EAST EUROPEAN CINEMAS

EDITED BY

ANIKÓ IMRE

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EAST EUROPEAN CINEMAS

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This book is dedicated to my boys: Fergus, Finny, Simon, and Tim.

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introduction

east european cinemas in new perspectives

anikó imre

for a postsocialist reassessment

Historical events rarely have as immediate an impact on the study and teaching of cinema as has happened in the case of this collection, which came into being in response to an urgent need to reassess East European cinemas from post–Cold War perspectives. As it has been abundantly documented in the social sciences, the cultures of Eastern Europe have undergone an accelerated transformation from state socialism to global capitalism during the past fifteen years. This transformation has also rendered obsolete much of what we know about East European cinemas, along with the approaches scholars and critics have habitually taken toward studying them. In the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall, every aspect of film production, distribution, and exhibition radically changed in ways that have been similar throughout the region.[1] With state funding severely diminished, East European film professionals had to learn to secure production funds, distribution networks, and audience favors on their own. Domestic films, bearing the stamp of a lofty art-house tradition

and the historical mission of the national artist, came to compete at the box office with popular Hollywood fare in the theaters and on the international film market; and were doomed to lose on both fronts.

Nevertheless, most local film industries weathered the initial shock quite well and, by the late 1990s, returned to late socialist production levels, at least in quantity. As far as quality goes, films from the region have maintained strong aesthetic and thematic continuities with what had become fossilized as the "artistic character" of East European cinema—the Eurocentric male or masculine intellectual's attempt to process national history in a sophisticated, self-reflective, allegorical film style. At the same time, the structural opening of film production has enabled the proliferation of hybrid production forms and cinematic styles: international collaborations; films made in cooperation with national television networks; old genres adapted to new local conditions (the mafia thriller, the political comedy, the postsocialist melodrama); and old genres recharged with renewed content (the nostalgic-celebratory national epic).

Such structural and aesthetic diversity has rendered most generalizations about East European cinemas as problematic as the term *Eastern Europe* has itself become. For decades, influential books such as Mira and Antonín Liehm's *The Most Important Art*, Michael J. Stoil's *Cinema Beyond the Danube*, and David W. Paul's collection *Politics, Art, and Commitment in the East European Cinema* served the crucial purpose of informing the curious world outside the Soviet Bloc about important cinematic developments that would have otherwise remained concealed by the Iron Curtain.[2] They also provided indispensable material for college courses on East European cinemas. However, much of what remains the authoritative literature fifteen years into postsocialism was determined by the epistemological parameters of the Cold War world order: films of the region were evaluated by the West, in the West, and for the West on a selective basis,[3] privileging films and directors who took an oppositional stand in relation to communist totalitarianism in their filmic commentaries on national events of great historical importance. The close critical attention to themes of universal morality and national liberation did not preclude investigations of style; but serious theoretical engagement was inhibited by Western critics' investment in the twin ideas of good, liberatory nationalism and the moral integrity of the East European auteur. As Christina Stojanova notes, names such as Věra Chytilová, Miloš Forman, Agnieszka Holland, Miklós Jancsó, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Jiří Menzel, Márta Mészáros, István Szabó, or Andrzej Wajda not only became synonymous with both high (or auteur) film art and dissident defiance, but also came to stand for East European cinema as a whole.[4]

The preoccupation with national cinema's and the national auteur's ideological commitment, while undoubtedly relevant, left little else to

be considered. By contrast, by the 1970s, the literatures and cinemas of the decolonizing Third World, with discursive help from the fast-growing discipline of postcolonial studies, made explicit their sense of disillusionment with postcolonial nationalisms. Initially seen as revolutionary and liberatory, nationalisms were increasingly recognized as contingent and constructed, supporting certain power interests while suppressing others.[5] At the same time, the literatures and films of the Sovietized Second World, as if to substitute for waning leftist illusions concerning the Third World, continued to be represented in the West as self-contained and progressive, giving a unified voice to the homogeneous entity kmown as "the people." Good and bad, liberation and oppression, authoritarianism and democracy, truth and lies continued to guide and simplify the discourse that underscored both East European nationalisms—eagerly supported by the very same socialist states against whom those nationalisms were allegedly directed—and the interpretation of East European films, mirroring the global binary divisions of the Cold War era.

This divisive situation, embedded in the area-studies framework that the Cold War imposed on Western academia's relationship with Eastern Europe as a whole, had dramatic consequences. First, much of East European filmmaking remained shrouded in obscurity, including films that did not fit the mold of resistant cinema and therefore received no international distribution or attention, such as an extensive documentary and animation production, budding genre films and genre parodies, and films from the most remote Soviet satellites such as Romania, Albania, or Bulgaria.[6] Second, the concentrated attention to the Soviet era projected the cultures of socialism onto the entire history of these cinemas, effectively erasing, for instance, prewar popular genre-film productions, which would have significantly altered the preferred profile of East European films. Third, despite the intention of Western critics to connect East with West, locking these cinemas within their regional Cold War specificity and, further, in national specificities paradoxically contributed to the isolation of the bloc from the rest of the world and the isolation of national cultures from one another. Thus, Western critics inadvertently supported a successful divide-and-conquer strategy implemented in Moscow in order to keep the empire under control by fostering mutual suspicion and fear among East European national cultures. The East-West dialectic that characterized this vision also precluded comparisons with Third World cultures and prevented critiques of nationalism, which would have inevitably followed from such comparisons. Fourth, primarily because of travel restrictions and linguistic obstacles, Western scholarly communication with regional cultures was reduced to a one-sided reporting. East European critical and theoretical voices remained unheard for the

most part. Fifth, and most important, the single-minded attention to oppressive state politics versus dissident intellectual politics imagined film cultures as if they were in a temporal and theoretical vacuum: the auteur, larger than life and frozen in a romantic modernist gesture, functioned as a gatekeeper to guard against theoretical currents that were concurrently transforming the study of film elsewhere, from semiotics to psychoanalysis, feminism to cultural studies, studies of identity and representation to theories of spectatorship.

Perhaps the most sore omission in this regard, as discussed by several essays in the first part of this collection, are the insights of feminist paradigms, which have not only fertilized Anglo-American film studies since the 1970s but have also begun to be crossed by critical studies of nationalism inspired by postcolonial and Third World cinemas. Such a cross-fertilization has happened strictly along the First World–Third World axis, however, evading the obsolete and obscure Second World altogether. When it came to East European cinemas, "feminism" coincided with and, in effect, underlined "state feminism"—that is, the socialist state's centralized social policies, whose goal was to control women in particular and the population in general by deepening the essentialist division of labor between the sexes and affirming the bond between compulsory heterosexuality and the nation-state. Gender-conscious film criticism has remained limited to the occasional celebration of token female auteurs and their woman-centered themes, as if to make up for the fact that both filmmaking and film criticism, East and West, has remained very much a man's business.[7]

Some of the most incisive questions that feminist film theory has raised over the last three decades have to do with the relationship among film aesthetics, gendered representations, and the spectatorial desires that motivate the negotiating process that has come to replace the more static model of homogeneous audiences and bounded individual identities.[8] Such a three-dimensional approach, encompassing the textual properties of film, the continuity between social and represented realities, and processes of spectatorial identification, would immediately expose the lack of interest in identities other than national within studies of East European film. Talking about identifications and positionalities instead of finite identities contained in the natural national body would ruffle the allegedly smooth ideological surface of film texts and open them up to alternative interpretations. Introducing issues of pleasure and spectatorship into studies of East European films, as several contributors do in this volume, not only demystifies the cultural homogeneity of East European nations but also explains why entertainment-starved audiences had turned their yearning eyes toward Hollywood long before native films were officially taken off the life support of state subsidy.

