



Figure 40 *Alice* (1987)

If the banalities of the early 1970s eventually gave way to the re-employment of a number of New Wave directors, 1980s production clearly sought to move beyond earlier limitations. There is at least some evidence that continuing problems were not always those of official censorship. The limitations of the 1970s had often been internalised and, in less precise ways, institutionalised. There was also a genuine shortage of ideas and scripts pointing both to deficiencies in training and to the absence of that symbiosis of the arts that had characterised the 1960s.

Two significant developments in the 1980s were, firstly, a move towards the development of a more 'commercial' mainstream and, secondly, a growth in the genre of social-problem films. Both were officially approved and sponsored tendencies, and they sometimes overlapped.

While low costs had, to some extent, allowed the production of empty moralising tracts for empty cinemas, the film industry had to make some attempt to gain audiences. This was most often achieved through the promotion of a select range of Hollywood and foreign movies, and it was not altogether surprising that a group of directors should attempt to make films with similar appeal. While it would not be true to say that the Czech and Slovak cinemas consisted of 'art' and 'commercial' sectors in the West European/North American sense, there was also a whole range of popular comedy films, notably those by Oldřich Lipský and Zdeněk Podskalský, as well as children's films, that I have not discussed. They were not, however, films particularly responsive to Hollywood influences.

Two of the directors most associated with the moves towards a more commercial cinema were Vít Olmer and Jaroslav Soukup. Olmer, who was known as an actor in the 1960s and

had continued to act in films on a regular basis, made his directing debut in the 1970s. With *Jako jed* (*Like Poison*, 1985), he analysed the love affair between a middle-aged architect (Zdeněk Svěrák) and a young Slovak girl, while *Antonyho šance* (*Anthony's Chance*, 1986) is the story of a young widower trying to bring up his daughter and create a new marriage. While dealing with genuine social issues, the prime focus is entertainment, with attractive performances, atmospheric photography (Ota Kopřiva), and lively music scores from Jiří Stivín. Soukup focused more on the youth market with *Láska v pasáži* (*Love in the Arcade*, 1984), addressing problems of teenage crime and drugs and, in 1986, made *Pešti ve tmě* (*Fists in the Dark*), known as the Czech *Rocky*, a nostalgic retro movie with the 1930s reconceived very much in the manner of Hollywood. Zdeněk Troška, a director of some talent, began his sequence of *Sun, Hay and...* comedies,<sup>29</sup> which have been likened to the British *Carry On* films.

Drugs were also the focus of Zdenek Zaoral's *Pavučina* (*The Cobweb*, 1986), notable because the film began life outside the official production programme. Smyczek's *Proč?* (*Why?*, 1987) dealt with the subject of football hooliganism and attracted international attention. A violent and sometimes shocking drama documentary reconstruction, it was distinguished by its lack of easy moralising and the fact that its 'hooligans' were ordinary teenagers. The problem, it seemed to suggest, had more generalised roots. Olmer's enormously successful *Bony a klid* (*Big Money*, 1987) exposed the activities of rival mafia gangs in a hectically-paced film accompanied by Frankie Goes To Hollywood on the soundtrack. It was full-blooded, but also exploitative.

In the late 1980s, a number of new directors made their debuts with some striking first features. Zdeněk Tyc made a feature film at FAMU featuring Miloš Forman's son Petr – *Vojtěch, řečený sirotek* (*An Orphan Called Vojtěch*, 1989) revealing that the 'auteur' film was not yet dead. Petr Koliba made *Něžný barbar* (*Tender Barbarian*, 1989), featuring Boleslav Polívka and Jiří Menzel, a spirited attempt to film Hrabal's novel based on the life of the 'Explosionalist' artist, Vladimír Boudník. Irena Pavlásková, in *Čas sluhů* (*The Time of the Servants*, 1989), made a powerful political/stylistic debut confronting the corruption of the system. In 1989, it was announced that the ban on the films of the 1960s might be lifted; there was talk of re-establishing links with suppressed creative traditions, and *The Fireman's Ball* was generally released. In film, at any rate, the dam seemed that it might break. Would the Czech and Slovak cinemas rediscover their past vitality?

#### THE VELVET REVOLUTION AND AFTER

While Czechs invariably denied that there was any significant change in the summer of 1989, it was clear that there was a new mental climate and a new outspokenness. As Václav Havel once said in a television interview, it was not in doubt that the system would fall: it was purely a matter of which event or events would light the touch paper.

