

I have also extended my coverage to include the directors I have referred to as the 'First Wave', because it is illogical to exclude them. Ján Kadár's and Elmar Klos' *A Shop on the High Street* and Vojtěch Jasný's *Až přijde kocour* (*Cassandra Cat/That Cat/When the Cat Comes*, 1963) and *All My Good Countrymen* are conventionally regarded as New Wave films, even though their directors made their debuts in the 1950s (or, in Klos' case, the 1930s). Can Uher's *Slnko v síti* (*Sunshine in a Net*, 1962), František Vlácil's *Marketa Lazarová* (1967) or Karel Kachyňa's *Ucho* (*The Ear*, 1969) be sensibly excluded from what is essentially an interactive history? Forman and Chytilová were also older than their colleagues, and Forman had graduated in the 1950s. In the final analysis, we are looking at a specific socio-cultural context that allowed increased creative freedom for all generations, albeit spearheaded by the international success of the younger directors.

I have not attempted to deal with the role of animation and documentary during the 1960s, partly because of film availability, but mainly because they require a separate and more specialised treatment. Many of the New Wave filmmakers worked in documentary – notably Schorm and Jireš, but also, in the years of normalisation, Vihanová, Chytilová, Jakubisko and others. Documentary nevertheless played an important role in its interaction with features and in the addressing of contentious or taboo subject matter. Among the 1960s filmmakers to attract international attention were Václav Taborský and Jan Špáta. More recently, there has been some remarkable work from women filmmakers, including Helena Třestíková, and Jana Ševčíková (*Plemule*, 1984).

I have nevertheless included some consideration of the work of Jan Švankmajer, the most outstanding of the filmmakers to emerge from animation from the late 1960s, and also Karel Vachek, whom some might describe as a documentarist. I have included them here partly because they are impossible to ignore, but also because their work transcends established categories. Their commitment to innovation and links to a submerged artistic inheritance also place them within the responses that characterised the late 1960s.

CULTURE AND SOCIETY

THE CZECHOSLOVAK CINEMATIC TRADITION

JAN ŽALMAN OPENED his monograph on the Czechoslovak New Wave with the comment that the culture of small nations is too often seen as a pale reflection of the 'great'.¹ In the case of Czechoslovakia, the Surrealist movement of the interwar years has often been treated as little more than a footnote to the French, while the best works of pre-war Czechoslovak cinema, if they are considered at all, are seen as reflections of German Expressionism and French realism. The Czechoslovak New Wave has, in turn, often been looked at solely in terms of the Western European influences exerted upon it. There has been little attempt to examine the ways in which Czechoslovak cinema itself has set the pace or made significant additions to approaches initiated elsewhere. As Žalman pointed out: 'without some inherent resources and traditions, intellectual and creative inspiration, the Czechoslovak cinema which is at present the object of so much interest could not have come into being ... Culture draws its sustenance from far deeper sources than those that supply political programmes.'²

While the Czechoslovak New Wave developed under quite specific historical conditions, it had the advantage of springing from a strong national tradition in cinema. The first films were made in 1898, and, although the majority of those produced between the wars provided conventional film entertainment, there are a number that equal in quality the best films of the German and French cinemas. A personal selection would include Karel Anton's *Tonka Šibenice* (*Tonka of the Gallows*, 1930); Gustav Machatý's *Ze soboty na neděli* (*From Saturday to Sunday*, 1931) from a script by the Surrealist poet Vítězslav Nezval; Josef Rovenský's *Řeka* (*The River*, 1933); and Karel Plicka's *Zem spíeva* (*The Earth Sings*, 1933). Perhaps, like Franz Kafka and Leoš Janáček, they needed a Max Brod to popularise them and establish their significance outside their local context.

The most significant long-term developments for Czechoslovak cinema grew out of the 'Devětsil' movement. Devoted to revolution in art, life and politics, the Devětsil linked itself to the Communist Party, advocated work of a consciously avant-garde nature, and attempted to promote the cinema as an art form. Among the many important figures associated with the movement were critic Karel Teige, the poet Vítězslav Nezval and novelist Vladislav Vančura. Nezval wrote a number of film scripts, most notably *From Saturday to Sunday*, and Vančura directed five films, including the important *Před maturitou* (*Before the Finals*, 1932). Martin Frič, who was to become Czechoslovakia's most popular film director, directed former Devětsil members, the comedy team of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, in *Hej-Rup!* (*Heave Ho!*, 1934) and *Svět patří nám* (*The World Belongs to Us*, 1937). Vančura was closely involved in plans for the new nationalised film industry prior to his execution as part of the Nazi retaliation for the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942. It was clearly no accident that one of the first New Wave films – Jasný's *Cassandra Cat* – should feature Werich, or that some of the most individual films of the 1960s should be based on the work

of Devětsil writers. In particular, one should mention František Vlácil's *Marketa Lazarová* (from Vančura), Jiří Menzel's *Rozmarné léto* (*Capricious Summer*, 1968, from Vančura) and Jiří Šst's *Valerie a týden divů* (*Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*, 1969, from Nežval). In 1968, Josef Škvorecký and Evald Schorm were planning to reunite Werich with the exiled Voskovec in a new film that would also have featured Suchý and Šlitr of the Semafor Theatre, and pop star Eva Pilarová.

Before moving to a consideration of the more immediate determinants of the New Wave, it is worth discussing some of the pre-war films and directors in more detail. Not only would the major films be familiar to the younger directors, but many were regularly revived in Prague cinemas, providing a kind of cultural continuity with the pre-war period that was not known, for instance, in the case of the British cinema.