It is, of course, easy to be insightful fifteen years down the road, having experienced developments that no one could foresee even during what we are now able to identify as the dying years of socialism. The goal of this volume is not to offer an "improved truth" about East European cinemas and, by extension, societies, based on a misguided assumption of a sort of evolutionary accumulation of knowledge. Rather, the essays in this collection bring into sharp focus some of the theoretical perspectives that the Cold War ideology and the practical realities of the Iron Curtain kept in obscurity. Conversely, they employ insights that these cinemas have to offer in transforming film theories hitherto only derived from and tested on First World and, to some extent, Third World material.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was beyond a doubt one of the most significant historical developments of the twentieth century—a century already overburdened by global crises and transformations.[9] The removal of the barrier between the two sharply divided ideological spheres of the globe revealed the hidden mechanisms of a mass-scale historical experiment that had thoroughly transformed the identities of millions and produced unique aesthetic forms. The spectacular implosion of the heavily scaffolded socialist empire and the subsequent economic and political shifts attracted plenty of media and scholarly attention during the early 1990s, so much so that the virtual subfield of "transition studies" was formed within the social sciences.[10] Media studies also took interest, mostly to document how hefty investments by global media corporations changed the structure of state-owned print and electronic media. However, such studies have typically stopped short of asking how examining socialist media up close might compel a reexamination of Western media theory.[11] A theoretical dialogue between the extinct Second World and the rest of the globe has only been initiated in cultural studies.[12] However, since the primary concern of cultural studies approaches has been to rediscover and rehabilitate the sphere of popular culture, even these have glossed over film as a "passé" art form.

the ghostly region

The loss of interest in East European films has been a part of a more general loss of interest in the Second World in the aftermath of the post–Berlin Wall euphoria. The celebration engendered by the end of socialism failed to create an equal ground on which to integrate Eastern Europe in the global circulation of ideas. Rather than an opportunity to learn from the experience of socialism and allow existing theories of global culture to be transformed by the lessons, the energy released by the fall of the Wall became transformed into the celebration of the victory of capitalism, which rendered superfluous

a sustained engagement with the socialist past and the postsocialist present. As Michael Kennedy argues, the discourses of market and democracy quickly emerged as the "master narratives" of the East European transitions, confirming the superiority of global capitalism.[13]

This puts the ambitions of this volume in a curious double bind: the cultural translation waiting to be performed between East European cultures and film and media studies is being deferred indefinitely as the Second World itself is disappearing from sight. The end of the Cold War, which has opened up exciting new avenues of study and the potential to reformulate reigning theories, is proving to be the very impediment to launching such studies. Some scholars are intent on cultivating the academic field of "postsocialist studies" to prove that Eastern Europe is "a fertile location for scholarship, commanding attention with examples of postfascism, comparable to postcolonialism and the more recent phenomena of postcommunism, postsocialism, even post-totalitarianism."[14] In the current absence of such a field, with the capitalist world in general and the United States in particular in search of replacement Cold War others to take the Soviet Bloc's strategic position, East European cultures are left with no representational space in the evolving post–Cold War configuration of the global order. Eastern Europe, when it does not remain completely obscured by its former colonizer, Russia—whether we browse the news media or the names of publications and conferences in Slavic studies—is being shuffled between the two remaining global poles, the First and the Third, depending on the issue and the location in question.

As many of the essays in this collection testify, the difficulty of repositioning is aggravated by the fact that since 1989 the region has also been tearing along the seams. With the regional unity imposed by Soviet rule and Western representations no longer keeping its imaginary borders intact, the region has fissured into two entities: the warring, "barbaric" Balkans, tense with a wide range of economic and cultural differences, and East-Central Europe, consisting of those lucky nations with realistic aspirations of rejoining Europe. But how does one write about East European cinemas without a reliable geographical and disciplinary designation for circumscribing the subject? As Dina Iordanova explains in her contribution to this volume, most writing about postsocialist cinemas has solved the dilemma by acknowledging the internal spatial fissures within the region, by relegating the—already artificial, imposed—framework of Eastern Europe to the Cold War and focusing instead on East-Central Europe, the Balkans, or particular national cinemas. Russia, separated from its former East European satellites, has continued to receive by far the most critical and theoretical attention devoted to postsocialist cultures, confirming the widespread academic amnesia about Eastern Europe.

Furthermore, the unspoken consensus about films from postsocialist Eastern Europe—with the exception of war-ridden post-Yugoslav cultures—has been that there is not so much to say about them anymore: With the oppositional political ground pulled out from under them, most of the new films have been deemed less impressive, both aesthetically and ideologically, than those made during the heroic decades of socialism. East European directors have been following two more-or-less distinct generic routes to compensate for their loss of national and international prestige by seeking box-office popularity: historical epics and Hollywood-inspired genre films.[15] But in fact, the only formula that has proven truly successful outside of Eastern Europe has been to blend the historical soul-searching mission of national cinema with an easily digestible format that employs humour and nostalgia, as in the case of the Oscar-winning *Kolya* (Jan Sverák, 1996) or the immensely popular *Good Bye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003). In other words, with the exception of isolated writings that have attempted to reintegrate East European films in the bloodstream of world cinema and film studies,[16] the Cold War period of East European filmmaking has been written off as finished; and the new era has been ignored as mediocre global fare no different from what you would find elsewhere.

The assumption of this collection is the opposite: far from being completed, the reevaluation of the film cultures of the socialist era has not even begun; and far from being pitiful genre-film imitations or nostalgic efforts to revive modernist oppositional art cinema, postsocialist film cultures offer unique opportunities to study the role that visual media play in a monumental cultural shift of global significance. In order to consider the cinematic developments of the region in their spatial and temporal continuity, it is necessary to keep the designation *Eastern Europe*. However, it is equally important to do so conditionally and contingently, acknowledging the region's shifting boundaries, internal differences, and constructed identities. Besides the practical reason, echoed as a disclaimer in virtually each writing about East European cultures that despite the Cold-War connotations of this term there is nothing more accurate,[17] maintaining an "East European" perspective helps to arrest two tendencies discussed above: perpetuating a "national cinema" framework grounded in the assumption of an essentialist "national character," and the erasure of the common regional histories associated with the term *Eastern Europe*.[18]

Therefore, providing each postsocialist national cinema with equal representational space is not the primary concern of this volume. Rather, its divisions call attention to areas in which looking at East European cultures in new perspectives benefits both First and Third World theories of film and Second World cultures themselves; and allows for comparisons across the region. Neither is chronology the

main organizing principle of the book; while issues of history are inevitably central to each chapter, most of them explore films made during the process of political "thawing" and cultural opening that slowly began in the 1960s and has accelerated since 1989.

