

BETWEEN ESCAPE AND TOURISM – Czech and Polish Travel Films of the Postcommunist Period

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The modern subject is a subject on the move

John Urry

In my paper I intend to discuss the representation of travellers and the travelling experience in two Central European films, the Czech *Jizda* (*The Ride*, 1994), directed by Jan Šverak and the Polish *Farba* (*Paint*, 1997), directed by Michał Rosa, against the background of the momentous historical change, which took place in the Warsaw Pact countries of Europe at the beginning of the 1990s. My argument is that these films register and explore the changing conditions of travel in the Czech Republic and Poland in the last decade or so, resulting from such factors as easier access to a car, Westernisation, a new sense of freedom and consequently, an increased possibility of being a tourist for ordinary Czechs and Poles, but also difficulties which are encountered by those who embark on a journey. Another purpose of my paper is to identify the main characteristics of the countries represented by Sverak and Rosa; whether are they 'selling' the Czech Republic and Poland to viewers as a 'tourist's paradise' or on the contrary, are they warning them against visiting them? I want to concentrate both on similarities and differences between the respective films, drawing attention to the tension between old and new in the physical and social landscapes the travellers pass through. However, before I start answering these questions, it is worth discussing some general problems connected with tourism and the specifics of travel and tourism in the countries and cinemas of the old Soviet Bloc.

The blurred edges of tourism

Defining tourism proved to be a difficult task for a number of interconnected reasons. Firstly, it is not easy to distinguish tourism from other activities (typically involving travel, but even this is questioned by some authors), and accordingly – tourists from other categories of people, such as businessmen, holiday-makers, explorers and migrants.¹ Hence, perhaps it is better to talk about the touristic dimension of an activity, rather than about tourism as such. This problem largely results from the elusive purpose of tourism. Some authors claim that it is a quest for authenticity, while others draw attention to the search for inauthenticity, especially if we take into account tourism undertaken in recent decades, dominated by postmodernism.² Another difficulty is captured by the concept of the 'end of tourism', advocated by, amongst others, John Urry. Urry argues that in the era of post-fordism or disorganised capitalism 'tourism comes to take over and organise much contemporary social and cultural experience. Disorganised capitalism then involves the 'end of tourism'. People are tourists most of the time whether they are literally mobile or only experience simulated mobility through the incredible fluidity of multiple signs and electronic images.'³ 'Tourism is nowhere and yet everywhere'.⁴

To these difficulties we have to add some specific problems connected with the different traditions and understandings of 'tourism' in different cultural settings. In particular, in the countries where travelling, especially for pleasure is taken for granted, tourism has different connotations than in those where it is a privilege of a few. Similarly, in cultures more saturated with images, more – to use Jean Baudrillard's phrase – hyper-real, the border between touristic and other activities is more blurred than in those less dominated by mass media. Having these difficulties in mind, I will try next to identify the specifics of tourism in Central/Eastern Europe.

¹ See C. Ryan, *Recreational Tourism*, London and New York 1991; S. Lash, J. Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, London 1994; P. M. Burns, A. Holden, *Tourism. A New Perspective*, Hemel Hempstead 1995.

² J. Urry, *Consuming Places*, London 1995, pp. 147-149.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 148.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

Tourist and traveller in the countries and cinemas of the Soviet Bloc

In order to understand the meaning of travel and tourism in countries such as Poland and Czechoslovakia, we must realise that direct and indirect restrictions on travel was one of the most widely used, as well as most resented forms of communist oppression. A passport was difficult to obtain and Western currency was expensive (and in some periods illegal to buy and keep at home), excluding most citizens from travelling abroad. Accordingly, when Poles and Czechs did engage in foreign travel, it was rarely for the purpose of tourism or to discover one's 'true identity', but for practical reasons: to migrate to a more prosperous and democratic country, or just to earn enough money abroad to buy a flat or set up a business back home. Moreover, even this kind of travel, which assumed that there were better countries than their own, was looked on unfavourably by the communist authorities. The exception was travel to other socialist countries, especially those with plenty of sun and warm water, such as Bulgaria, Hungary and some Soviet republics, like Georgia, but this type of travel (often accompanied by illegal selling and buying of goods which were deficient in the home countries) was available only to more affluent citizens.

Tourism in one's own country was more common, typically taking the form of short excursions to historical sites or two weeks' holiday at the seaside. Both types of tourism/holidaymaking – visiting another socialist country or an attractive spot in one's own homeland, were usually organised by large employers, such as coalmines or shipyards for their workers and their families. These employers possessed large hotels in the popular resorts, complete with staff taking care of every aspect of life for the holidaymaker, including his/her cultural and sometimes political development. It must be added that as the collapse of communism approached and the holidaying facilities in Central/Eastern Europe worsened, increasingly this type of travel was looked down on by the younger generation and more affluent members of society as signifying lack of individualism and conformity on the part of travellers, and boredom, connected with low quality entertainment. Younger people, and students in particular opted for less structured trips to the mountains, where they could stay in private accommodation or – if they could afford it – went abroad.

The collapse of communism removed many of the aforementioned obstacles to travel. Czechs and Poles can now go freely to most countries in the world, without experiencing any administrative problems with acquiring a passport, a visa or foreign currency. A car in the 1990s became relatively cheaper

than in the previous decades, which made travelling in one's own country and abroad cheaper. Moreover, the income of the typical middle class travellers from the Eastern Bloc, is increasing faster than that of the inhabitants of Western Europe, therefore on the whole foreign tourism is becoming cheaper for citizens of the ex-Soviet Bloc. At the same time, the network of hotels and other tourist facilities in the countries of Central Europe increased and their standard improved, largely to cater for Western tourists. This was also advantageous for Czechs and Poles who previously could not reach some parts of their countries either because of the sheer lack of places to stay or because the quality of facilities was below an acceptable standard.