On 16 January massive demonstrations had accompanied the twentieth anniversary of Jan Palach's self-immolation in protest against the 1968 invasion. In February, Obroda (Revival), 'A Club for Socialist Restructuring' was formed by former officials of the Prague Spring supporting the Gorbachev line and demanding more rapid reforms, while April saw the 'non-person' Alexander Dubček interviewed on Hungarian Television. In June, the petition 'Nekolik vět' ('Just a Few Sentences') called for increased democratisation and was signed by 40,000 people in five months. However, against a background of the triumph of Solidarity in the Polish elections (June) and Gorbachev's renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine (July),

the regime showed little inclination to compromise. On 14 June the government praised the Chinese crackdown in Tiananmen Square, and forestalled the anniversary of the Soviet invasion on 21 August with widespread arrests and detainments. On the same day that the Polish Senate condemned the 1968 invasion and apologised, *Rudé právo* ruled out any dialogue with independent initiatives. In September the Hungarian Parliament condemned the invasion, but the Czech Communist Party ideologist Jan Fojtík called for an avoidance of the excesses of 'glasnost'.

On 17 November an officially-approved march commemorating the death of Jan Opletal, a student executed by the Nazis in 1939, developed into an anti-regime protest, and was attacked by riot police, injuring hundreds. Within days, this led to the formation of the Občanské fórum (Civic Forum) in Prague (based in the Činoherní klub and the Laterna magika theatre) and of Veřejnost proti násilí (VPN; Public Against Violence) in Slovakia. By 24 November the Communist leadership had resigned, and Havel and Dubček were addressing the crowds in Prague. However, changes remained cosmetic until the organisation of a general strike on 27 November. When the government responded with the proposal of a government 'only three-quarters Communist', the threat of a second strike led to the establishment of a government with the Communists in a minority, on 10 December. On 29 December Havel, who had been in jail only two months previously, was elected President of the country, with Dubček as Chairman of the Federální shromáždění (Federal Assembly). The Velvet Revolution was achieved. The country became the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic on 20 April 1990.

It would not be appropriate to consider the complexities of post-Communist political developments here. However, the simple version of the collapse of Communism in Czechoslovakia must take on board the fact that it formed part of the overall collapse of Communism within the Eastern bloc, occasioned by its own contradictions, encouraged by Gorbachev's introduction of 'glasnost' and 'perestroika', and also triggered by earlier changes in Poland, East Germany and Hungary. Of course, change had to be initiated, and most had expected the regime to react with repressive force. But, as Ivan Sviták argued,<sup>30</sup> it would be disingenuous to argue that the Czechs and Slovaks had freed themselves unaided from oppression. Without the wider context, one could have looked for little more than a long-overdue liberalisation within the Party itself.

The main political groupings to emerge from the Revolution were Civic Forum in the Czech Lands, and VPN in Slovakia. As Keith Crawford points out, in common with other similar groupings in East Central Europe, they consciously avoided the use of the term 'Party' because of its Communist connotation, opting instead for terms such as 'front', 'forum', 'movement' and other broad-based terms.<sup>31</sup> Such movements were distinguished primarily by their opposition to Communism, with Civic Forum, for example, containing no less than fourteen different entities. Since they were essentially alliances formed from within an élite, it was virtually inevitable that they would split on grounds of both policy and personality.

In the June 1990 elections, Civic Forum won a majority of votes in the Czech Lands, while VPN won a third of the votes in Slovakia. However, both groups had fragmented by the following year. In the June 1992 elections the right-wing grouping within the Civic Forum, the Občanská demokratická strana (ODS; Civic Democratic Party), led by the former Finance Minister Václav Klaus since April 1991, won a third of all votes in the Czech Lands, while Hnutí za demokratické slovensko (HZDS; Movement for a Democratic Slovakia), a more left-wing grouping led by Vladimír Mečiar, won a third of all votes in Slovakia. Klaus remained in office until 1997 and, in 1998, a minority government

was formed under the Česká sociální demokratická strana (CSD; Czech Social Democratic Party). Despite a constitutional confrontation in 1994 when the Slovak President Michal Kováč encouraged the opposition parties to unite and oust Mečiar (11 March), he was again re-elected the following September, remaining in office until the 1998 elections, when he was defeated by the opposition. Klaus, of course, replaced Havel as President of the Czech Republic in 2003.

The split in the country from 1993 into the separate Czech and Slovak Republics, the so-called 'velvet divorce', while having its roots in historical conflicts and economic and political differences, was by no means inevitable. It was essentially a decision made within the élites and, according to public opinion polls, desired neither by the majority of Czechs nor by the majority of Slovaks. In fact, a considerable part of the country requested a referendum.<sup>32</sup> However, it did allow Klaus to progress unhindered with his Thatcherite economic reforms, and pleased those on the Slovak side who saw it as the first and perhaps last historical opportunity to assert an independent identity. Given the failure of the West to engage meaningfully in the reconstruction of Central and Eastern Europe, the attempt to establish the Czech Republic as an inevitable part of Western Europe was understandable.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not this was at the expense of German economic and cultural hegemony depended very much on future developments within the European Union.<sup>34</sup> While totalitarian tendencies in the new Slovakia under Mečiar are well documented, the country was, by 2003, one of the fastest growing economies in Central Europe.