new perspectives, new structures

Collectively, the essays in this collection aim to expand the limited and limiting categories in which East European films' social-ideological functions as well as formal-textual properties have been discussed: the former has often been reduced to anticommunist resistance and the latter to various strategies of resisting socialist realism. This volume questions the oversimplifications of the relationship between ideology and aesthetics that have affected East European films disproportionately. On the one hand, the essays herein are guided by arguments analogous with those that call for theorizing Third World cinemas: the fact that a work of art overtly acknowledges an ideological dimension should not exempt it from examination in search of inadvertent or unacknowledged ideological operations, which intervene at points of production and reception alike.[19] On the other hand, the authors are aware that postsocialist texts that purport to be trivial, formulaic, and "just entertainment" carry layers of unacknowledged ideological significance.[20]

Accordingly, individual chapters are arranged in three sections, less according to their thematic, geographical, or historical focus but according to the kinds of connections they make between ideology and aesthetics. The essays in Part I revisit the concept of *representation*. While theories of representation have proven indispensable in the West and, to some extent, in the postcolonial Third World for addressing continuities between screen and real-life (reel and real) identities,[21] the politics of representation in Eastern Europe has been monopolized by national allegories. The first step in rethinking representation, then, is to point out fissures in film aesthetics and reception that undermine the idea of a seamless process whereby tendentious authorial intention overlaps with definitive critical interpretation, which happens to coincide with spectatorial responses. The authors do not replace "incorrect" interpretations that "misrepresent" certain communities with "correct" ones, based on an idealized conception of the marginalized. In other words, they skip over the "images of" phase in Western film criticism, whose assumptions about filmic realism do not seem as relevant for East European cinemas as they were to Anglo-American cinemas of the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, essays in the first section rediscover and put into new perspectives, theories that may have been cast aside as no longer useful or popular in mainstream film theory in order to address intra- and intercultural negotiations over representations that are more specific to the East European cultural terrain.

Petra Hanáková's essay resurrects French psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic film theory from the gloom where "grand theories" have recently been cast in the United States.[22] She argues that the concept of *jouissance*, translated into a specific, East European kind of gendered pleasure, sheds new light on Vera Chytilová's life and work. Chytilová has been shuttled back and forth between gender-blind approaches that listed her as a prominent figure of the Czech New Wave, and pseudofeminist approaches that labeled her a feminist by virtue of her generous attention to female protagonists. Hanáková juxtaposes *Sedmikrásky* (*Daisies*, 1966) with Esther Krumbachová's lesser-known *Vražda ing. Čerta* (*The Murder of Engineer Lesser Devil*, 1970) in the context of the two directors' critical reception within the masculinist culture of the Czech New Wave, problematizing female authorship in the process.

Katarzyna Marciniak and Marguerite Waller are also interested in how theories of gender travel across national and cultural borders. In a manner similar to Hanáková's, Marciniak's essay reexamines a psychoanalytic concept, that of *suture*, in her reading of *Kobieta Samotna* (*A Woman Alone*, 1981), a film made by Agnieszka Holland, whose very name has become synonymous with border crossing. Marciniak reads the film's suturing strategies through the way in which they affected her American students in the course of their classroom encounters with the film. Rather than stitching spectators into a comfortable viewing position, it turns out that the abject zones that Holland's suture creates "suffocate" spectators without any hope of release. Marciniak's ultimate intention is "to expand the scope of transnational feminist studies, to stretch its parameters, so that the voices and perspectives from the Second World may find their way into the field that many consider a radical and indispensable direction for feminist studies."

Waller's essay echoes the need to open up the category of the "national" to transnational and feminist investigation in East European cinemas. At the center of her analysis is *Bolse vita* (*Bolshe Vita*, 1996), a film that takes us "into the thick of interlinguistic, intertextual, cross-cultural communication" in postsocialist Budapest. Waller shows us that for director Ibolya Fekete developing a unique, cross-generic film style and an unorthodox view of international and transnational Budapest are inseparable parts of the same project. The essay concludes by bringing to our attention a twenty-minute video titled *Making the Walls Come Down* clandestinely made in the spring of 1998 by a group of urban Albanian Kosovars who call themselves Ghetto Art. Waller analyzes this feminist transnational project in relation to both *Bolse vita* and its own ideological-political context, that of a decade of martial law under Slobodan Milosevic, a year before the bombing of both Serbia and Kosova by U.S.-led forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The global media attention that the Yugoslav war received also opened up space for theoretical investigations of masculinity, a notion that had not been a part of East European critical vocabularies before the transitions. Tomislav Longinović examines recent films from the former Yugoslavia that critique representations of "vulgar and vile," "homophobic and castrated" Balkan masculinities in response to both "the exclusion of their native locations from the Western vision of civilization" and "the domestic glorifications of righteous uses of violence." Elżbieta H. Oleksy offers an overview of Polish visual media's representations of masculinities, which, she argues, are channeled through the two traditional avenues of predatory violence and nationalistic-romantic heroism. She also traces the corresponding hegemonic representation of femininity, Mother Poland, back to the cult of the Holy Virgin. In contrast to these representations, Oleksy introduces visual texts that transgress dominant gendered representations, either by defying long-standing critical concensus, as does Andrzej Wajda's *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1977), or by explicitly engaging in a feminist politics of representation to resist the oppressive alliance between the Catholic Church and the nation-state, as do Dorota Nieznalska's, Alicja Żebrowska's, and Katarzyna Kozyra's innovative visual installations.

In much of the media coverage of and the social scientific literature about the end of socialism, 1989 came to be coded as the historical moment of a magical transformation that sharply separated the "before" from the "after."[23] In studies of East European cinemas, accordingly, the "before" remained interesting only for historical record, while the "after" has become regarded as a near-indistinguishable part of the global flow of entertainment.

The essays included in Part II challenge both assumptions. They regard the cinematic output of a specific country or the work of a particular filmmaker as those encompass the transition from modernist art cinemas funded by the nation-state to the global marketplace and its postmodern sensibilities. By drawing on theoretical and thematic perspectives that have eluded the study of East European cinemas thus far, the essays also highlight suppressed continuities between East European and other film cultures.

Melinda Szaloky's original argument extends Hamid Naficy's global theory of exile and diaspora to the "internal exilic" cinema of communist Hungary. As Szaloky shows, "Naficy's claim that the exilic mode is 'transnational' may help explain the affinities between 'exilic' Hungarian films and other similarly inflected film practices, including kindred Eastern-European cinemas. The exilic approach, in other words, can make possible the reappraisal of certain national cinemas in a global context." And conversely, the particularities of the national context help supplement

and localize Naficy's theory: in the Hungarian cinema, Szaloky argues, exilic and diasporic entrapment is so frequently tied to the motif of orphanage as to create what she calls an "orphanage cinema," or the cinema of an "orpha-nation."

As if to provide a detailed example of exilic filmmaking, András Bálint Kovács revisits the fascinating life of Gábor Bódy, an unduly neglected Hungarian filmmaker, deemed too obscure in the West during his short life to receive decent foreign distribution despite his enduring stature and widespread popularity within his native intellectual culture. Kovács not only uncovers important aesthetic continuities between Bódy's and Peter Greenaway's theory films, renegotiating the position of East European films within European art cinema, but—even more important—points out that Bódy's aesthetic experiments with film form, along with his theoretical writings, prefigured the digital revolution that was to transform filmmaking on a global scale a decade after his death.