Judging from the statistics on trips undertaken by Poles and Czechs in the 1990s⁵, and the proliferation of travel agents (a large part of whom are franchises of Western companies) in these countries, tourism became an important aspect of the lives of citizens of Central/Eastern Europe. The dominant form is a package holiday in a foreign country of warm climate, such as Spain, Greece, Croatia, Tunisia or Turkey. However, it is worth mentioning that over the relatively short period of time since the political transformation, the connotations of such travel and the social mix of people who undertake them, changed significantly. While at the beginning of the 1990s they were a privilege of the most affluent, with the passage of time they lost their aura of exclusivity and are increasingly regarded as unsophisticated, even vulgar. Those who regard themselves as more cultural or adventurous than their compatriots, and are sufficiently well-off to fulfil their dreams, choose now more exotic or obscure locations, such as South America, China and India. Travelling in the ex-Soviet Union or in one's own country also became fashionable amongst some sections of the society, particularly young people, as it is regarded as less pretentious and more genuine than going to a 'concrete paradise' of popular Mediterranean resorts, like Torremolinos.

It is a commonplace to say that cinema depicts social and cultural reality, but the depiction is not a simple and accurate reflection, but a representation distorted by a number of factors, including the official ideology of the day, or the artist's opposition to it. Accordingly, when Polish and Czech filmmakers portrayed people travelling, the portrayal usually fulfilled some ideological functions. Nevertheless, there were some important similarities between the

⁵ See www.intur.com.pl

situation of real travellers and those in films. Hence, the perceived mediocrity of journeys undertaken by citizens of the Soviet bloc during the communist period was an important factor why in Poland and Czechoslovakia there was little tradition of road cinema in the sense of films set on the road, and why they did not adhere to any strict set of rules, as American films of this genre did. There is no space here to discuss in detail the characteristics of classical or true road cinema, but it is worth mentioning here that the classic examples from the late 1960s, such as *Easy Rider* (1969), directed by Dennis Hopper and *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), directed by Bob Rafelson, as well as later manifestations of this genre in the films of Jim Jarmusch and Aki Kaurismäki were typically read as anti-consumerist, anti-capitalist manifestos, exalting such values as freedom, solidarity, and respect for a more natural way of living. At the same time we find in them a glorification of the car and motorbike as vehicles to achieve freedom. Because of a different approach to travel in Eastern European films and their heterogeneity it is better to talk about travel films or the motif of travel in these films, rather than Czech or Polish (as well as Hungarian or Bulgarian) road cinema.

The majority of Czech films about travel made after 1945 cast as the main characters people who attempted to escape the drab reality of a socialist country. In most cases, and almost in all in which the character was a mature man, the direction of the escape was from a large city, usually Prague to the country, often accompanied by the 'inner journey' of a character, who while travelling, reminisced on and evaluated his life. This was the case of *Intimní osvětlení* (*Intimate Lighting*, 1966), directed by Ivan Passer, *O slavnosti a hostech* (*The Party and the Guests*, 1966), directed by Jan Němec, and Jaroslav Papoušek's *Hogo fogo Homolka* (1970). The mode of transport was a car of Czech production, suggesting that the protagonist stood slightly above the average in the social hierarchy. There were also films about leaving the provinces for Prague. In such cases the travellers were typically younger and they did not seek refuge, but rather adventure and fun; the best known example is the main character in Miloš Forman's *Lásky jedné plavovlásky* (*Blonde in Love*, 1965). We can also identify films about urban nomadism, typically set in Prague, such as *Josef Kilián* (1963), directed by Pavel Juráček. It is worth mentioning that the Czech New Wave, not unlike the French New Wave, more often than other cinematic schools or paradigms in Czech cinema utilised the motif of geographical change as a catalyst of a transformation in the lives and personalities of the main characters. I will suggest that the reasons for that was the spirit of optimism, characteristic to

Czechoslovakia of the late 1950s and early 1960s, as well as to the directors' choice of young people as the film protagonists, who were testing various possibilities, largely by moving from one place to another.

At the level of the narrative, Czech films with the motif of travel were very critical of Czech social and geographical reality. The country was typically represented as boring and frozen in time. Prague was a site of hostility and alienation, particularly to the newcomers: they could get lost there, be anonymous, but their chance to find their own place in the capital was extremely remote. However, through *mise-en-scène* the Czech travel films often conveyed a different message, that Czechoslovakia was a mysterious place, unspoilt by civilization, even by communist transformation, respectful of its monuments and utterly charming. Take, for example, Juráček's *Josef Kilián* which perfectly evokes the 19th century atmosphere of Prague. In short, the image conjured up in this film could be very attractive to some sections of both domestic and foreign tourists.