After the formation of the independent republic in 1918, Czechoslovak cinema initially faced economic insecurity. Although there was a brief postwar boom in which patriotic films caught the mood of the public, producers were soon forced to compete with foreign imports. Technical standards were hampered by the absence of properly-equipped studios until the American and Biografia companies combined into the A-B Company, and converted a former restaurant and dancehall into a studio in 1921. This was supplemented by the Kavalírka Studios, established by actor-director Karel Lamač in 1924, where some of the most important films of the 1920s were made before the destruction of the studios by fire in 1929.

The coming of sound provoked yet further problems, with the cost of new equipment and an inevitable rise in production costs. Furthermore, it was not immediately apparent that producing feature films for a market of only thirteen million inhabitants was a viable economic proposition. The first Czech talkies were actually produced in Paris, but the matter was finally resolved in favour of Czech-language production after the success of the first films in the domestic market in 1930. In 1933 the A-B Company constructed the Barrandov Film Studios in Prague, which were to form the basis for both pre-war and postwar developments. The studios were originally intended to attract international production, and the A-B Company itself undertook three costly historical films produced in foreign-language versions and aimed principally at the French market: Julien Duvivier's *Golem* (1935), Victor Tourjanski's *Volha v plamenech* (*The Volga in Flames*, 1934) and Nicolas Farkas' *Port Arthur* (1936). The plan misfired, but the studios were fully employed, and there was a rise in domestic production to over forty features a year by the late 1930s.

The 1920s and 1930s in Czechoslovakia are scarcely touched on by the standard film histories, and still await a substantial examination by non-Czech and Slovak critics and historians. It is immediately apparent that the key importance conventionally attached to Gustav Machatý's *Extase* (*Ecstasy*, 1932) is diminished when set in the context of other productions of the period. No doubt a systematic study would produce a number of discoveries and reassessments.

Machatý is the one Czech director of the interwar years who gained an international reputation. He directed his first film as early as 1919, and worked in Hollywood in 1920–21, reputedly as an assistant to both D.W. Griffith and Erich von Stroheim. His first film of significance was an adaptation of Tolstoy's *Kreutzerova sonáta* (*The Kreutzer Sonata*, 1926), followed by the unsuccessful *Švejk v civilu* (*The Good Soldier Švejk in Civilian Life*, 1927), inspired by Jaroslav Hašek.

Machatý's fame rests squarely on the *succès de scandale* of *Ecstasy* at the Venice Film Festival of 1934 and, in particular, its featuring a nude Hedy Kiesler (Hedy Lamarr). Although

Parker Tyler included it in his *Classics of the Foreign Film* – the only Czech title – he regarded this study of female sexuality as 'not important as a finished work of art but arresting as an unusual gesture, in an unusual direction, at a moment when its subject-viewed seriously as I think its maker viewed it – required courage to film and offer to the general public'.³ However, Machatý had previously made two important films in collaboration with Vítězslav Nežval: *Erotikon* (1929) and *From Saturday to Sunday* (1931). Together, the three films provide a clever and often subtle analysis of male/female relations.

Erotikon is a film about passion and human relations that, despite the frank sensuality of its early scenes, favours accepted morality. It examines the outcome of a night of love at a provincial railway station. The stationmaster's attractive daughter, played by the Yugoslav actress Ita Rina, sleeps with a man from the city who is forced to stay the night after missing his train. She becomes pregnant, brings shame to her father, and is sent away to have the child.

In its juxtaposition of country/innocence and town/decadence and in upholding the values of family life, the film is entirely conventional. However, the depiction of a sympathetic heroine governed by passion and capable of twice going astray provides added complexity to the subject, and looks forward to the theme of *Ecstasy*. The convenient killing off of her seducer, the object of temptation, and the miraculous intervention by an understanding and well-off young man who doubles as husband and father-figure nevertheless provide a strong confirmation of existing values.

Machatý's stylistic brio is reserved for the film's opening scenes, depending heavily on the background of a thunderstorm and scenes of erotic tension built from cutting between the two participants in separate rooms. The girl's longing is conveyed through her open mouth, knees protruding from the bedcovers, and the symbolism of telegraph poles in the pouring rain. In the bed scene itself, the man appears as a Dracula-like figure as he rises above her naked breast. The beginning of their clinch is filmed from overhead, the room spinning round at its climax, and the sequence ends with the merging of raindrops on the window. Easy to parody today, it was an opening of considerable power that also drew attention to the atmospheric lighting of Václav Vich.

Ecstasy, often described as a landmark in the history of the erotic film, is a logical extension of *Erotikon*. However, while it focuses directly on the woman's sexual needs, its plot has little to offer. The central figure, played by Hedy Lamarr, is newly-married to a dull husband, who ignores her both personally and sexually, treating her as little more than a decorative acquisition. She leaves for home and the countryside, where she becomes the mistress of the virile foreman of a work team. When her husband comes to fetch her, it is too late. For a while, the threat of murder hangs over her lover, but it is the husband who finally commits suicide.