In the summer of 1991, a cinema in one of Prague's main streets, Na příkopě, stood draped in camouflage. Above it, a tank barrel penetrated the balloon-shaped pink graffiti of a naked woman. The film being advertised was the enormously successful *Tankový prapor* (*The Tank Battalion*), directed by Vít Olmer and adapted from the novel by Josef Škvorecký. Just preceding Troška's *Slunce, seno, erotika* (*Sun, Hay, and Eroticism*) as the first privately produced film in over forty years, it was one of the four Prague cinemas showing Czech or Slovak films. The remaining thirty screens were devoted to the latest Hollywood releases. A new era had arrived.

Technically illegal (the industry had yet to be privatised), *The Tank Battalion* was funded by Bonton Records, with co-funding by the state insurance company and a geological firm. A spirited attempt to make a successful film within the constraints of the market, its opening was preceded by blanket television advertising and featured a showbiz event in which Škvorecký and Olmer descended by helicopter. It has to be said, however, that the film is frequently crude, in all senses of the word, and scarcely did justice to the novel. Made with greater finesse, it could undoubtedly have been an international success.

Earlier in the year, the Barrandov Studios sacked 1500 employees, while directors, screenwriters and cameramen were made freelance. Some said that that was not what they had demonstrated for in November 1989, and it was noted that not even the Nazi Occupation had wrought such destruction. There was little doubt that Barrandov was overstaffed, but it did seem that the craft skills that had underpinned the industry for years could be lost.

In the last years of Communism, film audiences had been in the region of fifty million per year, with a third of that figure achieved by domestic product. After 1989, audiences dropped by fifteen million. The whole question of the validity of the Czech and Slovak film industries was again at the forefront. Given increased production costs, a population of only ten million (the Czech lands) and five million (Slovakia), declining audiences, US market penetration and the increased importance of television, it was clear that the industry had no chance of survival without subsidy, international co-production and television co-pro-



duction. Models and strategies applicable in Western Europe within much larger countries would hardly be less necessary in such small countries. The problems, of steering between 'artistic' or parochial products, and of the lure of 'Europuddings', presented considerable difficulties. Even when a film succeeds by all major criteria, the difficulty of penetrating a declining international market for foreign-language film remains daunting.

Privatisation in the Czech Republic was not without its opponents, notably the Union of Film and Television Artists, for which the main spokesperson was Věra Chytilová. The law abolishing the state monopoly was not passed until autumn 1993. The Union argued that Czech film production could not be sustained without substantial state support. Igor Ševčík, head of the film section of the Ministry of Culture, argued in response: 'We believe we must subsidise the film industry. The new system is more flexible and will improve our cinema industry. We prefer to support projects and individuals rather than studios and facilities which must be able to support themselves.'<sup>35</sup> Grant aid was limited to no more than one-third of production costs. By 1997, the Barrandov studios had virtually abandoned 'national' production, focusing instead on servicing international productions such as *Mission Impossible*, *Les Misérables*, *The Barber of Siberia* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Czech films had become increasingly dependent on the support of public-service television.

Audiences have continued to shrink (from fifty million a year in the last years of Communism to 21.9 million in 1993 and 9.8 million in 1996) and this may to some extent be inevitable. Not only do people have more things to do with their lives, but the introduction of improved television and, in 1994, the first private television company, NOVA, have all had an impact. Cinema-owners can often find more profitable uses for their premises. Nevertheless, audiences improved by 19% in 2001 with the introduction of a further five multiplexes, with the overall total rising to 12 million in 2003, the highest figure for nine years. In 2003, there were 208 film premieres, which included 112 new American films and 15 Czech. Three Czech titles were in the top ten in 1993 and 1999, and four in 1994, 1997, 2000, 2001 and 2003. Production has averaged out at around 16–20 features a year.

As the 'realities' of the market asserted themselves, many films were quickly and casually made, with Olmer and Soukup continuing to follow the logic of their 1980s successes. Olmer had some success with his grossly exploitative *Nahota na prodej* (*Nudity for Sale*, 1993), but had less of a success with *Playgirls* (1995) and *Playgirls 2* (1995), while Soukup's *Byl jednou jeden polda* (*Once Upon a Time There Was a Cop*) was the only major hit of 1995. Boca Abrahámová pointed out that where films were once discussed primarily in terms of artistic criteria, the priorities of the market now dominated.<sup>36</sup> In addition, as Eva Zaoralová suggested, there was almost a modernist/postmodernist division among filmmakers, as the symbolism and humanism of the New Wave are rejected by younger directors.<sup>37</sup>