In comparison with Czech films, the journeys shown in Polish films deviated even more from the norm of road film. Firstly, they were often made by public transport, especially trains. Moreover, many of them were imaginary or short. The characters only dreamt of going to exotic places, or substituted them with locations closer to home. Examples include *Kto wierzy w bociany* (*Who Believes in Storks?*, 1970), directed by Helena Amiradžibi and Jerzy Stefan Stawiński, in which a rebellious teenage couple find refuge in a place nearby, which they call Island of Happiness, or *Wniebowzięci* (*Taken to Heaven*, 1973), directed by Andrzej Kondratiuk, where two rather unsuccessful middle-aged men use the money which they won in the national lottery on short domestic plane trips. In Bogusław Linda's *Seszele* (*Seychelles*, 1989) the characters only think about going to an island paradise, without even embarking on their journey. Wojciech Has, the director of *Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie* (*The Saragossa Manuscript*, 1964), *Sanatorium pod Klepsydrą* (*The Sanatorium Under the Hourglass*, 1973) and *Niezwykła podróż Baltazara Kobera* (*The Extraordinary Journey of Baltazar Kober*, 1988) can be regarded as a master in depicting imaginary journeys, not only in Polish, but in world cinema. Even if the characters found the courage to escape the drab world for real, they typically failed to reach their destination, caught by the police or their parents. The abortive efforts of all these people can be read as a metaphor for the impossibility of overcoming the communist reality.

In contrast to Czech films, promoting Poland as a site of tourism and holidaymaking was hardly detectable in Polish films. The mise-en-scène of the majority of Polish films with a motif of travel foreground the drabness of both large Polish cities and the countryside. It was taken for granted that tourism or more generally, having pleasurable impressions from travelling, equals going abroad or moving 'inwards', using one's imagination.

Two features of Czech and Polish travel cinema from the period before the collapse of communism are very important for me, as I intend to compare the new films against these characteristics. One of them is, paradoxically, their static character. I refer to the fact that despite representing characters changing places and identities, the travel itself is rarely shown. The characters simply board a car or a train, which is followed by a cut and then we see them at their destination. Moreover, the cinematic means widely used and associated with road cinema, also of European origin (examples are films by Wim Wenders and Jean-Luc Godard), such as travelling and panning shots, and fast editing, are assiduously avoided. The camera in the travel films of the communist period is typically static, suggesting that remaining in one place was the norm in this part of Europe. One can also note a parallel between these films and the ideology of socialism, which assumed its own perfection and hence, no need for change.

In terms of gender, Polish travel cinema favoured the adventures of a single male, male companions or a heterosexual couple. In the latter case, however, the woman tended to play only a passive role: she was the one who allowed herself to be kidnapped, as in *Who Believes in Storks?* or *Opowieść harleya* (*The Tales of Harley*, 1987), directed by Wiesław Helak, or failed to escape while her male friend succeeded, as in *300 mil do nieba* (*300 Miles to Heaven*, 1989), directed by Maciej Dejczer, based on the true story of two teenage boys who fled to Denmark, hidden in a lorry.

Czech cinema in this respect was more versatile than Polish. One of the most memorable travellers was Andula in *Blonde in Love*, who left her boring village, factory and dormitory to pursue the man who appeared to be in love with her. However, in common with Polish films women were never in charge of vehicles and they have little control of their destiny. Men drove cars, offered a lift to hitchhikers or passed them by.

After the collapse of communism travel cinema in the Czech Republic and to an even greater extent in Poland grew in number and increased in variety. I will suggest two, interconnected reasons for that expansion. The first is the

discovery by the film authors that travel films are an excellent vehicle with which to explore the various upheavals experienced by Eastern Europeans due to socio-political change. The second reason was to show off the beauty and uniqueness of their countries, to act, if not as a travel agent, so at least as a travel agent's friend. In the group of films using the motif of travel as a metaphor of a wider change which took place in Eastern Europe around the year 1990 we should list, amongst other films, the Polish *Torowisko* (*Track-way*, 1999), directed by Urszula Urbaniak, *Uprowadzenie Agaty* (*Kidnapping of Agata*, 1993), directed by Marek Piwowski and *Enduro Bojz* (2000), directed by Piotr Starzak, *Jutro będzie niebo* (*Tomorrow Will Be Heaven*, 2001), directed by Jarosław Marszewski, the Czech *Kolja* (1996), directed by Jan Šverak, *Samotáři* (*Loners*, 2002), directed by David Ondříček, *Vylet* (*The Journey*, aka *Some Secrets*, 2002), directed by Alice Nellis, and *Smradi* (*Brats*, 2002), directed by Zdenek Tyc. The group of films encouraging tourism comprises some Polish films set in Cracow, such as *Spis cudzołożnic* (*The Register of Adulteresses*, 1994) directed by Jerzy Stuhr and *Anioł w Krakowie* (*An Angel in Cracow*, 2002), directed by Artur Więcek 'Baron' and almost the same Czech films, which we find in the first group, which testifies to Czech directors' willingness to depict their country in the best possible light, although not without self-irony. Take, for example, an episode in *Loners* when some Japanese tourists visit the home of a tourist agent to see 'a typical Czech family'.

A common feature of Polish and Czech travel films, made after the collapse of communism, in comparison with films made in earlier periods, is their increased interest in travel itself, which in my opinion testifies to the greater mobility of the citizens of respective countries. This interest is conveyed both by devoting a larger proportion of the film to the events which take place in the vehicles, as well as by using cinematic means which suggest mobility, such as tracking shots, hand-held camera and fast editing.