The film is a visual celebration of sexuality and the physical that uses its countryside setting with considerable skill. The famous nude scene has Lamarr pursued through the trees by tracking shots and swimming in long shot, the motif of horses emphasising a union with nature, rather than crude voyeurism. The attempt to portray her lover in similar terms is less successful. He is photographed against the skyline in the kind of shots reserved for athletes and Socialist Realist heroes. The film concludes with the 'Píseň práce' ('Hymn to Work'), a virtually abstract section based on František Halas' poem, in which the muscular bodies of workers are juxtaposed with ripening corn – an evocation of birth/construction that ends with a poetic image of mother and child. It is, above all, the tonal qualities of Jan Stallich's photography that make these sequences the prototype of 'Czech lyricism'. Paul Rotha wrote:

With much of its action shot in natural surroundings, Machatý's direction was as good as anything being made in Europe in the 1930s. His use of editing to build up moments of high tension, such as the automobile drive to the level crossing, his sense of movement and symbolism, and his very delicate handling of situations that could easily have become laughable, put him with the best directors of the period ... Its attempt to create a soundtrack which would be easily translatable for international markets by having only one sequence in direct synchronous speech is worth analysis, as indeed was its ingenious use of off-screen sound. The photography was superb.⁴

In comparison with both *Erotikon* and *Ecstasy, From Saturday to Sunday* is a much more mature work. The script attempts greater depth of characterisation, and makes a more convincing effort to deal with the problems of everyday reality. The film opens with doors swinging to and fro, a second hand moving around a clock to the figure twelve. A tracking shot shows typists working at their desks. A well-dressed and voluptuous young woman persuades her conventional colleague, Maňa, to go on a double date with her – but she has to borrow a dress and some shoes. It is an economical summing up of the world of everyday work, of financial and character differences, and of the solutions that may be on offer. In the nightclub scene that follows, the decadence/attraction of night life is emphasised as it had been in *Erotikon*. In one image, the camera manages a close up juxtaposition of pince nez and a girl's bosom. The camera swoops across the room towards the group – a hand grasps a knee and a face gets slapped. The two girls get drunk, and a clown sings about people at night to a background of *paper sun and stars, coquettish faces and winking eyes*. A finger moves down a list of hotels in a telephone directory.

Maňa tries to stave off the evening's apparently inevitable outcome, but she is prevented from leaving, and money is thrust surreptitiously into her handbag. Another young woman cries, saying that she was taken to a private room and given nothing for her services. In fact, Maňa makes a last-minute escape from the threatening hotel bedroom, and takes refuge from the pouring rain in a café. There she meets a man, and the film records the progress of their romance after their return to his flat.

The simple, almost neorealist account of their developing affair is disturbed by the need to provide a conventionally dramatic ending. The money secretly advanced in anticipation of her favours leads to a breakup in the relationship, and Maňa's attempted suicide. The final chase to her rescue seems false, a near-tragedy not adequately based in the plausible character observation that has preceded it.

The strength of the film derives from a delicate and lyrical romanticism. Particularly impressive are the scenes in the bachelor flat, strewn with clothes and discarded footwear. Maňa puts her tiny feet into the man's great slippers and wriggles with pleasure as he makes coffee for her. Their first kisses are accompanied by a radio programme of early morning exercises (intercut with shots of a fat announcer and a fat couple demonstrating them). The tone of mockery continues when the young man burns a hole in her dress while ironing it, a minor disaster welcomed by the sound of a muted trumpet. The film differs from *Erotikon* and *Ecstasy* in its avoidance of excess, the absence of tragedy, and the equal matching of a hero and heroine from the same social class.

At a number of levels, Machatý's films are reminiscent of the late 1920s work of G.W. Pabst. The heroine of *From Saturday to Sunday* finds herself in an initial situation not that different from Greta Garbo in *Die freudlose Gasse* (*The Joyless Street*, 1925); the 'poetic'

criticism of decadent city life is shared with a number of German realist films, and the star performances of Ita Rina and Hedy Lamarr recall the same kind of director/actress relationships. However, the German films do not show the same concern with a realist surface, *location shooting* or lyrical camerawork. As Rotha and others have suggested, the control of camera and cutting is certainly as advanced as any other films being made at the time, and it is at this technical level that the films are so effective, providing a visual range and mobility over and above the immediate requirements of the script.

A film that shares a number of these characteristics is Karel Anton's *Tonka of the Gallows* (1930), which accidentally became the first Czech sound film when part of the negative was destroyed in the Kavalírka fire of 1929. Anton reshot the sequences and took his actors to Paris and Joinville to add sound. Its cast included Ita Rina as Tonka, with Vera Baranovskaya (Pudovkin's 'Mother') and the Czech actor/director Josef Rovenský. Anton's international ambition was indicated by the fact that the film was made in Czech, French and German versions.

The story was taken from a novel by the Czech-born German writer Egon Ervin Kisch, in turn based on a journalist's report about a Prague prostitute who gives herself to a condemned man at the request of the authorities. Another film contrasting the decadence of city life with the innocence of the countryside, it stresses the financial attractions of prostitution for a woman forced to earn her own living. In the opening sequences, the coming of spring is linked to her return to the country, her mother and her sweetheart. She brings gifts and clearly has a 'good' job in the city (although she is looking pale). Her romance develops against a background of lyrical, impressionist photography, with a gay and skittish performance from Rina. Suddenly, she returns to the city without explanation.

It transpires that Tonka is the most popular girl in a Prague brothel, and she responds to the authorities' request for a volunteer to spend the night with a condemned man (Josef Rovenský). In contrast to the lyricism of the scenes in the countryside, this sequence depends heavily on Expressionist effects. Tonka first sees the shadow of the man cast against prison bars as if he has already been hanged. A huge, grasping shadow reaches for her, the man's eyes glazed. Her comforting of him is intercut with shots of the waiting executioner with clipped hair and formal dress sitting in an empty guardroom – angular, geometric lines, the shadow of the barred grill against the wall. He had only wanted an ordinary street whore, but she is able to break through the despair of a man who 'has no one'. She encourages him to 'have courage' in the face of his execution, and her face is superimposed on his before the hanging. With the ironic words, 'Justice has been done', a black cross dominates the screen. She prays to God to have pity on his soul.