Ágnes Pethö analyzes a film that embodies continuity in its very title. Much like Bódy's work, the Romanian Mircea Daneliuc's film *Glissando* "transcended its own age" of the later regime of Nicolae Ceausescu. It did so by both reaching back to the absurdist tradition of Romanian drama and the wider Balkan tradition of black humor, and by reaching forward into the future, to inspire films to be made after the fall of communism. Pethö's discussion sensitively details the film's intertextual strategies, which insert Federico Fellini's and Alain Resnais's modernist visions within an "intermedial" blend of art forms and ultimately make it impossible to sort out modern from postmodern.

Dusan Bjelic draws on Fredric Jameson's distinction among "national," "Hollywood," and "global" cinemas to describe the Serbian cinema of the 1990s in its continuity with but also differences from earlier phases of Yugoslav film production, including the "black film" of the 1960s and the "Hollywoodization" of the 1970s. In the focus of his discussion are the ways in which the films of recent Serbian "global" cinema, particularly Srdjan Dragojevic's *Rane* (*Wounds*, 1998), and *Bure Baruta* (*Cabaret Balkan*, 1998), deploy and subvert the global media cliché of the "wild Balkan man." They do so in order to confront nationalism and globalization at once, showing that the two, far from being antithetical to each other, share a commitment to neoliberalism. Catherine Portuges's and Peter Hames's chapters offer a similar, retrospective assessment of Hungarian and Czech national cinemas, respectively. Portuges revisits "selected Hungarian films that, whether semiautobiographical or fictionalized, constitute an indispensable history of the intersections of film, historical trauma, and the Holocaust, in their interrogation of Jewish identity and, perhaps most important, the sources of the memories that are ultimately transmitted visually to subsequent generations." Hames examines how five recent films from the Czech

Republic have continued and reworked the central preoccupations of Czechoslovak filmmaking with irony and history to achieve domestic and international success.

The collection concludes in Part III with four essays that offer panoramic regional views of the changing landscape of East European cinemas among shifting national and conceptual borders. Kriss Ravetto's wide-reaching essay is concerned with the internal borders of Europe. She interprets Theodoros Angelopoulos's *O Megalexandros* (*Megaleksandros*, 1980) and Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russkij kovcheg* (*Russian Ark*, 2002) as films that destabilize and relativize not only Europe's own latent imperial self-image and its enduring colonial reincarnation within East European nationalisms but also the ever-so-tenuous borders that the present volume projects around Eastern Europe. In her essay, Roumiana Deltcheva offers a region-wide, comparative view of the ways in which postsocialist films have engaged with issues of the socialist past. Christina Stojanova discusses films made by a younger generation of directors in light of Zygmunt Bauman's thoughts on postmodern life in a globalizing world and of post-Freudian theories. Dina Iordanova's thorough evaluation of postsocialist developments within the study of East European cinemas brings together scholarly publications and conferences, film festivals and teaching practice. It fittingly concludes the volume by reminding us how much of the work of cultural translation remains to be done.

what is left to do?

Indeed, while this book represents an ambitious collective effort to cross-pollinate film and cultural theory and East European film cultures, editing a collection such as this also makes one aware of how much more is left to do. Echoing the thoughts of several other contributors, Iordanova urges scholars to remap continuities and discontinuities within and emerging internal hierarchies among postsocialist cinemas. The recent geopolitical shifts to be taken into consideration range from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia to the splitting of the former Czechoslovakia, from the imperial fatigue experienced by the former colonizer, the Soviet Union (now once again Russia), to the unclear situation of Baltic successor states whose cultures remain invisible without an updated post–Cold War affiliation, and whose cinemas routinely remain left out of considerations of both Russian and East European film. The film culture centered around Deutsche Film AG (DEFA) in East Germany seamlessly "rejoined" Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall in studies of film, erasing the traces that it had been an integral part of regional production and distribution networks.[24]

Furthermore, a significant amount of East European documentary, animation, and popular genre-film production remains unknown and

unexplored. Children's and youth culture is virtually nonexistent in studies of East European film and media; and spectatorship studies has not yet traveled to East European film and media cultures. The postcolonial dimensions of East European cultures and the potential for Eastern Europe to complicate and problematize some of the established categories and disciplinary boundaries of postcolonial studies offer further, productive avenues of study. While cultural studies has begun to explore identities within the region, East European notions of race and ethnicity would usefully problematize existing theories of identity; and this in turn should include and provide inspiration for studies of film. Particularly conspicuous is the absence of studies of sexuality in writings about East European cinema, especially in relation to nationalism.

On an even broader theoretical scale, reevaluating the entrenched position of East European film as an art form within the fast-transforming and proliferating global media cultures engendered by the postsocialist transition would complicate and refresh the paradigms of media studies and media theory in a post–Cold War world.[25] Comparisons among the media cultures of Eastern European, South American, and Asian cultures, which are often in analogical postcolonial historical positions and under neocolonial media domination by U.S.-based global entertainment media would be particularly fruitful. Two specific angles of global comparison are the analogy between Soviet-type (self-) censorship and the censorship of the entertainment market; and the ideology and practice of democracy in socialist Eastern Europe, postcolonial cultures, and the capitalist West.[26]

Perhaps the most lasting disciplinary influence to affect the study of East European cinemas has been the disconnect between critical theories of nationalism, most often rooted in feminist and postcolonial studies, and Slavic studies, which have most commonly embraced the study of films. Beginning to bridge this gap is one of the central missions of this collection. Immediately after the end of socialism, the world celebrated along with East Europeans who, liberated from their long-term deprivation and oppression, were finally ready to join the free world of consumption and entertainment. The celebration of victorious nations turned to bitter disappointment within a few years, as East Europeans aligned themselves with "tribal," "ethnic," and "patriarchal" nationalisms. Clearly, both celebration and condemnation are condescending and inadequate responses. The study of visual media in general and the cinema in particular have a privileged role in understanding how historical structures and emotional investments interact in perpetuating nationalisms. The essays that follow introduce approaches that transcend both celebration and indifference and invite further critical and theoretical explorations of East European cinemas.

