

CHAPTER 3

The 1970s

Seeking Change

The time of fragmentation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Working women seeking alliances

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The seedy worlds of media, entertainment and politics

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Culture industry Eastern European style

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Decadent workers and weak bosses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Camp (non)work

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Defeated refuseniks and (not so) clever lazybones

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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