This strange romance profoundly affects Tonka, giving her a quasi-religious insight into the meaning of life that goes beyond the values of the society in which she lives. She is so clearly depressed by the man's death that she is soon referred to as his 'widow', her loss of vitality making her unattractive to customers. The other whores leave a model of the gallows and a hanged man in her room, and she is eventually thrown to the streets, an object of both pity and ridicule.

The story of 'Tonka of the Gallows' becomes popular, and pursues her to the end of her life. Her lover takes her back to the countryside, but literally on the verge of marriage (she is wearing her wedding dress) someone tells the story of Tonka. She returns to Prague and, at the end of the film, is shown telling her story in exchange for a drink. Her death is directly linked to her desire for a 'normal' married life. She imagines that she sees a wedding dress on a street stall, grabs it, and runs across the road under a passing taxi. She

dies in her lover's arms to visions of marriage, waving friends, the countryside and her honeymoon.

Like Pabst's *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*, 1929), *Tonka of the Gallows* portrays a woman whose sexuality cannot be contained by conventional moral values and whose downfall cannot be forgiven, her generosity of spirit leading directly to her destruction. Like the city decadent in *Erotikon* and the husband in *Ecstasy*, the only eligible male character shows a crucial inability to understand the problems of the female. In this respect, although the female characters remain the object of male voyeurism, they are shown to be emotionally and spiritually superior. Both Anton's *Tonka of the Gallows* and Machatý's films can be seen, despite commercial restraints, as genuine attempts to reflect on the contemporary status of women.

The director most often associated with the tradition of Czech lyricism is Josef Rovenský that is, if one excepts Karel Plicka's excellent Flaherty-inspired documentary on the folk traditions of Slovakia, *The Earth Sings*. Rovenský had played a leading part in *Tonka of the Gallows*, but is probably best known for his co-starring role opposite Louise Brooks in Pabst's *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (*Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1929) and for his discovery of Anny Ondráková (Ondra), the leading star of Czech movies, who later appeared in Hitchcock's *Blackmail* (1929). His most important work, which, together with *Ecstasy* and *The Earth Sings*, made a major impact at Venice in 1934, was *The River* (1933).

The characteristic tone and mood of *The River* are set by a methodically poetic introduction. There are lyrical shots of streams running in woods, tracking shots of the river-foam, waves – and a shot of a man on a raft steering his way into the foam. Then there is calm, and light shimmers on the water. In church, a voice intones: 'First there was nature and then there was man, who came to tame nature...' There are images of birds, trees and deer swimming. 'But man has an evil side' – shot of a man carrying a gun. However, this is no trite lyricism, since the economic realities are soon revealed. Peasants till impossible hill soil, the man pushing and the women pulling a wooden plough like human cattle. They empty baskets full of stones collected from the earth.

The film's story centres on the life of the poacher. The mayor of the village, himself an ex-poacher, is afraid that his son may fall into the same ways, and decides to send him to the city. This theme is linked to the developing love between his son and the daughter of one of the impoverished peasant families. A simple and intimate love story culminates in the confrontation between the youth and a large pike, so that he can earn enough to buy her a pair of boots.

The scene in which the boy and the girl make their farewell is beautifully done. The obvious lyricism of crowns of daisies, butterflies, and the playing of a mouth organ is counterbalanced by her tapping big toe in a bandage, and a blouse that will not do up. The mood of the scene reinforces the feeling of adulthood as both a new beginning and the ending of a period of innocence.

The photography is again by Jan Stallich, but employed here to present the context of a real location in the countryside, rather than, as in *Ecstasy*, a correlative to the heroine's romantic/sensual condition. However, the film does include a characteristically-Czech dream fantasy in which the youth sees himself as a prince accompanied by a turbaned boy-servant carrying the beautiful new boots he has bought for his beloved. The final struggle with the pike is filmed as an extended battle similar to that between the boy and the alligator in Robert Flaherty's *Louisiana Story* (1948).

The two subsequent films of significance directed by Rovenský were both co-scripted by the young Otakar Vávra, with an attendant emphasis on dialogue and literary construction.

In *Maryša* (1935), adapted from a late nineteenth-century drama by the Mrštík brothers, the main feature is a compelling performance by Jiřina Štěpničková in the central role. Its opening portrays yet again a countryside idyll. This time, it is much more of a stereotyped city-dweller's view with the narrative commentary: 'In this world, no one would look for evil, but even here the soul and the heart of man are filled with evil.'

The plot concerns the decision of a rich peasant to marry off his daughter Maryša to a miller in order to merge their properties and gain control of the latter's mill. Her sweetheart František has to go away to the Army where he will be 'taught his position'. The marriage nevertheless goes ahead to a man who is reputed to have killed his previous wife with overwork. Maryša accepts, despite initial opposition, so that her parents will not condemn her; and when František returns from the Army, she refuses to run off with him while she is still married. Her distorted sense of obedience and morality leads her to an extreme solution – the poisoning of her husband.

While the script exploits all the clichés in the situation, the characters are shown to be firmly in the grip of economic or class determinants. No one individual is to blame for the situation, and the stereotypes are undercut in various ways. Her father is aware of the injustice of his action, and her husband, despite his shortcomings, had wanted a real marriage. While there is a Socialist direction in all this, the film, like *The River*, casts its story within a religious context. It ends with the image of Christ and the message that 'Love is stronger than anything'.