***The Ride* – tourism without vulgarity**

The Ride was directed by the most nationally and internationally renowned and rewarded director in Czech postcommunist cinema, Jan Šverak, the winner of an Oscar for *Kolja* in 1997. I will suggest that an important reason for Šverak's fame is his ability to combine creatively some vernacular and international cinematic traditions. *The Ride*, which is Šverak's second feature, makes reference to at least two distinctive cinematic paradigms. One of them is classical road

cinema, which – as established earlier – is marked by glorification of the car. As the second strand of inspiration for *Šverak I* will list the Czech New Wave of the 1960s, represented by films such as *Blonde in Love*, *Černý Petr* (*Black Peter*, 1964) and *Sedmikrásky* (*Daisies*, 1966), as well as later films by Věra Chytilová. As was previously mentioned, many of these films can be regarded as coming-of-age films, whose protagonists gained maturity or at least a new outlook on life thanks to a certain type of peregrination. Moreover, Chytilová's movies had an anarchic quality about them – their characters do not care where they go and for what reasons, as long as they are moving. They also give prominent roles to travelling women. It is also worth mentioning *Band a Part* (1964) by Jean-Luc Godard as a possible inspiration despite Godard's film not being a road movie – as *Šverak's* film also includes two men and one woman breaking the law and represents the car in a similar way to the French director.

The Ride begins with a scenario which can be found in many American road films: two young men, Radek and Franta look for a cheap car in garages, specialising in second-hand Western vehicles. Their search is presented in a long shot, which allows us to see the masses of cars on offer to the customers. Such an abundance of vehicles draws attention to the fact that Czechs, or at least inhabitants of large Czech towns, have become a nation of motorists, hence – a nation on the move, albeit dependant on the West in fulfilling its need to travel. The car which the friends eventually buy is assembled on the premises from the remains of several vehicles destroyed in accidents. It looks a bit shabby, with scratches all over the bodywork, but also distinctly Western and adventurous, largely thanks to being a convertible (soft-top cars were not produced in socialist countries and they were associated with Western decadence). The car does not have any legal documents and only a fake number plate, apparently once belonging to a French car, which parallels the young travellers' lack of a driving licence. The easiness and speed of acquiring the car and its inexpensiveness poignantly contrast with the earlier times, when one could not simply buy a car, but had to wait for it for years, even if one had enough money, or 'receive' it from the authorities as a sign of appreciation for one's service to communism. The choice of car signifies Radek and Franta's modest financial resources (they cannot afford to buy a car with a valid MOT), as well as their semi-conscious desire to emulate young Western travellers. The shadowy second-hand dealer advises the buyers to pretend to be French tourists whenever they are approached by the police. The illegality of the car also has some crucial implication for their route. They decide to use only

minor roads, as opposed to the main ones, which in Radek's words are used by gangsters and the police. Furthermore, they are restricted to travelling in their own country because by crossing national borders they would risk being arrested.

The letters on the number plate read JZD, which are consonants in the word 'jizda' (meaning 'ride' or 'travel'). In this way Šverak suggests that the car will be used for a purposeless and unstructured journey, for travel for travel's sake. Indeed, the young friends do not have any precise itinerary or guide and only once do we see them looking at the map. Moving freely from one place to another and experiencing something pleasant or interesting appears to be their main goal. They do not mind getting lost or returning to the same place twice. Neither do they know how long their journey will last – they assume that it will depend on what happens to them on the way.

Travel and tourism, as Chris Rojek and John Urry maintain, 'can be thought of as a search for difference'.⁶ In the case of Radek and Franta we can think of two types of difference which they seek. One is a difference of landscape and lifestyle, associated with a particular landscape. The young protagonists hit the road in order to leave behind the large city, presumably Prague. With the exception of the opening shot, no part of the film is set in the city, but Prague is mentioned in their conversations in the context of consumerism and greedy materialism which dominate the lifestyles of its inhabitants. When reading a newspaper one of the friends comments that in Prague these days everything is measured by the size of a credit card and he mentions overcrowding and the pollution of Prague swimming pools. They themselves do not have any credit cards and the lake in which they bathe is very clean and wild and they are the only ones swimming there.

As Rojek and Urry observe, 'from a male perspective, women are the embodiment of difference, ... they are, as it were, "imagined territories". The activity of leaving home to travel involves for men sexual adventure, with "finding a woman"... The loosening of everyday ties and responsibilities opens the male self for sexually coded assignations.'⁷ Accordingly, for Radek and Franta travel

⁶ C. Rojek, J. Urry, *Transformations of Travel and Theory*, in: *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, eds. C. Rojek, J. Urry, London 1997, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

is a means to escape domesticity (one of them is married), meet women and enjoy sexual adventures. In their conversations they mention the advantages of foreign prostitutes: they are cheaper than the local girls and the language barrier prevents them from complaining if something goes wrong. They even joke about burying them in a forest after 'having fun' with them. It is worth mentioning here that prostitutes are often regarded as epitomising female travellers – they are described as 'women of the streets'.⁸ Moreover, in the 1990s prostitutes from the Balkans and ex-Soviet Union became a common feature on the roads of more prosperous postcommunist countries, such as East Germany, the Czech Republic and Poland.

However, Šverak constructs Radek and Franta in such a way that it is hard to imagine them taking advantage of vulnerable women – they are simply too good-natured for that (and we are meant to identify with them while it is difficult to identify with users of prostitutes), as well as too attractive to pay for sex with 'women of the streets'. In Eastern Europe this type of erotic contact is associated with lorry drivers and older men travelling on business in private cars. The suspicion that they will avoid prostitutes is confirmed when the travellers pick up a young woman sitting by the side of the road. She is Czech, and with a waif-like figure, delicate features, a simple dress and no make-up, hardly fits the stereotype of a prostitute. Not only do Radek and Franta fail to take sexual advantage of the girl, named Anna, but in due course they do everything to please her. They get her her favourite food, alcohol and share their supply of marihuana with her, and despite their modest financial resources they book into a cheap hotel to secure a comfortable night for her. In the end they even offer her a lift to anywhere in the country she wishes to go.