The New Wave has not suddenly bounced back, and, where it has been successful, the films appear as if from another era. Menzel, although he scored a box-office success with the delayed release of *Skylarks on a String*, adapted his successful stage production of Václav Havel's *Žebrácká opera* (*The Beggar's Opera*, 1990) in an over-literal fashion. His version of Vladimír Voinovich's *Život a neobyčejná dobrodružství vojáka Ivana Čonkina* (*The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin*, 1994), scripted by Zdeněk Svěrák and featuring Russian actors, was as good as any of his other recent films, but somehow out of its time. Perhaps also, after a number of Army comedies denouncing Stalinism, Czech audiences felt they had settled that account. Chytilová's comedy, *Dědictví aneb Kurvahošigutntag* (*Inheritance or Shit-Boys-Gutntag*, 1992), featuring Boleslav Polívka and Jozef Kroner, was a commercial success (and one of the top ten in Slovakia), but pleased the critics rather less.

It was one of the few films to cast a jaundiced eye on the excesses of the 'new capitalism'. She was still unable to set up her long-planned film based on the life of Božena Němcová. More recently, she returned to the polemical style of *Prefab Story* with her *Pasti, pasti, pastičky* (*Traps/Traps, Traps, Little Traps*, 1998). The story of a woman who is raped by two men, she describes it as a 'feminist black comedy'. As a vet, the heroine is well-trained in the practice of castration. However, even without their testicles, the two men (one of them a deputy minister), hang on to their power and position. The film received a mixed reaction but was the first to attack 'capitalist' morality with the enthusiasm previously reserved for 'socialist' excesses. In *Vyhánění z ráje* (*Expulsion from Paradise*, 2001), set on a nudist beach, she examines the situation of a film director attempting to create an artistic work. His screenwriter wishes to maximise its humanist philosophy while his Russian producer is more interested in its 'erotic' content. However, Chytilová's merciless exposure of human flesh did not find favour with either critics or audiences. Her most impressive 'post-revolutionary' film was the two-part feature documentary, *Vzlety a pády* (*Flights and Falls*, 2000), an investigation of the lives of three Czech photographers (Václav Chochola, Karel Ludwig, Zdeněk Tmeje) from the 1930s to the present. In her early years as a model, Chytilová was married to Ludwig, who had specialised in his own brand of Hollywood-style portraits of female actors in the 1930s and 1940s. It is a fascinating and atmospheric journey through a hidden culture in which Chytilová herself was a participant. It is interesting, as well, to see the original café where Hrabal set his *At the World Cafeteria*, with Hrabal himself appearing in an extract from Chytilová's film version.

Antonín Máša's *Byli jsme to my?* (*Were We Really Like This?*, 1990), dedicated to Pavel Juráček and Evald Schorm, tells of a politically persecuted stage director and his attempts to circumvent Party censorship. Since both he and Schorm had worked in theatre after being banned from the studios, it has both a personal and a political resonance. Jan Schmidt's *Vracenky* (*Rounders/Lenin, My Lord and Mother*, 1992) was one of the best films about the Stalinist experience of the late 1940s/early 1950s but, being in black-and-white and leavened with humanism and understanding, not a commercial success.

Němec's long-delayed *V žaru královské lasky* (*The Flames of Royal Love*, 1990), based on Ladislav Klíma's 'grotesque' novel first published in 1928, provided plenty of opportunity for horror and eroticism in its story of a sexual obsession treading the borders of love and hatred. Updated into the near future and with music by Jan Hammer, it is a bold film but, not surprisingly, lacks the spontaneity that characterised his work in the 1960s. In 1996, Němec made his *Jméno kódu: Rubín* (*Codename: Ruby*), a collage which combined a story of unconsummated love with political leaders' attempts to master the secrets of alchemy. Dedicated to Krumbachová, he described its basic theme as 'the mystery of alchemy, enriched and filled with parallel levels'. It achieved neither critical nor commercial success but his digitally-shot *Noční hovory s matkou* (*Late Night Talks with Mother*, 2001) again attracted international attention. A parallel to Kafka's *Letter to the Father* (*Brief an den Vater*), it is constructed as a dialogue with his dead mother, combining haunting and evocative images of his journey to her graveside with material from his life (his marriages to Krumbachová and Kubišová, filming the Soviet invasion, his exile in California). Echoing the visual power of his earlier films, it is both formally complex and strangely youthful.

Jakubisko's *Lepšie byť bohatý a zdravý, ako chudobný a chorý* (*It's Better to be Healthy and Wealthy than Poor and Ill*, 1992) began as a Slovak film but ended up as a Czech production, satirising both capitalism and Slovak nationalism in his characteristic free-wheeling style. After moving to the Czech Republic, he produced his expensive epic *Nejasná zpráva*

o konci světa (*An Ambiguous Report on the End of the World*, 1997), in many ways a summation of his earlier work. Taking Nostradamus as his starting point, he tells an allegorical story about a village at the edge of the world. Drawing on childhood memories, the film is a powerful ballad, laced with atmospheric photography and an impressive musical score.