Despite its success at the level of script and characterisation, *Maryša* does not repeat the light and lyrical touch of *The River*. The scene in which Maryša is ritually dressed for her marriage – a sacrifice to the accompaniment of a folk song – is beautifully executed, but the film remains primarily an illustration of a literary script.

Hlidač č.47 (*Guard No. 47*, 1937), Rovenský's final film, suffers in many ways from the same problems, but it is also a film of greater subtlety and complexity. It is a triangular story set at a provincial railway station. The local guard and his wife save the life of a potential suicide, but in the process the guard loses his hearing. The rescued man then falls in love with the wife, who is dissatisfied and bored with her existence in the provinces. Miraculously, the guard recovers his hearing and discovers what people (including his wife) really think, before there is a final reunion. Rovenský again ends with his religious message, the figure of Christ and the motto, 'He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.'

In any consideration of Czechoslovak cinema in the interwar years, the name of Martin Frič must bulk large. In 1973, five years after his death, more films directed by Frič were on display at Prague cinemas than by any other director. He was not an 'auteur' in the conventional sense, but rather a highly prolific filmmaker who made more than 85 films and worked with most of the leading actors and writers in Czechoslovakia for a period of over forty years. His work included the first Slovak feature-film proper, *Jánošík* (1935), regarded by Frič as an 'art' film, but described by Graham Greene as the story of 'a serf who takes to the mountains and robs the rich so that he may give to the poor ... treated in such a romantic rollicking tuneful way that we are reminded of *The Maid of the Mountains*'.⁵ However, he is most remembered for his comedies, his work with Voskovec and Werich and Vlasta Burian in the pre-war years, as well as later films such as the two-part *Císařův pekař-Pekařův císař* (*The Emperor's Baker, The Baker's Emperor*, 1951). This again featured Werich, and provided a welcome relief from the sufferings of the 1950s. Werich once said to him: 'You'll never make a bad comedy, and so you don't have the right to do anything else. People need comedies.'⁶

Voskovec and Werich had produced their first play at the avant-garde *Osvobozené divadlo* (The Liberated Theatre) in 1927, taking over the management in 1929. Of Voskovec and Werich, Škvorecký writes:

Together with Jaroslav Ježek, the father of Czech jazz, they moulded Dadaism, circus, jazz, Chaplin, Buster Keaton and American vaudeville into a new art form. They created a new form of intellectual-political musical. Never before had anything like that existed in Bohemia, and it was a quarter of a century after the Nazis had closed the Voskovec and Werich theatre before it appeared again in the Semafor Theatre of Jiří Suchy and Jiří Šlitr.⁷

Voskovec and Werich made a number of films based on their plays in the 1930s, including *Pudr a benzin* (*Powder and Petrol*, 1931) and *Peníze nebo život* (*Your Money or Your Life*, 1932), both directed by Jindřich Honzl. Frič directed them in *Heave Ho!* (1934), widely regarded as their best film, and *The World Belongs to Us* (1937). Both films had music by Jaroslav Ježek, and photography by Otto Heller, who later worked in Britain on such projects as *Richard III* (1955), *Peeping Tom* (1959) and *The Ipcress File* (1965).

The World Belongs to Us is an attack on Nazism, and *Heave Ho!*, the more substantial of the two, is an attack on capitalism. In this film, Werich plays the head of a firm who is ruined by a ruthless rival (a cripple given to such phrases as 'Business is slow. Don't be sentimental about the workers. Fire them or go broke.'). Voskovec plays a worker representative who is supposed to speak on the radio about the unemployment situation. He begins with the script prepared for him: 'It is my privilege to speak for the unemployed. Smilingly we gaze into the future...' He throws away the script and tells the truth, only to be set upon from all sides and dragged away from the microphone.

The two are thrown together and go through a number of comic routines owing much to traditional Hollywood slapstick – cutting a hedge at different levels for an eccentric philatelist with stamps stuck to his backside; ironing trousers with a steamroller that goes out of control and buries a car; displaying the kissing techniques of 'happy endings' in films that range from Douglas Fairbanks and Charles Boyer to *King Kong* (1933).

However, their progress is never divorced from social reality. Their first night is spent in a cheap doss-house where the world of high finance is soon placed in perspective by the monetary problems of the poor. Their own situation is the cue for a song in the tradition of 'Buddy, Can You Spare a Dime', set against a background of unemployment charts dating back to 1929.

A series of accidents lead to Werich's inheriting a half-built factory, which he completes with the help of unemployed labour. Building on their endeavours, they form a successful collective that produces milk products and puts Werich's rival out of business. Business multiplies, the results being recorded through split-screen techniques. The return of their first lorry, where the milk in churns has turned to butter, becomes the excuse for an affectionate parody of Eisenstein's *General'naya liniya* (*The General Line*, 1929). Lorry one becomes the cream separator; and, as Voskovec speaks in fake Russian, a procession of lorries appears that recalls the ranks of tractors that fill the screen in Eisenstein's film.