Despite admitting that she does not know how to drive and has no money, Anna does not content herself with taking a back seat either in the literal or metaphorical sense. She asks the friends to allow her to drive and later challenges them to remove the car key while they are driving, risking a serious accident. They agree, but nothing dangerous happens, only the car stops in the middle of the field and a tractor is brought to take it back to the road. Unlike women of earlier generations of cinematic travellers (both Western and East-

⁸ See E. Jokinen, S. Veijola, *The Disoriented Tourist: The Figuration of the Tourist in Contemporary Cultural Critique*, in: *Touring Cultures*: op. cit.

ern), who were very shy in their relationship with cars, for Anna a car is like a toy, a kind of lapdog. Nowhere is this shown better than in a scene (reminiscent of Jean Luc-Godard's *Band a Part*) where, encouraged by Anna, they all closely follow their car while freewheeling.

Anna's arrival in the lives of Radek and Franta allows Šverak to enrich his discourse on travel and tourism with new motives, such as consumerism, romanticism and nostalgia. The first two elements are introduced thanks to the young heroine's ambivalent and mysterious relationship with her rich boyfriend, Honzik, who is also an owner of a Western car, but much newer and more expensive than Radek and Franta's convertible. She admits that she met the friends when she ran away from Honzik and he tries to track her down after her departure, appearing in the same towns and villages, which the three travellers visit. We also learn that at the time as she stayed with Radek and Franta, she was in contact with her boyfriend and eventually returned to him, leaving Radek who had fallen in love with her totally devastated. Her stories about Honzik suggest that she is at the same time attracted and repelled by him. His wealth flatters her, making her 'light travelling' more a question of free choice than a result of her modest resources. At the same time his possessiveness (she claims that he does not allow her any clothes than those which he gave her) makes her feel suffocated and restless. Radek and Franta's last encounter with the girl takes place when the friends attend the scene of a car accident, whose dead victims are Anna and Honzik. Although the boyfriend was behind the steering wheel, it is clear that Anna caused the crash, performing the same trick with the car key as she had attempted earlier with the owners of the old convertible. The accident can be interpreted as Anna's marking her power and autonomy as a female traveller. At the same time it shows how extreme measures must be taken by a travelling woman to prove that she is in control of her destiny. It is worth adding here that Anna is portrayed by Šverak as in a sense even more mobile than Radek and Franta. This is because for the friends travelling is a way of spending a holiday, while for her it is a way of life. She claims that she hits the road (albeit always with Honzik) whenever she feels bored or sad. Such restlessness makes her similar to heroines of some contemporary road films, especially *Sans toit ni loi* (*Vagabonde*, 1985), directed by Agnès Varda. It also bears similarities with the women in Czech New Wave films, especially those of Věra Chytilová, including the two Marias in her *Daisies*, who would rather die than settle down. Anna acts as a link with the communist period and its cinematic representation in the New

Wave also because she has an affinity to objects and customs from earlier times. One example is her utter joy on finding some records of Czech singers popular before the collapse of communism in the house which they broke into. Another example is her joining in the firefighter's feast, somewhere in a provincial town which bears association with Forman's *Hoří, má panenka* (*The Firemen's Ball*, 1967). Radek and Franta keep her company in her nostalgic pursuits, but they never initiate them, which suggests that as far as travel in time is concerned, Anna is a much more sophisticated tourist than they.

Lack of money prevents the young travellers from behaving as ordinary holidaymakers and forces them to adapt new identities. On one occasion we see Franta pretending to be an inspector, sent by the icecream producer Algida to inspect shops selling their products. He objects to any grocer keeping any other make of icecream in the refrigerator given to him by Algida. As a punishment for not conforming to this rule Franta confiscates all his icecream and beer, which he later enjoys with Radek and Anna during their journey in the heat. In due course, they also steal fruit and vegetables from somebody's garden and when they run out of cash to pay for the hotel, they break into a house to spend some nights there. Unscheduled events add to the unpredictability, adventurousness and danger of their travel – characteristics constituting an ideal for many contemporary tourists – those who do not want to be reduced to playing the role of 'adopted children of estate agents' or – as James Buzard puts it – to travel on a 'beaten track', in a 'vulgar way', repeating the experiences of thousands of fellow tourists.⁹ It must be mentioned here that, paradoxically, the limitations of Radek and Franta's journey, namely being forced to travel in one's own homeland, sticking to minor roads and contenting themselves with little money are represented by the director as a significant advantage from the perspective of a tourist who yearns to avoid inauthenticity and vulgarity. Thanks to these limitations the friends reach places which are not widely known to those who visit the Czech Republic, allowing them to be, albeit on a small scale, discoverers of this country. To confirm the status of his characters as discoverers, on several occasions Šverák uses a bird's eye view shot to show that they are the only motorists on the large, almost empty surface consisting of roads and fields.

⁹ See J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918*, Oxford 1993.