notes

1. For detailed accounts of the transformations of these film industries, see Richard Taylor, Nancy Wood, Julian Graffy, and Dina Iordanova, eds., *The BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 1–4; Dina Iordanova, Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film (London: Wallflower, 2003), Christina Stojanova, "Ars Longa, Politica Brevis: Overseas Sketches on the Newest History of the East European Cinema," *Filmkultúra*, September 2000, http://www.filmkultura.hu/2000/articles/essays/index.hu.html.
2. Mira Liehm and Antonín Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977); Michael J. Stoil's *Cinema beyond the Danube: The Camera and Politics* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1974), and David W. Paul, ed., *Politics, Art, and Commitment in the East European Cinema* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983). See also Daniel J. Goulding, ed., *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).
3. See Stojanova, "Ars Longa, Politica Brevis"; Catherine Portuges, *Screen Memories*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 1–15; and Dina Iordanova's and Marguerite Waller's essays in this collection.
4. Stojanova, "Ars Longa, Politica Brevis."
5. See, for instance, Wimal Dissanayake, "Introduction: Nationhood, History, and Cinema: Reflections on the Asian Scene," in *Colonialism and Nationalism in Asian Cinema*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): ix–xii; Chris Berry, "A Nation T(w/o)o: Chinese Cinema(s) and Nationhood(s)," in Dissanayake, ed., *Colonialism and Nationalism*, 42–64; Ella Shohat, "Post-Third-Worldist Culture: Gender, Nation, and the Cinema," in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 183–209; and Neil Lazarus, "Great Expectations and After: The Politics of Postcolonialism in African Fiction," *Social Text* 13–14 (1986): 149–64.
6. On such painfully blank spots of scholarship, see Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*.
7. See, for instance, Barbara Quart, "A Few Short Takes on Eastern European Film," Cinéaste 19, no. 4 (1993): 63–64, and the East European sections of Barbara Quart, *Women Directors: The Emergence of a New Cinema* (New York: Praeger, 1988).
8. See Jane Gaines, "Women and Representation: Can We Enjoy Alternative Pleasures?" in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990): 75–92; Deirdre Pribram, ed., *Female Spectators* (London: Routledge, 1988); E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (New York: Methuen, 1983); Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Laura Mulvey, Visual and Other Pleasures (London: Macmillan, 1989).
9. For a detailed explanation of this significance, see Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova, "Introduction: Mapping Postsocialist Cultural Studies," in *Over the Wall/After the Fall: Post-Communist Cultures through an East-West Gaze*, ed. Sibelan Forrester, Magdalena J. Zaborowska, and Elena Gapova (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 1–41.

10. The field of transition studies, or "transitology," is characterized by texts such as John Pickles and Adrian Smith, eds., *Theorizing the Transition: The Political Economy of Post-Communist Transformations* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Klaus von Beyme, *Transition to Democracy in Eastern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's, 1996); and Ken Jovitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992).
11. Colin Sparks argues for the East European transitions' transformative value for media theory in "Media Theory after the Fall of European Communism," in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, ed. James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (London: Routledge, 2000). See also John Downey, "Full of Eastern Promise? Central and Eastern European Media After 1989," in *Electronic Empires: Global Media and Local Resistance*, ed. Thussu, Daya Kishan (London: Arnold, 1998); Slavko Splichal, *Media beyond Socialism: Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1994); and John Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory: Transition, Power, Culture* (London: Sage, 1996).
12. The richest results of the extension of cultural studies to postsocialist Eastern Europe are Michael D. Kennedy, ed., *Envisioning Eastern Europe: Postcommunist Cultural Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994) and Zaborowska, Forrester, and Gapova, eds., *Over the Wall/After the Fall*.
13. Kennedy, introduction to *Envisioning Eastern Europe*, 2–4.
14. Zaborowska, Forrester, and Gapova, "Introduction," 24.
15. See Stojanova, "Ars Longa, Politica Brevis," for examples of these two avenues.
16. See, for instance, Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001); Kriss Ravetto, "Mytho-Poetic Cinema: Cinemas of Disappearance," *Third Text 43* (1998): 43–57; Catherine Portuges, *Screen Memories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Katarzyna Marciniak, "Cinematic Exile: Performing the Foreign Body on Screen in Roman Polanski's *The Tenant, Camera Obscura 43* (2000): 1–44; Katarzyna Marciniak, "Transnational Anatomies of Exile and Abjection in Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain*," *Cinema Journal 43* (2003): 63–84; Anikó Imre, "Twin Pleasures of Feminism: *Orlando* Meets *My Twentieth Century*," *Camera Obscura 54* (2003): 177–211; and Anikó Imre, "White Man, White Masks: Mephisto Meets Venus," *Screen 40*, no. 4 (1999): 405–22.
17. Daniel Goulding, in the introduction to *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. Daniel Golding (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), ix, declares that "Eastern Europe" is a "geographical and cultural misnomer" that he will nonetheless perpetuate in his book for lack of a better term. Some of the publications that are directly concerned with the question of geographical designation are "Eastern Europe . . . Central Europe . . . Europe," special issue of *Deadalus* (119, no. 1; 1990); István Fried, "East Central Europe: Controversies over a Notion," *Danubian Historical Studies 2*, no. 1 (1998): 7–17; and Robin Okey, "Central Europe/Eastern Europe: Behind the Definitions," *Past and Present 137* (1992): 102–33.
18. By analogy, Zaborowska, Forrester, and Gapova, eds., "Introduction," also retains the "East European" designation, but describes the work of "postsocialist studies" to be undertaken in relation to the region as something that "shuttles between and around past and present, Cold War and aftermath, East and West, reconstituting history, geography, politics, and cross-cultural translation around the issues at the core of how identities are constructed and negotiated" (25). Very much in line with the

goals of the current volume, postsocialist studies are "interdisciplinary and dialogic," and have much in common with "postcolonial theory, cultural, gender, and identity studies" (27).

19. This is the argument Julianne Burton makes in her call for extending film theory to the Third World; see Burton, "Marginal Cinemas and Mainstream Critical Theory," *Screen 26*, no. 34 (1985): 2–21.
20. For two classic explications of this position, see Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," *Movie 24* (1977): 2–13; and Fredric Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985): 715–33.
21. The most extensive such attempts have been Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's two co-edited volumes, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003).
22. I am referring in particular to David Bordwell's introduction to *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies*, ed. David Bordwell (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 3–36, in which he argues that the era of grand theory has come to an end in film studies. Bordwell claims that "subject-position theories" and "cultural theories" are too sweeping, too lightly based in actual practice, paying too little attention to patterns of consumption. My assumption is that such theories might be given a renewed importance in the context of film cultures that have evolved differently, disconnected from the arena of mainstream film theory.
23. Kennedy, introduction to *Envisioning Eastern Europe*, 1–4.
24. Iordanova, in her chapter in this volume, refers to Katie Trumpener's seminal article, urging scholars properly to acknowledge and process DEFA's East European history. See Katie Trumpener, "DEFA: Moving Germany into Eastern Europe," in *Moving Images of East Germany: Past and Future of DEFA Film*, ed. Barton Byg and Betheny Moore (Washington D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies/Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University University Press, 2002), 85–104.
25. See Downey, "Full of Eastern Promise?"; Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory*; and Sparks, "Media Theory."
26. Kennedy, introduction to *Envisioning Eastern Europe*, 31.

part one

gender identity and representation

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one

second world-ness and transnational feminist practices

agnieszka holland's *kobieta samotna (a woman alone)*

katarzyna marciniak

> *If the world is currently structured by transnational economic links and cultural asymmetries, locating feminist practices within these structures becomes imperative.*
>
> —**Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, Introduction to** *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*

I will start with a pedagogical experience that inspired this essay. In 2003, I taught a newly designed graduate seminar, "Transnational Feminist Practices."[1] My students were intrigued by exploring this new field of transnational feminist cultural studies. The seminar combined the study of diasporic cinema and current discourses of transnationality in order to examine border and transcultural identities in the global contexts of exilic dislocation, patriarchal violence, and ethnic cleansing. For all my students, this was a fresh intellectual experience. As foundational texts for the

seminar, we read Inderpal Grewal's and Caren Kaplan's work answering the question, "Why do we need a theory of transnational feminist practices?" We then moved to essays by Meena Alexander, Leo R. Chavez, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Stuart Hall, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Nawal el Saadawi, Ella Shohat, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Trinh Minh-ha, and others. We investigated critiques of "global feminism" and "global sisterhood" with the understanding that, as Kaplan claims, these discourses "have naturalized and totalized categories such as 'Third World women' *and* 'First World women.'"[2] Probing these readings, it became clear that one of the main concerns of the field is to trouble the First World/Third World binary and to scrutinize the often subtle operations of the Eurocentric logic that historically patronizes non-Western spaces and peoples, while endlessly privileging "First Worldness." It also became clear that the discussions of Second World women in relation to transnational feminist studies were nowhere to be found in the essays we studied.