Beginning with the words 'Our century is a horror show to which no horror show can aspire', *The World Belongs to Us* provides an analysis linking unemployment, capitalism and the rise of Nazism. Set during the depression, a new demagogue sets himself up as a champion of the unemployed, but his election campaign is financed by the very firm that helped

to create the crisis. Initially hired by rival factions to paint slogans on factory walls, Voskovec and Werich end up on the side of the workers and defeat a Fascist plot to overthrow the government. A film depending more on both politics and narrative than their earlier work, it was enormously successful on its first release. The only existing version was reconstituted from fragments after the negative was destroyed during the Nazi Occupation. As Michal Schonberg suggests, 'the Liberated Theatre and the films of Voskovec and Werich remained associated in the consciousness of the Czech people with the highest ideals of liberty and democracy.'⁸

Two films that addressed the problems of the working class more directly were Přemysl Pražský's *Batalion* (*Battalion*, 1927) and Carl Junghans' *Takový je život* (*Such is Life*, 1929). *Battalion* was adapted from a novel by Josef Hais-Týnecký about the early Czech Socialist Dr František Uher. The title is the name of an inn frequented by the Prague underworld, providing a focus for the analysis of class relationships, problems of drink, prostitution and police behaviour. It is an often compelling story that employs montage effects owing much to the Soviet example.

Such is Life is often seen as a by-product of the German realist film of the early 1930s, that included such films as *Mutter Krausen's Fahrt ins Glück* (*Mother Krausen's Journey to Happiness*, directed by Piel Jutzí, 1929), *Berlin-Alexanderplatz* (directed by Jutzí, 1931) and *Kühle Wampe* (directed by Slatan Dudow, 1932), based on the script by Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Ottwald. It is rated highly by Czech critics and by Siegfried Kracauer, although it gets only faint praise from Lotte Eisner in *L'Ecran Démoniaque* (1965). Carl Junghans was a German journalist, playwright and director who failed to find commercial backing for *Such is Life* in Germany. It was originally to have been backed by the Social Democrats and the Communists, but they decided to back *Mother Krausen's Journey to Happiness* instead, a theme that, according to Junghans, had originated with him. He was later to co-direct a second Czech film, *A život jde dál* (*Life Goes On*, 1933–35), featuring Ita Rina, which was made as a Czech-Yugoslav co-production. *Such is Life* was provided with a music soundtrack in 1959 by Zdeněk Liška, working under the direction of Elmar Klos.

Technically, *Such is Life* is a remarkably accomplished film and one of a number that looked forward to the principles of neorealism. It centres on the character of a washerwoman (Vera Baranovskaya), and the everyday problems surrounding the life of her family. The title of the film is reflected in its six major divisions: 'Days of Work', 'Days of Pleasure', 'Days of Sadness', 'Days of Rest', 'Days of Bitterness' and 'Final Days'. She faces the not-uncommon problems of a pregnant daughter and a drunken husband who is both unfaithful and sacked from his job. *A hard and exhausting life ends in a premature death. Although the immediate cause is an accident, her physical and mental state are contributory factors.*

The striking aspect of the film lies in its use of locations and a sense of documentary – this despite the use of such well-known actors as Baranovskaya, Theodor Pištěk and Valeska Gert. On the whole, the decorative image is avoided, although some degree of lyricism is permitted in the river scenes that comprise 'Days of Rest' (for everyone except the film's central character). Junghans also employs montage sequences at key points. The most notable is when Baranovskaya walks across the Charles Bridge in Prague after she has spent Sunday washing by the river. *Her figure is intercut with the statues on the bridge (Christ, Mary, and so on), and the sequence ends in an overhead shot emphasising her isolation/martyrdom as she drags the tools of her trade on a small cart. There is also an effectively-cut dance scene and a montage of tombstones at the end of the film to remind us that her fate is not unique.*

Although the lot of the mother is harsh, she remains buoyant, and there are scenes of everyday happiness as well as of suffering. The scenes of her daughter at work as a manicurist

have elements of humour and observation worthy of Miloš Forman, and her husband's quiet but deeply-felt reaction after her death is rendered with an understatement uncharacteristic of the German school. The final scene of the funeral party moving off suggests inevitability, the typical nature of her suffering, and the universality of the topic. Kracauer quotes Carl Vincent's description of the film as showing a 'touching and smiling *tristesse* in the face of human pain and decay'.⁹ Thus, the film provides a critical observation of working-class life, but in no sense attempts the kind of political analysis aimed at in *Kühle Wampe*. Nevertheless, it does stress the life of the working class, and the credit before the funeral, 'The Days of the Poor Have No End', makes it more than an example of the '*social décoratif*'.

The main challenge to cinematic orthodoxy was mounted by the novelist Vladislav Vančura. The first chairman of the Devětsil and the leading experimental novelist of the interwar years, he wrote many unrealised film scripts, and was one of the prime movers in the attempt to develop cinema as an art independent of commercial demands. He believed in collective work, and brought many eminent names together to work on his films, including Nezval, Roman Jakobson, the novelists Ivan Olbracht and Karel Nový, Bohuslav Martinů and the composer and stage producer E. F. Burian.

The first film on which Vančura worked was *Before the Finals*, for which he took credits as co-director with Svatopluk Innemann. The film is a delicate and lyrical observation of life at a boys' school, focusing on the humanisation of a narrow-minded mathematics teacher. The film's strongest quality lies in its sympathetic identification with the school community, and Vančura's avant-garde interests are closely integrated within the concerns of a predominantly mainstream film. Nevertheless, there are some unusual innovations. In one scene, a staff meeting is seen through a glass window, the characters standing and gesticulating like shadow puppets. The music is exaggerated and satirical, and the camera circles and tilts in an acrobatic manner. There is also a preoccupation with overhead shots, which give a sense of distanciation, as well as of spatial relationships and geographical context.

