 2011.
4. Such representation concurs with Dave Haslam’s description of Wilson: ‘He’s never underestimated the way that a culture that appears marginal one year can be mainstream the next’ (Haslam 1999: 111).





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