The most impressive film from the former New Wave directors was Vihanová's *Pevnost* (*The Fortress*, 1994), adapted from a story from Charter 77 signatory Alexandr Kliment, and first written in the 1960s. Evald (deliberately named after Evald Schorm), an intellectual banned from practising his profession, arrives at a village to measure the water supplies. He establishes himself in a caravan close to a castle, an inaccessible thirteenth-century fortress inhabited by soldiers. The parallels with Kafka are deliberate and, in its analysis of power, the film also recalls Juráček's *Josef Kilián*. This analysis of 'the conflict between despotic and rigid power, and an individual aspiring to liberty' (Vihanová)<sup>36</sup> was redeveloped after 1989 to provide a nuanced account of the years of normalisation. Given its symbolic format, Vihanová has, of course, more universal themes – alienation, solitude, resignation, dream – and sees the film as a continuation of the theme of *Deadly Sunday*. While its use of contrasted black-and-white photography and Kafkaesque structure recalls the 1960s, it nevertheless achieved success at a number of international festivals. Vihanová, who is also a music graduate and edited the film herself, paid considerable attention to the soundtrack. Arguing that contemporary films concentrate on 'flat', as opposed to 'dramaturgical', sound, she aimed to present a symphony of noises. Unlike most long-cherished projects, it also preserved its sense of attack and conviction. Another long-planned project *Zpráva o putování studentů Petra a Jakuba* (*The Pilgrimage of Students Peter and Jakub*, 2000), followed the path of two students – one of law, one of philosophy – and their interaction with the life of a young Roma man who has killed his loved one out of jealousy. An attempt to promote a multicultural dialogue, it failed to achieve the same coherence as *The Fortress*.

In 1997 Juraj Herz returned to Czech production with his *Pasáž* (*Passage*), adapted from the novel by Karel Pecka, first published in samizdat in 1976. It was a subject that he had tried to set up for a number of years. A Kafkaesque story about an office worker who is drawn into a secret world of fantasy hidden behind the arcades in Václavské náměstí (Wenceslas Square), it enjoyed success in a number of West European countries but received a negative critical response in Prague. The theme and narrative structure is very close to Švankmajer's *Lekce Faust* (*Faust/The Lesson of Faust*, 1994), which had in many ways provided an exemplary statement of a similar theme.

Younger directors who have made successful debuts include Jan Hřebejk (*Pelišky* [*Cosy Dens*, 1999] and *Musíme si pomáhat* [*Divided We Fall*, 2000]), Vladimír Michálek (*Amerika*, 1995, *Zapomenuté světlo* [*Forgotten Light*, 1996] and *Babí léto* [*Autumn Spring*, 2001]), Petr Zelenka (*Mhága* [*Happy End*, 1996], *Knoflíkáři* [*Buttoners*, 1998] and *Rok ďábla* [*Year of the Devil*, 2002]), Saša Gedeon (*Indiánské léto* [*Indian Summer*, 1995] and *Návrat idiota* [*Return of the Idiot*, 1999]), Petr Václav (*Marian* [1996] and *Paralelní světy* [*Parallel Worlds*, 2001]), Alice Nellis (*Ene bene* [*Eeny Meeny*, 2000] and *Výlet* [*Some Secrets/The Journey*, 2002]), David Ondříček (*Samotáři* [*Loners*, 2000]), Roman Vávra (*Co chytneš v žitě* [*In the Rye*, 1998]) and Filip Renč (*Requiem pro panenku* [*Requiem for a Maiden*, 1992], *Válka barev* [*War of the Colours*, 1995] and *Rebelové* [*Rebels*, 2001]). If the post-1989 generation was slow to produce a body of work, it can now be seen to herald one of the most significant groupings to emerge in Central/Eastern Europe. While Zelenka tends to reject the influence of the New Wave on his films, the majority of the work suggests the permanence of a tradition. Hřebejk, Gedeon, Nellis and Vávra certainly admire the 1960s directors. But, if the influences of Forman,

Passer and Menzel are apparent, the films of the new directors represent an extension and expansion of the tradition rather than simple imitation.

Hřebejk's films, which deal, respectively, with the moral dilemmas of life under communism and the German occupation, enjoyed a great domestic success. *Cosy Dens* looks at family relations during the Prague Spring while *Divided We Fall* examines the plight of a Czech couple who hide a Jewish neighbour during the Second World War. He fathers a child for them, solving their infertility problems and providing legal protection at the same time. Both films were scripted by Petr Jarchovský, focusing on the microworld of the everyday rather than the larger world of politics, revealing how people adapt, conform and change. Complex and ironic, they also highlight the need to address historical experience rather than accept a mere exchange of ideologies. *Divided We Fall* gained an Oscar<sup>®</sup> nomination, but the path from domestic to international success still remains a problem.