With *Na sluneční straně* (*On the Sunnyside*, 1933), Vančura adapted the ideas of the Soviet educationist A. S. Makarenko, examining the fate of children brought up within different social classes. Set in a children's home, it demonstrates the ways in which equal talents and needs are threatened by the injustice and division of the outside world. The screenplay was written by Nezval, Jakobson and Miroslav Dismán. Both acting and costume are used in a deliberately symbolic and stylised manner. Whenever conventional narrative or drama seems about to take over, Vančura introduces some form of disjunctive effect. In one scene, a conflict between husband and wife, the camera swings like a pendulum above them, lurching off the set and then back again. The use of ellipses, wipes and deliberately-posed figures produces an effect of constant disorientation, while the class parallels are stressed through montage – mannequins intercut with bourgeois ladies; finance with the serving of food; a clandestine affair with a mechanical dredger. A puppet show commenting on the role of money is itself exposed as a mechanism. The film was rejected by its producers and released only in a revised version.

In the meantime, Vančura had formed a film cooperative, for which he made *Marijka nevěrnice* (*Faithless Marijka*, 1934). Set in Ruthenia (part of Czechoslovakia until 1945), it was written by Karel Nový and Ivan Olbracht, and became known as 'the film by three novelists'. With few exceptions, most of the characters were played by non-professional actors, members of the regional Ruthenian and Jewish communities. Fascinating on many levels, its main focus is on economic issues and the world of work. There are lyrical scenes of the river, ennobling shots of workers against the landscape, and an inventive use of split-screen. Its

virtuoso use of montage, often using images turned on their sides, is unusual in a 1930s film, and the work was given added power through Martint's only film score.

Apart from Machatý, who had embarked on an ultimately abortive international career in the mid-1930s, another filmmaker to leave for the United States was Alexandr Hackenschmied (later known as Alexander Hammid). The fact that he worked principally in documentary, often as cinematographer/editor, and rarely took more than a co-director credit, has kept his name out of the public eye. In Czechoslovakia he was a champion of the independent or avant-garde film, and made a number of short films, including *Bezúčelná procházka* (*Aimless Walk*, 1930) and *Na Pražském hrade* (*Prague Castle*, 1932), in which he tried 'to find the relationship between architectonic form and music'.¹⁰ He worked as a scene designer on Machatý's *Erotikon*, and took a major credit as 'artistic collaborator' on *From Saturday to Sunday*. He also played a key creative role as editor of Plicka's *The Earth Sings*, which was transformed into 'a visual and aural symphony',¹¹ and he photographed Vávra's *Listopad* (*November*, 1934). Apart from a major contribution to American documentary, Hammid made further films on musical subjects, including a feature version of Menotti's opera, *The Medium* (1951). In 1943, he demonstrated a continued interest in the independent film when, with his then-wife Maya Deren, he co-directed *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), one of the seminal works of the New American Cinema. Thomas E. Valášek argues that there are strong similarities between this and the earlier *Aimless Walk*, and that Hammid made a significant contribution to Deren's later work, in particular *At Land* (1944).¹²

Another figure that should perhaps be mentioned is that of Hugo Haas, who became well known as an actor/director/writer in Hollywood in the 1940s and 1950s, with a number of his films based on Czech originals. He made his name as a popular comic actor in films such as Innemann's *Muži v offsidu* (*Men in Offside*, 1932) and *Život je pes* (*It's a Dog's Life*, 1933), part of a sequence of seven films in which he was directed by Martin Frič. He turned to direction in the late 1930s, notably with his film version of Karel Čapek's anti-Fascist play, *Bila nemoc* (*The White Sickness*, 1937), in which he also played the part of Doctor Galén. Both this and the Voskovec/Werich *The World Belongs to Us* were the subject of Nazi protests in the year before Munich. The Jewish-born Haas completed two more films before leaving for the United States.

It would be wrong to overemphasise the native cinematic tradition. Nevertheless, the Expressionism of Karel Anton, the lyrical eroticism of Machatý, the pastoral qualities of Rovenský's best work, the capacity for subtle observation of character and the socially-conscious humour of Voskovec and Werich provide a strong national context. The influence of the characteristic 'Czech style' of photographic lyricism, associated with Jan Stallich, is particularly apparent in the films of the late-1950s. The early work of the cinematographers Jan Čuřík (*The White Dove*) and Jaroslav Kučera (*Touha* [*Desire*, 1958]) owes much to his example.

In the more open atmosphere of the 1960s, it was natural that new directors would be most influenced by the radical breaks with tradition characteristic of contemporary French and Italian cinema. Among the most obvious influences were Godard, Resnais, Truffaut, Reichenbach, Antonioni and Fellini. There were also links with the English 'realists' (Anderson, Reisz, Richardson) of the early 1960s, with their emphasis on the problems of everyday life.¹³

However, more than anything else, the Czechoslovak New Wave was the product of its times, of the political and cultural situation in Czechoslovakia. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that the reforms of the 1960s resulted from a return to traditions that had remained latent during the Stalinist period. In the sphere of culture, the flourishing of

ideas and hunger for the arts were a spontaneous response to de-Stalinisation; once the lid was off, the repressed energy had to find expression. As Škvorecký has pointed out: 'In all branches of art the artistic common sense gnawed at the glazing of officious socialist-realism from the very beginning.'¹⁴ Before the 1960s, this took the form of having the conviction to tell the truth about everyday life within traditional narrative conventions or in emphasising the poetic, formal qualities of the lyrical photographic tradition, developments that in themselves would not seem inherently subversive. It is noticeable that, even with the greater freedom provided in the 1960s, directors who served their apprenticeship in the 1950s did not radically change their approach or methods. Such a 'generation gap' is equivalent to similar developments in Western Europe.

THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND

After the aptly-described 'Munich betrayal' of 1938, when the Anglo-French allies handed over to Hitler a third of the country, 40% of its industry and Czechoslovakia's frontier defences, it was only a matter of time before the German invasion. At the end of the Second World War, the Yalta Conference agreed on Western and Soviet spheres of influence, and the Red Army was granted the honour of liberating Prague. The Soviet Occupation, which lasted six months after the liberation, seemed to indicate almost inevitable adherence to a Communist form of government. The realpolitik of the Great Powers ruled then as it had in 1938, and would again in 1968. The new government lasted for less than three years before being replaced by a Communist dictatorship that was to prove one of the most conformist and repressive in Eastern Europe.

While the Communist accession to power in 1948 was prepared for by the decisions of the Great Powers, it was also the reflection of a strong Communist tradition in Czechoslovakia. The Party was the outcome of a split in the Social Democratic Party and, at the time of its inception in 1921, numbered some 350,000 members. In its first parliamentary election in 1925, it polled 13.2% of the votes and became the second largest party in the country. It was predominantly working class and had a genuinely urban organisation. However, as Vladimír Kusín has pointed out, the numerical strength of the Party and the national and democratic traditions of the country clashed with the rigid revolutionary demands of the Third International.¹⁵ By 1931, two years after Klement Gottwald became the Party's leader, membership had dropped to 40,000. In the late-1930s, under the influence of Popular Front ideas, the popularity of the Party increased, and in 1938 membership rose to 100,000.

During the war, the headquarters of the democratic government-in-exile under President Edvard Beneš was in London, while the Communist Party representation under Gottwald was in Moscow. With the Soviet Union in alliance with the Western allies and a growing Communist influence in the Czechoslovak underground movement, it was logical for Beneš and Gottwald to collaborate. Around 1943 the idea developed of what was later to be called a 'specific Czechoslovak road to socialism'.¹⁶ The idea that Czechoslovak Socialism could, at the same time, embrace nationalism, democracy and Communism was carefully nurtured, and Gottwald repeatedly stressed the fact that Czechoslovak Socialism would not follow the Soviet model. During the Soviet presence (which ended in the summer of 1945), 'national committees' were set up, led by activists trained in Moscow. Gottwald was also able to ensure Communist control of the key ministries – Interior and Information. In the 1946 election, the Communist Party polled 38% of the vote, and became the country's strongest

political party. What is important to note was the existence of genuine popular support that maintained democratic and national ideals. As Cecil Parrott suggested, the Czechoslovak Communists 'unlike the Russians ... took democracy for granted'.¹⁷

Jiří Pelikán, a former member of the Party's Central Committee and head of the state television service, pointed out that Czechoslovakia was distinguished from the other Eastern European countries liberated by the Soviet Union in two important ways: (i) the existence of a legal Communist Party in the pre-war period; and (ii) the possession of an industrial working class with revolutionary and democratic traditions. There was also no Soviet military presence. It was precisely because of this potential for independent development that Stalinist repression proved greater than elsewhere.

As early as 1952, the Secretary General of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Rudolf Slánský, was put on trial, convicted and executed. Of the fourteen leading Communists arrested at the time, eleven were executed and three were sentenced to life imprisonment. It is also noteworthy that eleven out of the fourteen accused were Jewish. If non-Communists are included, the purges are calculated to have included some 136,000 victims through death, imprisonment and internment. Among those sentenced was the post-invasion Secretary General of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, Gustáv Husák. (In this respect, his fate was similar to that of other Eastern European politicians who later 'turned back' the tide of reform – Władysław Gomułka in Poland and János Kádár in Hungary.) If, in 1956, the date normally accepted for the beginning of de-Stalinisation following Khrushchev's speech at the 20th Party Congress, Czechoslovakia failed to respond with the alacrity of other countries, it was not surprising. The natural base for any extensive reform had already been removed.

Nevertheless, it is from this time that one must date the beginning of the self-examination that was to lead to the Prague Spring of 1968. Intellectuals and students did make a stand. At the 2nd Writers' Congress of April 1956, writers such as Ladislav Mňačko and the poets František Hrubín and Jaroslav Seifert criticised Stalinist practices, and managed to elect a liberal presidium. On May Day 1956, student processions in Bratislava and Prague demanded liberalisation and greater contacts with the West. In 1957 and 1958, the first films of the Czechoslovak filmmakers I have referred to as the 'First Wave' made their appearance. However, any far-reaching developments were fairly rapidly nipped in the bud, and at the Writers' Congress of 1959 the conservatives were returned to leadership. In the same year, the conference at Banská Bystrica ensured the banning of most of the critical films produced in the previous year and a reorganisation of the management of the Barrandov Film Studios.¹⁸

Vladimír Kusín has shown how the revelations of 1956 and the need to explain the Stalinist experience affected almost all aspects of intellectual life in the late-1950s.¹⁹ Ota Šik, who was to play a leading role in the economic reforms, writes:

The shock of Khrushchev's historic speech was such that my former political activity lost all meaning for me. Naturally, I could not be satisfied with the ingenuous argument that the 'cult of Stalin' was the root of all evil. I had to decide either to leave the Communist Party, or to stay in order, by long-term, patient and systematic work, to help change the system. With a few like-minded friends I opted for the latter course.²⁰

Šik's reaction was not unique, and it is clear that a good deal of thinking was going on behind closed doors. The changes of the 1960s owed their development initially to the 12th Congress of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, held in December 1962. Outwardly conformist, it nevertheless made one important concession – the establishment of a commis-