The image of the Czech Republic Šverak conveys, is partly a 'paradise of nature', as if taken from the pages of the "National Geographic", with pristine woods and forests, clean lakes and rivers, an abundance of frogs and snakes, and anthills and lizards. On many occasions the film ceases to be driven by the development of the narrative, following the 'spectacle of nature'. The camera follows the characters communing with nature, or even disperses with humans altogether, showing us the local plants and animals, often in close-up. The other aspect of Šverak's Czech Republic is a homely province, where nature co-exists in symbiosis with culture, as epitomised by the image of storks perched on the church roof or flying above the houses. However, the province is not devoid of cultural monuments. The small towns in which the travellers stop look as if they remained untouched either by communism or postcommunism, but instead reveal a character shaped by earlier periods. They boast distinctive centres with small cafés and bars selling traditional Czech drinks and well-preserved old buildings, usually dating from the Renaissance. Radek, Franta and Anna visit some of the attractions, enjoying the fact that they can admire them almost in privacy, undisturbed by other tourists and unburdened by any clichéd connotations of the places they visit. They can give them their own, more personal meanings. Take, for example, the monastery visited by Radek and Anna. The silence and emptiness of the place encourages them to exchange caresses (which they would not dare to do if the place was full of people) and talk about the specific smell exuded by monasteries, resulting from the solitary lifestyle of the monks.

In a wider perspective, comprising not only the point of view of the travellers, but also of the indigenous population, the consequence of Radek and Franta using the 'unbeaten track' is a balance between their gaze directed at local people and that of the local people directed towards them. They are all mutually attracted, and on some occasions the local people are more interested in the travellers than the other way round. It could even be argued that thanks to the incomers from Prague the provincials become tourists themselves, gaining access to a different culture. However, one can not overestimate the difference between Šverak's protagonists and the inhabitants of small towns and villages. As in *Easy Rider*, the latter are static: frozen in space and time. They stand near their houses and look at the passing convertible with interest, as if it was something utterly exotic, and some wave to the travellers. Most of them look very rustic and backward: old women in long, shapeless dresses with rakes in their hands and dirty children with simple toys. In the small towns the local

people try to chat the travellers up, help them with directions, and they fail to notice that often the main reason that they stop in their village is to steal money or food from the local shops. The representation of the provincial as curious but slow-thinking and backward reminds us of the books of Hrabal and Hašek. The only difference is that according to these famous Czech writers the provincials often eventually prove themselves less naive and more resourceful than one expected at the beginning, while Šverak consistently demonstrates the intellectual superiority of the metropolitan travellers over them.

To sum up the tourist experience of Radek and Franta I will argue that they achieved the rare ideal of becoming 'tourists without vulgarity'. They were tourists, because both in terms of the landscape and in terms of experiences they escaped home and found something new. Moreover, their experiences were unpredictable and rich. Paradoxically, various constraints of their travel, especially the lack of money, facilitated a rich and deep contact with their own country, normally rarely achieved by tourists. Accordingly, rural and provincial Czechoslovakia, as Šverak represents it, is a place where such tourism can be enjoyed. However, we can risk the statement that it can only happen as long as tourists are rare in this region.

Pregnancy tourism, aborted journey

Paint was the second and so far the most successful film in the career of Michał Rosa, who in total made three films, the remaining two being *Gorący czwartek* (*Hot Thursday*, 1993) and *Cisza* (*Silence*, 2001). In his native Poland he is renowned as a director depicting the lives of young people in post-communist Poland, but not in a way sympathetic to their plight, but rather in a critical manner. This is also true of *Paint*, which was regarded as a film which subtly but persuasively conveys a right wing ideology which is critical of the lifestyles of young people. In common with Šverak's film, *Paint* is different from the earlier Eastern European travel films by being more preoccupied with travel itself – trains and railway stations feature prominently in the narrative. Moreover, Rosa uses cinematic means which suggest mobility extensively, such as tracking shots, hand-held camera and fast editing. Tadeusz Sobolewski writes that the camera behaves as if looking for a frame in which to lock the characters who always manage to escape.¹⁰

¹⁰ T. Sobolewski, *Sztuczny luz*, „Kino” 1997 No. 9, p. 7.

The title character, nicknamed Farba (Paint), is in her late teens and neither works, nor goes to school. Instead, she travels from one town to another by train, usually without a valid ticket, which is partly the result of her financial situation, and partly a sign of her rebellion against authority. She is accompanied on her journey by a boy of her own age nicknamed Cyp. The ultimate purpose of Farba's journey is to visit her grandmother, whom she has not seen for many years, but she is not in any hurry to reach her destination. Travel for travel's sake appears for her at least as important a motive to move as finding the relative. For this reason I will regard her as a tourist, however atypical. The third reason she travels is that it allows her to earn money in a way which would be almost impossible if she stayed in her home town. Farba is expecting a baby and in each new town she visits a number of gynaecologists and suggests to them that she does not want to keep her child. In response, many of them propose to arrange an illegal abortion (under the strong influence of the Catholic Church, abortion has been strictly forbidden in Poland since 1993), albeit at a high price. After their offer Farba reveals that she has taped their conversation and together with Cyp blackmails the doctors. Most of the gynaecologists agree to pay, rather than risk their reputation or go to jail. The money which they receive is used to buy food, a place in a cheap hotel (if they do not manage to run away without paying their bills) and soft drugs. Hence, we can describe Farba's journey, evoking the famous phrase 'abortion tourism', as 'pregnancy tourism' or 'fake abortion tourism'.