As a class, we found ourselves in an ambivalent position when we got to the rubric of the Second World by way of screening Agnieszka Holland's 1981 film *Kobieta Samotna (A Woman Alone)*. The notion of Second Worldness was a puzzle for my students as they acknowledged they were unfamiliar with its conceptual application. I came to see their lack of "knowledge" as a product of a certain cultural amnesia that manifests itself in the discursive elision of post–Berlin Wall communities that, I think, are erroneously treated by many scholars as already Western. Within such a conceptual paradigm, the category of the Second World, considered as no longer useful or relevant, is a relic belonging to the Cold War rhetoric and the socialist era. Additionally, as my students pointed out, the postsocialist-communist Eastern and Central European regions are obviously familiar to them, but under the notions of, for example, Balkan studies, or East European studies—categories typically dissociated from theories of transnational feminisms.[3]

Analyzing the dynamic of our seminar, largely dictated by our readings, I realized that some of my students, even prior to their learning about the field of transnational feminist cultural studies, were already familiar with the need to trouble the First World/Third World binary and to resist the patronizing gestures of "global sisterhood" that privilege the agency of mainly white, Western women. However, because the category of Second Worldness hardly ever shows up in these theoretical discussions, the need to think about this geopolitical space in the context of transnational feminisms was quite a challenge. I write this essay taking up this—admittedly ambitious—challenge. My intention is to expand the scope of transnational feminist studies, to stretch its parameters, so that the voices and perspectives from the Second World may find their way into the field that many consider a radical and indispensable direction for feminist studies.[4]

the context of transnational feminist cultural studies

Aihwa Ong once remarked that "besides the poor, women, who are half of humanity, are frequently absent in studies of transnationalism."[5] Initiated by such U.S.-based feminists as Grewal, Kaplan, Mohanty, Shohat, and Spivak, the field of transnational feminist cultural studies has developed in response to this absence. This new scholarly area combines transnational studies with multicultural feminist theories. Discussing transnational feminist practices as a critical pursuit grounded in historical specificity, Kaplan argues that "[p]ostmodern theories that link subject positions to geopolitical and metaphorical locations have emerged out of a perception that periodization and linear historical forms of explanation have been unable to account fully for the production of complex identities in an era of diaspora and displacement."[6] The main goal of the field is thus to link the studies of postmodernity and global economic structures with issues of race, imperialism, nationalisms, and critiques of global feminism. As my class came to find out, despite its intended global scope, the field omits perspectives from the Second World. Why does the field continue to operate within the critique of the First World/Third World binary? I believe the answer is twofold.

First, many feminist thinkers whose voices are prominent in multicultural, diasporic debates in the United States come from the places traditionally labeled as the Third World. As a result of such a politics of location, the main discussions have focused on critiquing the oppressive West/non-West dichotomy and on showing how, to use Trinh's words, "there is a Third World in every First World and vice-versa."[7] The dominant feminist discourses, even those that advocate "polycentric multiculturalism,"[8] "anti-racist, multicultural feminism," or "radical or critical multiculturalism,"[9] operate discursively within the disruption of the First World/Third World axis and say very little about the ambivalent territory of the postcommunist Second World.

A second reason for the neglect of Second World feminist voices is motivated by the treatment of the Second World as a bygone category. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, for example, in their groundbreaking book *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, commented on the nonexistence of the Second World.[10] Such claims contribute to the false impression that communities once behind the Iron Curtain are already Western. This belief ignores the fact that Central and Eastern European regions, for a long time placed in Western imagination "behind the Wall," continue to be treated as the "other" Europe, the impoverished cousin to the "real" thing, a treatment that consolidated the identity of "true Europeans" who see themselves as legitimately and "purely" Western.

As a result of such conceptualizations, the field of transnational feminist studies hardly ever gestures toward feminist voices from the

Second World. Hence, despite their radical potential, feminist debates operate within a restricted focus—unintentionally, I believe, limiting the meanings of the notion of the transnational. My thinking in this regard has led me to the following questions: What are the implications and consequences of the discursive erasure of the Second World? What might be gained by reviving this category? Bringing into focus Holland's *Kobieta Samotna,* a Second World narrative that is formally and thematically connected to the trope of transnational crossings, my intention is not merely to recover the forgotten space of the Second World; neither do I wish to create the impression that the Second World needs to compete for attention with the Third World. The notions of the First, Second, and Third Worlds are obviously reductive ideological constructs that support the primacy of the First World. I share, for example, Shohat and Stam's contention that "all these terms, like that of the 'Third World,' then, are only schematically useful; they must be placed 'under erasure,' seen as provisional and only partly illuminating."[11] At the same time, however, I am curious about the impulses behind an incessant stress on the idea that the "Second World is no more."[12] Thus, I see the need to acknowledge and investigate the complexity of transnational crossings within a more global network.

transnational desires

> *[T]he misleading impression [is] that everyone can take equal advantage of mobility and modern communications and that transnationality has been liberatory, in both a spatial and political sense, for all peoples.*
>
> **—Aihwa Ong,**
> *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*

Kobieta Samotna is Agnieszka Holland's last film made in Poland before she left the country in 1981.[13] Since then, she has produced her films within transnational contexts—in France, Germany, and the United States—and has achieved international prominence for such productions as *Bittere Ernte* (*Angry Harvest*, 1985), *To Kill a Priest*, (1987), *Europa, Europa* (1990), *Olivier, Olivier* (1991), *The Secret Garden*, (1993), *Total Eclipse*, (1995), and *Washington Square* (1997). Of all of the films in her oeuvre, *Kobieta Samotna* stands out as a particularly original, unforgettably poignant narrative.[14] The film represents a socially underprivileged, working-class single mother struggling to support herself and her eight year-old son, Boguś. The originality of the film comes precisely from its focus on a female protagonist, Irena (Maria Chwalibóg), placed at a pivotal moment in Polish modern history—between the beginning of the Solidarity movement and the end of the communist

Figure 1.1
Irena (Maria Chwalibóg), a mail carrier, on her route.

era. Unconventionally, the narrative does not take the side of either political party, choosing not to condemn the communist system in favor of Solidarity. Instead, through privileging a woman's experience—her struggle amid physical exhaustion to secure food and shelter for herself and her son—the film becomes a devastating critique of both parties, showing us how for either of them, a character like Irena is of no concern: "I am a nobody. I didn't fight in the war, I don't have a car. I work for pennies; nobody respects me." Those bitter words that Irena utters stress her awareness of her abjected position as a poor woman from the lowest social stratum.