The one director to attract international attention has been Jan Svěrák. After winning the Hollywood student Academy Award<sup>®</sup> in 1989 with his spoof documentary, *Ropáci* (*The Oil Gobblers*), he followed in Jiří Menzel's footsteps by gaining an Academy Award<sup>®</sup> nomination with his first feature film, *Obecná škola* (*The Elementary School*, 1992). Based on his father Zdeněk Svěrák's script about his early childhood, it is set in the school year of 1945–46. Following the adventures of ten-year-old Eda and his friend Tonda, a series of episodes are linked by the children's relationship with an extraordinary teacher (Jan Triska), who claims to have been a Slovak Resistance fighter. Authentically revealing the postwar era with its chewing gum and abandoned weaponry, it remains within the tradition of Czech lyrical cinema. Intended by the Svěráks as a 'healing' film, its unashamed indulgence in the beauty of landscape or the music of Dvořák does not dispel its critical edge.

With *Akumulátor 1* (1994), Svěrák made a successful science fiction comedy based on the theme of television sets being able to suck the energy from viewers' bodies. Excellent special effects rendered this one of the more expensive Czech films in recent years, and it headed the box-office charts for 1994. By way of compensation, Svěrák followed this with one of the cheapest in *Jízda* (*The Ride*, 1995), which won the Grand Prix at Karlovy Vary. An obvious 'homage' to *Easy Rider* (1969), it focuses on two young men who buy a used car and take it on the country roads of southern Bohemia. They pick up a young woman, and her boyfriend pursues them in a black sedan. The style is loose and freewheeling with the 'unserious' and self-indulgent look of a student work. However, it is also sophisticated in its timing and use of humour, with a precise understanding of what works on film. In fact, it is an extremely clever film that draws on influences ranging from Godard to Passer while linking itself to the world of contemporary youth culture. The film's heroes are fashionably cynical and alienated, but Svěrák brilliantly conveys a tenderness and naïveté beneath the surface.

In the Oscar<sup>®</sup>-winning *Kolja* (*Kolya*, 1996), the first post-revolutionary film to be bought for American distribution, Zdeněk Svěrák stars as Louka, a musician banned from playing with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, who agrees to marry a Russian woman for money. When she leaves for Germany on her Czech passport, he is left with their five-year old son. A sentimental and humanist story made with flair and humour, it deliberately evokes the lyrical tradition so successfully tapped in *The Elementary School*. The political realities of the 1980s sometimes seem to be treated with too much of a spirit of reconciliation, but there is also a strong sense of irony. While it seems to have been designed to play to the preoccupations of foreign critics, it also proved a big success in the domestic market. He enjoyed similar domestic success with his later *Tmavomodrý svět* (*Deep Blue World*, 2001), which, like *Kolya*, was based on a script by Zdeněk Svěrák. A co-production with Britain and Germany,



its romantic love story is set against a background of the Czech air force units serving in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. Technically impressive, it was fairly explicitly modelled on the simplified storylines and characterisations of contemporary Hollywood.

Of the new directors to have made their debuts in the late 1980s, Pavlásková's *Corpus Delicti* (1992) was a disappointment, but Zdeněk Tyc continued to promise much with *Žiletký* (*Razor Blades*, 1994), demonstrating that the 'art' film may still have something to offer. Petr Koliha headed a dramatic group within Czech Television which was responsible for a number of successes that included Hynek Bočan's adaptation of Eva Kantůrková's *Přítelkyně z domu smutku* (*My Companions in the House of Anguish/My Companions in the Bleak House*, 1993) and Michálek's *Amerika*. Milan Šteindler, who had made an impressive debut with his comedy, *Vrát' se do hrobu* (*Go Back to the Grave*, 1990), confirmed his success with *Díky za každé nové ráno* (*I Thank You for Each New Morning*, 1995).

Jan Švankmajer continued his independent course, considerably assisted by a growing international interest in his work. *Faust*, based on one of his long-term obsessions, was a timely update of the legend to contemporary Prague. It was to be the last film of Petr Čepek, who died before its completion. His performance as Faust is full of the kinds of subtlety that must have pleased Švankmajer. Having established himself as relatively marketable, Švankmajer made a virtually live-action film with *Spiklenci slasti* (*Conspirators of Pleasure*, 1996), in which he listed among his technical advisers the Marquis de Sade, Sacher-Masoch and Luis Buñuel. A demonstration that he did not need Communism to provide him with targets, it features such delights as a man who seeks to achieve climax while watching a television newsreader, and another who constructs himself a papier mâché rooster's head out of pornographic magazines. It continues Švankmajer's black and sarcastic view of the human condition. In *Otesánek* (*Little Otík*, 2000), based on a Czech fairytale, he told the story of a childless couple, who acquire a baby from an unusual source. Mr Horák digs up a tree root resembling a child and presents it to his wife. Only too willing to accept it as real, she is soon powdering its bottom, changing its nappies and trimming its 'nails'. Otík comes alive and develops a voracious appetite. The family cat, the postman and a social worker mysteriously disappear. Otík was not a child in the real sense, said Švankmajer, but the materialisation of desire, of rebellion against nature.