Although Farba and Cyp need each other to continue with their unusual 'business', gradually their friendship disintegrates. Cyp feels uncomfortable with Farba's provocatively coarse manners and he has some qualms about the way they are using her approaching motherhood. Farba, on the other hand, cannot stand Cyp's apparent naivety and prudishness (he tries to cover her with a towel when she bathes naked in a fountain). The relationship reaches a crisis when the couple are joined by a young woman named Szachara of Gypsy, Georgian or perhaps Armenian origin. She is an ex-prostitute who was brutalised and ran away from her pimp. Farba shows Szachara some sympathy and help, but she does not want her to stay with them indefinitely, particularly as she is aware of Cyp's interest in the pretty girl. Eventually the group splits up: Cyp and Szachara stay together while Farba sets off on her own to find her grandmother in hospital dying of cancer. The relationship between Cyp and Szachara also ends, when she comes across some men from her own country and refuses to leave them when Cyp asks her to. In the end all three travellers go their separate ways, much to Farba and Cyp's grief, when they both realise that they would have preferred to stay together.

As with many characters in road movies, it is much easier to establish what Farba rejects and what she wants to escape from than what she accepts. She dislikes her own family, the Catholic Church, the sexual hypocrisy of her peers, the poverty and backwardness which she sees everywhere, and society in general. Most of all, however, she rejects stability, which is symbolised by her constant changing of her hair colour; this is the reason why she is called Farba – ‘farba’ meaning ‘paint’. In her rejection of substantiality she is similar to Anna in Šverak’s film. At the same time, consciously or subconsciously, she yearns for what she openly rejects: home, family, love, even having a child. The ultimate sign of her acceptance of her imminent motherhood, and perhaps even of her Catholic outlook on family life is her decision not to use the illegal service offered by the doctors. The further Farba goes, both literally and metaphorically, the more she shows how much she needs a stable home and someone to support her. This distinguishes her from her Czech counterpart who with the passage of time was more and more reckless and unwilling to settle down. Farba is deeply upset by the death of her grandmother, partly because she craves a safe and warm place for her child, and partly because she needs some reconciliation with her family and her past. She even starts to idealize her childhood, reminiscing over the good old days when her grandmother used to read her fairy-tales. The last scene shows her completely broken and utterly terrified, when she realises that Cyp is not on the train on which she hoped to find him. Hence, paradoxically, the end of her journey is more tragic than that of Anna, as the latter shows that even in death she is in control of her life, while Farba reveals herself as most vulnerable when being most independent.

Farba’s decision to blackmail the gynaecologists was discussed in the Polish press mainly in the context of her apparent immorality, cynicism and appetite for a life, where sex and money are easy to obtain.¹¹ The director himself described his heroine contemptuously as belonging to the ‘popcorn generation’ whose lifestyle unreflexively imitates the fictitious world of glossy Western magazines which flooded Poland in the last decade.¹² At the same time Rosa shows that such imitation is doomed to failure in the sense that Poles, at least those belonging to the social strata represented in his film, are unable to emulate Western ways successfully. Every imitation of the West, included in the film, is a very poor one, often mak-

¹¹ T. Sobolewski, op. cit., p. 6; M. Maniewski, *Żyj kolorowo*, „Film” 1998 No. 4, p. 74.

¹² M. Chyb, *Nie – letniości*, „Film” 1998 No. 4, p. 56.

ing the imitators look ridiculous, for example the cheap and shabby hotel, full of prostitutes and pimps from Eastern Europe, poignantly named 'Ric'.

When the thin veneer of Western colours is peeled off, Poland reveals itself as a poor country, with dilapidated buildings and ugly backyards, run-down railway stations and poor health and social services, as exemplified by the hospital where Farba's grandmother receives her cancer treatment. Neglect applies both to Poland built by the communists, as well as to that which remained from earlier periods. It must be emphasized that such a dispirited image of Rosa's homeland emerges despite the fact that he shot his film in two large cities: Elbląg and Wrocław, the latter regarded as one of the most beautiful of Polish towns. Farba's homelessness or near-homelessness (she can probably live with her mother, but at the price of living in an overcrowded environment and enduring humiliating treatment from her family) is also a testimony to Poland's poverty; as with many other pregnant Polish teenagers, she cannot even dream about getting a council house or welfare support (there is much truth in the claim that the Polish state nowadays cares more for unborn children than for those who are already here). Again, this makes Rosa's Poland very different from Šverak's Czech Republic, which appears both more prosperous and less compelled to follow Western ways. It is worth mentioning here that at a certain point the Czech Republic is evoked in Rosa's film. It takes place when the doctor who is willing to perform an illegal abortion on Farba says that if she wants a more 'civilised' and legal service, she can visit a clinic across the border, but in the end it will cost her more than to arrange everything in Poland.

Rosa's Poland is also an almost postmodern collage of languages, lifestyles, religions and values. The traditional, provincial lifestyle is exemplified by the family of Farba's old friend, Celina. Decency, understood as settling down with one's own family when a woman finishes her schooling, and a man completes his military service, moderate financial success, associated with setting up, or marrying into a small business, and leading a life which does not arouse the neighbours' suspicion is regarded as the ultimate value. Farba accuses them of hypocrisy and finds their life utterly boring which is also a sentiment shared by the director, who represents Celina's family as bordering on caricature in their old-fashionedness and narrow-mindedness, not unlike the provincials in Šverak's film. One gets the impression that they might be (if they are not already) victims of the social and economic transformation sweeping Poland in the 1990s. For example, Celina's mother admits that they are the last resi-

dents in this corner of their town – the old neighbours have moved to newer, more modern accommodation. In comparison with Celina Farba comes across as much more sophisticated, fashionable and on the whole even more realistic in assessing her prospects in life. The message is that those who stay in the same geographical location risk becoming, or at least being perceived as very backward and vulnerable to any change, confirming the previously quoted thesis of John Urry that 'the modern subject is a subject on the move'.