Crucially, in its depiction of female aloneness, misery, and desperation driven by Irena's economic status and particular circumstances (she has a long history of having been beaten, first by her father and then by her husband), the film carefully avoids clichéd markers of sentimentality. *Kobieta Samotna* feels like an intense paradocumentary, brutal, even cynical, in its unrelenting honesty—unromantic, unemotional, exposing the grimness of life without a weepy narrative that would elicit pity, thereby positioning the spectatorial gaze at a "safe" distance. Rather, through discomforting close-ups, the tight framing of bodies onscreen, a sparse soundtrack that favors ambient sound, mostly natural lighting, and authentic locations the film foregrounds various tactics of identification that bind the audience's gaze to the diegetic tonality of oppression and desperation. As I will discuss herein, the particular suture the film offers

is one without release: there is absolutely no loosening of the narrative hold, no redemption, no ejection from the images of abjection that permeate the narrative. Death, garbage, disabled bodies, decomposing mise-en-scène, the tonality of suffocation, and cultural and social claustrophobia dictate a haunting tempo; even sex is abjected as the representation of intimate encounters between Irena and her friend Jacek (Bogusław Linda) stresses bodily discomfort and is, ultimately, painful to watch.

The climax of *Kobieta Samotna* ends on a heart-wrenching, albeit unsentimental, note and underscores what I see as a main argument of the film: a desperate yet futile desire for mobility; a wish to escape to a West imagined as a liberatory space. The film exposes a hunger to become "transnational"—that is, to become a mobile subject beyond the confines of one's nation. Simultaneously, the narrative shows transnationality as an unattainable location, a mirage pursued by characters doomed to various complex locations of abjection.[15]

Jacek, having suffocated Irena to death with a pillow in a motel room, walks into the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw. The embassy is marked as a place of desire: this is where one applies for visas to travel to the United States and where one can brush up against the vision of a better life. A fenced-off, luxurious island of the West amid the dilapidated Polish landscape, the embassy is the space that promises mobility, a life away from the grim brutality of communist Poland in 1981. Jacek is disabled; he drags his stiff leg. His difficulty walking (both visually and metaphorically) underscores his hindered mobility. His head bizarrely wrapped in dark tape, he enters the embassy clutching a suitcase with a blinking light that he nervously switches on and off. He appears awkward, clumsy, and disoriented. Somewhat shyly approaching the security booth, Jacek explains his strange appearance to a guard whose frozen posture and onward gaze remain undisturbed; "You know," he says, "I had to wrap it up. I was afraid the skull might . . . crack open. I had to wrap it up because it fell apart." When he is finally approached by a security officer, he explains that his suitcase is full of explosives and demands a visit with the ambassador and a trip to the United States. The officer treats him cautiously, but his condescending tone clearly suggests that he assumes Jacek is emotionally disturbed, not to be taken too seriously. As the officer's voice gently coaxes Jacek to sit down and put the suitcase aside, we watch the culminating point of the sequence, ironically eerie in its evocation: still embracing the suitcase with his arms, exhausted by his struggle to leave Poland, Jacek dozes off, his head falling to the side. The next shot shows Jacek being led by the officers to a police car.

Upon Jacek's entrance to the embassy, the viewer is clued in that his act of trespassing is conflicted in multiple ways: as a trespasser, he is

Figure 1.2
Jacek in the U.S. Embassy.

uncomfortably out of place inside the embassy; he displays no bravado, no aggressive posture that one might associate with a terrorist act. Rather, we see a performance of a wounded, "crippled" masculinity, symbolized earlier in the film by an attack of epilepsy. Still, despite his obviously thwarted attempt to cross the border, Jacek does have the agency to carry out the final act of entering, however briefly and feebly, the Western space of the embassy. Irena, having been murdered in an act of "compassion" motivated by his desire to relieve her misery, has already been removed from the narrative.

Various tropes of conflictual mobility permeate *Kobieta Samotna* from its onset. The film opens with a gritty image of prisoners working on train tracks at dawn amid empty rural fields, under the watchful gaze of a guard. The monotonous, unnerving banging of the tools against the ground and the sound of shoveling aurally accentuate the hardship and relentlessness of their work. When a train passes speedily, the prisoners can feel only its movement, themselves unable to participate in the experience of forward motion associated with freedom and choice.

The mise-en-scène of this moment metonymically addresses the quality of Irena's life: like the prisoners, she is grounded in brutal economic conditions, moving through the physical demands of her days by herself, coping with the poverty and cruelty around her, contained and controlled by her community and her nation. After the train's passing, the opening sequence features Irena's tiny apartment situated

by the tracks, outside the city; and we get a glimpse of the poignancy of Irena's social position. Her apartment is a one-room cramped space that functions as a bedroom, kitchen, and dining area; Irena sleeps with her son Boguś in one narrow bed; they have no running water or bathroom; the whole space is enveloped in darkness and a feeling of coldness.

Juxtaposing the vastness of the open fields and Irena's claustrophobic, dark apartment, this introduction sets up a tension that drives the narrative, a tension that finds no diegetic resolution between the often ironically competing representations of openness and enclosure, mobility and stasis. Whereas her room is a suffocating space, Irena's work as a mail carrier keeps her on her feet all day long, as she rushes from one apartment building to the next. When delivering a disability check, she meets Jacek, a young, now out-of-work miner who makes extra money selling his time to others by standing in food lines in their stead. She enters his apartment to get his signature for a delivery and faints out of exhaustion, her body crashing under the heavy weight of the mail bag. Perplexed by the situation, Jacek gives her water and throws himself into attempting to open a window to bring in air and revive Irena. As Jacek struggles with the stuck window that cannot, in fact, be opened, the prolonged moment of this scene again metaphorically speaks to the couple's enclosure within small, stifling spaces and comments on the social suffocation that they both, in different ways, endure.

Creating a harsh representation of female aloneness and male inadequacy, Holland's film operates as a sharp indictment of gender relations in Poland at that time and speaks to an intolerance for any kind of difference. Jacek and Irena's particular experiences of oppression are marked by gendered specificity, intimately tied to their bodies. Jacek is constantly ridiculed by people around him as a cripple, a mutilated being, less than a man. His injured masculinity, always visible in the way he walks, is invariably on display, inescapable. At one point he confesses to Irena, "I don't feel right here. People are so unfriendly when someone is a little different; they tease you." The notion of teasing feels like a euphemism in Jacek's case as it does not quite convey the intensity of his ostracism. This teasing takes the form not only of frequent verbal scorn but also of physical violence, as others—especially other men around him—see him as an easy target who cannot stand up for himself. For example, Irena's neighbor, with whom she has a contentious relationship, catches Jacek at dawn by the train tracks and beats him, telling him not to show up in their neighborhood ever again. Irena receives an unexpected and unwelcome visit from Boguś's father, an abusive alcoholic, who upon noticing Jacek's disability immediately feels justified in violently pinning him against the wall and taunting him as a "crip."