After a silence of over twenty years, Karel Vachek returned to filmmaking with four long films for television, *Nový hyperion aneb Volnost, rovnost, bratrství* (*The New Hyperion or Freedom, Equality, Fraternity*, 1992), *Co dělat? (Cesta z Prahy do Českého Krumlova aneb Jak jsem sestaval novou vládu)* [*What is to be Done? (A Journey from Prague to Český Krumlov or How I Formed My Own Government)*, 1996], *Bohemia docta aneb Labyrint světa a lusthauz srdce* (*Božská komedie*) [*Bohemia docta or the Labyrinth of the Soul and the Paradise of the Heart (A Divine Comedy)*, 2000] and *Kdo bude hlídat hlídače? Dalibor aneb klíč k chaloupce strýčka toma* (*Who Will Guard the Guard? Dalibor or the Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 2002). The first is centred on the Czech and Slovak elections of 1990, and was shown just before the 1992 elections. Described by Vachek as neither fiction nor documentary, it is a montage of events in which politicians are shown with the mask off. While sometimes verging on the surreal, it is also a discourse on democracy and an ironic view of the human comedy. *What Should We Do?* juxtaposes a tour of the south Bohemian town of Český Krumlov with a bus journey from Prague, in which an assortment of intellectuals (including Kantůrková, Chramostová, Milota, Krejčík, Ivan Jirous and Erazim Kohák) are encouraged to give their views. Interviews from a variety of sources are edited to produce reflections on such topics as democracy, hierarchy, revenge, Socialism, the nature of power and the role of the artist.

It is a collagist approach that gains much from occurring outside the logical structures of television debate. It ends with the motto that it only makes sense through the medium of inner laughter.

In *Bohemia docta*, Vachek's characteristic overlapping of interviews, themes and dialogue, moves from the title's juxtaposition of Comenius and Dante to Marx, Alfons Mucha's *Slovanská epopej* (*Slav Epic*) and the legendary rock group, The Plastic People of the Universe. His multilevel discussion, interspersed with a taxonomy of mushrooms and castles, ranges from considerations of Roma culture to the writer and artist Josef Váchal, the reopening of the Slavia restaurant, the workings of the former security police and the poster of Václav Klaus in place of the Stalin monument. In a media world where discussion is usually simplified and sanitised, Vachek's debates and unusual connections can be genuinely instructive.

While it lasts for over four hours, *Who Will Guard the Guard?* seems simpler than its predecessors. Here, Vachek's themes are framed by rehearsals for a performance of Smetana's *Dalibor* at the National Theatre. The three 'acts' of the film focus on attitudes to the past, prospects for salvation, and the transition to capitalism. Thus, we have discussions on how the conductor Václav Talich preserved Smetana and collaborated with the Nazis, the link between the National Theatre and the ideals of Masaryk, Jan Němec denouncing the Dalibor legend, the secret police, globalisation, the persecution of the Roma and many other subjects.

In Slovakia the situation has inevitably been more severe. As Slovak production had, to all intents and purposes, been separate from Czech, the division of the country in 1993 had no overt effect on the industry. Feature production was always less than in the Czech lands and, in the Communist period, had numbered approximately ten features per year. In 1992 this dropped to four feature films, and to two in 1993. Nevertheless Dušan Rapoš had a great success with his *Fontána pro Zuzanu 2* (*Fountain for Susan 2*, 1993), a follow up to his 1985 film, *Fontána pro Zuzanu* (*Fountain for Susan*). Successful also in the Czech Republic, it had 25 prints struck, rivalling its US competitors. The non-privatisation of the Koliba Studios, despite their use as a base for the American *Dragonheart* (1996), led to continuing controversy and little use. Interestingly, there have been a number of Czech and Slovak co-productions, most notably Miloslav Luther's *Anjel milosrdenstva* (*Angel of Mercy*, 1994), adapted from the novel by Vladimír Körner. Winner of the European Film Award, its story of a young woman's experiences at the front during the First World War had an obvious parallel with the civil wars in former Yugoslavia.

The one indisputable auteur to have emerged from the Czech and Slovak cinemas in recent years has been Martin Šulík, with his critically acclaimed trio of films: *Neha* (*Tenderness*, 1991), *Všetko co mám rád* (*Everything I Like*, 1992) and *Zahrada* (*The Garden*, 1995). All were co-scripted with Ondřej Šulaj, who had previously scripted two of the most controversial Slovak films of the 1980s, Zoro Záhon's *Pomocník* (*The Assistant*, 1982) and Dušan Trančík's *Pavilón šeliem* (*Cage of Wild Beasts*, 1982).