However, it is worth adding that at the same time as mocking Celina's lifestyle, Farba and Cyp enjoy the excellent, traditional Polish food prepared for them, admire the warmth and cosiness of Farba's friend's flat and even ask if they can stay the night. In this way Rosa suggests that not everything from the past is rejected by the 'popcorn generation' – the young are also capable of nostalgia. In this respect Rosa's characters resemble the protagonists of Šverak's movie who also mused nostalgically on the communist past.

Rosa's Poland is awash with foreigners, mainly from the ex- Soviet Union and Romania, filling cheap hotels, flooding the street markets with second-rate clothes and cheap food, and providing sexual services at a bargain price – in this sense, it experiences not only Westernisation, but also Easternisation. Some of these people chose Poland as their new homeland, but for the majority it is only a stopover on their way to a better life in the West, preferably Germany. Rosa also draws our attention to young Poles who chose an alternative lifestyle: mixing Buddhism with Hinduism and New Age ideology (which Farba, Cyp and Szachara join at some stage). The cultural mixture is emphasized by the use of bright colours, especially red and yellow. In an interview Rosa described his choice of visual style as a means of distancing himself from the 'poetics of greyness' of Jim Jarmusch and Hal Hartley, widely imitated by many of his Polish colleagues.¹³

The director rather criticises than welcomes this new, multi-cultural Poland. For example, he suggests that foreigners constitute a large proportion of the criminal fringe of Polish society, dealing in drugs and prostitution, and organising trafficking in people. They also come across as brutal and unhygienic. Similarly, he ridicules a group of New Agers, showing that although these people demand society's tolerance for their way of life, they are themselves intolerant, always prepared to attack those who think differently. By contrast, a priest

¹³ Ibidem.

and a gynecologist who works for the Catholic charity Caritas, are represented in a very positive light, as helpful, selfless and mild-mannered. Cyp's muddled personality – he used to be an activist in a young Catholics' evangelical movement (Oaza) and still keeps a picture of Jesus in his suitcase, while making his living by blackmailing gynecologists, might also be regarded as a subtle criticism of the new, 'popcorn Poland', which abandoned its traditional ways without replacing them with anything positive.

In Rosa's Poland young women appear to pay more than once for the changes brought about by the shift from communism to postcommunism. Firstly, they seem particularly susceptible to the temptations of consumerism, and the easy life offered to them by colourful magazines and gigantic adverts decorating the cities, while having less material resources than most members of the society to fulfil their consumerist desires. It must be added here that travel constitutes an important element of the 'Western life' which attracted Poles after 1989. Secondly, they are victims of the conservative and patriarchal attitudes which dominated official political and cultural discourses in Poland in the 1990s, and of which the new restrictive abortion law is the most poignant indicator. Consequently, *Paint* shows that many of the young women risk being lost on the darker streets of democracy, where crime, drugs and prostitution dominate the impoverished landscape.

One can ask the question if Poland as a 'melting pot' can be attractive to tourists. I am tempted to give a positive answer, providing, as was assumed at the beginning of this paper, that tourism has many facets and can be combined with many other activities, including sex, and drug consumption. In Rosa's representation these goods can be obtained in Poland easily and cheaply, unfortunately largely thanks to people who come to Poland in a capacity different from tourism.

Conclusions

To conclude, I want to return to the original questions of my paper: what characterises travel in Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism and how this part of Europe looks several years after this momentous event. The shortest answer to the first question should be: easier in comparison with the previous epoch. Easier, because there are no administrative restrictions to travel and travel has become relatively cheap, especially for those who are prepared to break the law. This, however, does not mean that journeys are more likely

to bring happiness and fulfillment to those who embark on them. Both films discussed in my paper conclude with a sense of profound disappointment and sadness, which refers especially to the fate of travelling women. One gets the impression that they need much more determination to embark on the journey and assert their authority and independence on the road. They also pay a heavy price for the privilege of travelling.

Eastern Europe, as conveyed by Šverak and Rosa, appears multi-faceted, experiencing influence from abroad, as well as revealing many characteristics of the communist and pre-communist past, both in terms of people's behaviour, and in the appearance of their physical environment. Interestingly, both directors suggest that their countries should resist the power of Westernisation and Easternisation, but also warn against them being stuck in the past. Moving, changing, transforming, appears to be the natural destination of the Czech Republic and Poland. However, the direction and aim of their transition is not suggested by the directors and remains to be seen.

Między ucieczką a turystyką – czeskie i polskie kino podróży w okresie postkomunistycznym

Esej jest dyskusją nad tym, jak przedstawieni zostali podróżujący i doświadczenie podróżowania w dwóch filmach pochodzących z Europy Centralnej: czeskiej *Jeździe* (*Jizda*, 1994) w reżyserii Jana Šveraka i polskiej *Farbie* (1997) w reżyserii Michała Rosy. Perspektywę rozważań tworzą zmiany, jakie zaszły w tej części Europy na początku lat 90. oraz tradycja kina drogi i kina podróży w Polsce i Czechosłowacji. Starano się dowieść, że wybrane filmy nie przedstawiają „zwykłych turystów” (których trudno jest znaleźć w kinematografiach tych krajów zarówno przed, jak i po upadku komunizmu), ale rejestrują i poddają krytycznej ocenie nowe okoliczności i warunki podróżowania, wyznaczone przez takie czynniki, jak ułatwiony dostęp do samochodu, konsumeryzm w zachodnim stylu i poczucie większej wolności. Esej bada zarówno podobieństwa, jak i różnice między *Jazdą* i *Farbą*, zwracając szczególną uwagę na płeć ich bohaterów.