

CHAPTER 1

Homo Faber and the Work of Cinema

Discourses on work from Plato to Marx and Engels

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,¹ 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

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

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

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

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).

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)²

How capitalism won the world

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).³ 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

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

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)

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.⁴ 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

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

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).⁵

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

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

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 unimaginable 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

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

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)

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.⁶

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.

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

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

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*

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

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

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.⁷

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

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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).

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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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

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.