With *Tenderness*, Šulík examined what it means 'to be human in a post-Communist society', with human relations crucially influenced by the moral corruption of normalisation. It examined the relationship of a young man to a married couple whose relations are based on a strange mixture of tenderness and self-torture. Šulík's perceptive psychological study was in some ways reminiscent of Bergman and *Everything I Like* was conceived in a similar vein. Here, its divorced hero (Juraj Nvota) has an uncertain relationship with an English teacher (Gina Bellman). The film is constructed from short scenes each introduced by a single title, and again promotes a searching and existentialist theme.

In *The Garden*, made with Czech financial involvement, he adopts a similar fragmentary style. Jakub (Roman Luknar), who is having an affair with a married woman, is thrown out by his father (Marian Labuda), and takes over a deserted house and garden in the countryside. Here he meets a 'miraculous virgin' and learns to understand what is normally 'not understandable'. An intimate chamber film with a slow pace and sensitive music score, it is again about the relations of characters in crisis. This time, however, Šulík is concerned with the characters' imaginative world in which cats, dogs, the absurd and the surreal all play their part.

Šulík's most recent film, *Krajinka* (*The Landscape*, 2000), was co-scripted by Dušan Dušek, who had written Hanák's *Rose-Tinted Dreams* and *I Love, You Love*. Based on their own and their parents' memories of village life, its ten stories set in different historical periods evoke obvious parallels with Jasný's *All My Good Countrymen*. However, unlike Jasný's film, the characters rarely continue between episodes, and the role of the voiceover narration acquires more significance. The unforgettable characters, the significant objects and the power of Iva Bittová's singing are just some of the ingredients in a multi-layered and deeply-felt film. As the narrator observes: 'This country will never be again ... only a small landscape remains.'

While Šulík's brand of auteur cinema seems to represent precisely what the experts say should be avoided in the new world of capitalist realities, it also seems to suggest that sensitivity, conviction and filmmaking ability may still be one of the ways to reach an international audience.

The sole member of the 1960s generation still active in Slovakia is Dušan Hanák. His one completed full-length film, *Papierové hlavy* (*Paper Heads*, 1996), is a compilation documentary examining the history of Czechoslovakia from the 1950s to the 1990s. Based on archival material and testimony from 350 interviews, his examination of a submerged history – the uranium mines, the political trials of the 1950s, secret police torture – is contrasted with slogans proclaiming the 'radiant future' offered by socialism. Without an understanding of history, argues Hanák, how can we understand the implications of contemporary politics?

In a changing situation, it is not possible to predict the ways in which the Czech and Slovak cinemas will develop. However, some provisional observations may be made. While old assumptions about creative freedom no longer apply in a market situation, there is still, in theory, a government commitment to subsidy and to cultural traditions other than those of Hollywood's 'soft culture'. Grants to filmmakers such as Němec and Švankmajer indicate an awareness of criteria other than those of mass culture. International co-production, while not overwhelmed with success, has nevertheless seen the production of films such as *The Fortress* (a co-production with France), and *Chonkin* and *Kolya* (both co-productions with Britain). Barrandov has continued to service international production, and television has had a key role in the initiation or co-production of most films. American cultural domination is a threat, but domination of a particular space within audiovisual culture may not imply domination of the whole. The Czech and Slovak Republics face the same problems as much larger European countries. While production figures will never return to those of the Communist period, it seems likely that their cinemas will survive.

There may never again be a New Wave. Many of the directors mentioned in this book have now died: directors of the 'First Wave' such as Kadár and Klos, Helge, Uher, Vlášil, and Kachyňa – but also Jireš, Schorm, Papoušek, Juráček, Brynych, Máša, and Sirový. However, as noted earlier, the influence of the New Wave can be detected in a wide range of films by

younger directors. More specifically, Vachek's style of 'dialectical' documentary has arguably influenced such feature documentaries as *Bitva o život* (*Battle for Life*, 2000) by Vít Janeček, Miroslav Janek and Roman Vávra, *Nonstop* (Jan Gogola Jr, 2002), *Dust Games* (Martin Mareček, 2002) and *Český sen* (*Czech Dream*, 2004) by Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda.

In 2002, Martin Šulík made a remarkable documentary based on the diaries of Pavel Juráček entitled *Klíč k určování trpaslíků aneb poslední cesta Lemuela Gullivera* (*The Key to determining Dwarfs, or the Last Voyage of Lemuel Gulliver*) and, in 2003, Tomáš Hejtmánek directed *Sentiment*, a tribute to František Vlášil based on revisiting his locations and a re-enacted interview. Both were important testaments to two of the most distinctive directors of the 1960s. And, at the time of writing, Chytilová, Němec and Vachek are all teaching at FAMU. The continuity has not been lost.