Although not physically disabled, Irena encounters a similarly cruel treatment from people around her, which in her case is distinctively tied to womanness and her single motherhood. All the characters in positions of authority—her boss, the priest, the man in the Communist Party building where she goes for help, the neighbor who used to own the room she occupies—treat her either dismissively, condescendingly, disdainfully, or threaten her with violence. When she says "Nobody stands behind me" she articulates the idea that a single woman, especially of her class and without a man by her side, is constantly exposed to humiliation, contempt, and abuse. In fact, all her relations with men leave Irena either physically or emotionally bruised. Even her life with her son is ridden with many tensions manifested in one particularly excruciating scene. When Irena, fatigued, takes a nap after Boguś's First Communion party, bored Boguś catches a fly and places it in her open mouth as she sleeps. Irena awakes, coughing, choking. This act of violence is especially disturbing because it is not a premeditated act of brutality—Boguś is, overall, represented as a fragile child—but a symbolic gesture that emulates the treatment Irena encounters outside of her home.

Inevitably, Irena and Jacek grow to share similar desires—for a better, more just life, a life somewhere else where, as they envision, they could reside and be treated like human beings. They want to leave Poland not because they are against the communist regime but because they find no human connection with people around them. They do not necessarily contemplate historical events around them. In fact, these events, which the film alludes to, take place as if outside their frame of reference (at one point we see a marching group of protesters carrying a banner that reads, "Freedom for political prisoners"), showing us how the impending political changes have no immediate influence upon the lives of people like them. What they do contemplate are the most immediate material and emotional circumstances of their miserable existence: humiliation, scorn, difficulty to sustain their poverty-ridden lives, and the impossibility of any reward or pleasure that might come from one's hard work.

For a short while, however uneasily, they enjoy each other's company, but Irena's problems keep escalating, frustrating any hope of release from daily brutality: Boguś gets in trouble in school; her boss threatens that her route will be given to another mail carrier; her aunt dies, leaving Irena with a burdensome funeral bill that she cannot pay. Driven by despair, Irena steals money from work, places Boguś in an orphanage, and plans an escape out west with Jacek. They buy a used car and, for a brief moment, enjoy the experience of exhilarated mobility, a moment immediately thwarted by a car accident.

Despite the couple's ignorance about the world outside Polish borders and about the formalities involved in crossing the border, the narrative

does not condescend to Irena and Jacek and it does not belittle their longings and fantasies about a life "out there." Instead, the film reveals the specifics of that historical era. All information and media distribution in Poland is state controlled and carefully rationed, just as food, gas, and clothing are. When at one point Irena complains that she "lives like a dog" she refers to poverty and drudgery, but also to a feeling of perpetual entrapment, as if her nation were her cage. It is not surprising then that both Irena and Jacek believe that "they have everything over there and we have nothing here," idealizing the West as a place of freedom, opportunity, and justice. Additionally, in depicting their desire to escape out west, *Kobieta Samotna* offers an ironic twist: as Jacek and Irena drive toward the western border, their vision of the "West" is, in fact, East Germany, another Eastern Bloc country.

suture without release/abject zones

> *Film is a vivid medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame. . . . Power works in the depths and on the surfaces of the body, and not just in the disembodied realm of "representation" or of "discourse." It is in the flesh first of all, far more than on some level of supposed ideological reflection, that the political is personal, and the personal political.*
>
> —**Steven Shaviro,** *The Cinematic Body*

What my students found most haunting about Holland's film was a feeling of intense spectatorial discomfort tied to claustrophobic spatiality, an experience they had rarely encountered before. "No one is comfortable touching anyone else"; "It's about bodily discomfort"; "Even sex is uncomfortable"—these are the remarks that stimulated and guided our discussion. Indeed, the film diverges from any predictable representation of social and gender oppression. It does not offer pity for the protagonist; it does not exploit Irena as a helpless victim; there is none of the melancholy or nostalgic tonality so often present in the Polish films depicting that era; there is not even a sense of sustained tangible compassion for the brutality of abjection felt by Irena and Jacek. Instead, in its restrained emotionality, *Kobieta Samotna* engenders a particular kind of visual sensitivity and empathy rooted in the depiction of sociocultural harshness and desperate desolation.

The dictionary defines *empathy* as "the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another."[16] There is no voice-over or subjective point-of-view shots that would formally tie the audience to the female protagonist. The

Figure 1.3
Irena and Jacek (Bogusław Linda) after sex.

identification offered by the film is of a different kind: the spectatorial gaze is dislocated in its customary ocular comfort and bound to the visual and emotive experiences of abjection.

To be sure, the sense of utmost bodily discomfort is most poignantly and horrifically represented in the climactic scene at the motel when Jacek suffocates the sleeping Irena by placing a stack of pillows on her face, already bruised from the accident, and pressing the weight of his fragile body on them. This is Jacek's tragic way of "saving" her after she has pleaded with him, "I have no more strength. I cannot go on any more; help me; do something. I need to rest." Irena's plea and its outcome are shattering in their ambivalence, a wound through which the narrative delivers its final blow: it is not clear that she indeed wants to die, but she does beg him to stop her suffering, and Jacek's last gesture of "helping" her is an act of mercy killing. In a prolonged close-up, we watch Irena's quivering feet, the only image of her final struggle. The visceral discomfort of the moment is undisputably panic inducing, caused by the literal and metaphorical imagery of asphyxiation and claustrophobic pressure. Metadiegetically, the film thus comments on the social impossibility of existence for characters like Irena and Jacek: they are, indeed, tied to the dynamic of abjection without release.

This culminating experience of suffocating discomfort, as I have already argued, permeates the entire narrative and is perhaps most discernible in the intimate encounters between Irena and Jacek. There are no

Figure 1.4
Jacek killing Irena with a stack of pillows.

social, cultural, or familial spheres that are uninjured by abjection; there are no spectatorial comfort zones that would allow the audience even momentary relief; not even erotic encounters remain uncontaminated. Sex is difficult, awkward, unsexy. The first sexual moment between Irena and Jacek takes place in the claustrophobic spatiality of her apartment. Irena initiates it by hanging a piece of cloth over the window to protect them from the intruding gaze of the neighbors. Through long shots, we watch both of them undress separately. There is no touching between them yet, not even a sense of bodily proximity, despite the smallness of the space around them. Irena sits on the bed and Jacek joins her, sitting by her side. It is a very matter-of-fact moment—almost devoid of passion, spontaneous gestures, tenderness, underscoring a feeling of desperation and loneliness for both of them.

They are both uncomfortable, both uneasy for different reasons. When Jacek touches Irena's shoulder, her body instinctively pulls back, reminding us of her history of physical abuse. For him, intimacy is also a risky experience as he is aware of exposing his physical vulnerability, which has been sneered at and ridiculed many times before. Irena hangs a blanket, separating the bed from the rest of the room. For a brief moment we watch the blanket, only hearing wrestling behind it. The ending of this encounter feels quite surprising. Telling Irena that he never felt so good in his life, Jacek collapses, weeping, his body

awkwardly positioned on the bed because of his stiff, scarred leg, which is now fully exposed.

What is thus fascinating about *Kobieta Samotna* is how it navigates and positions—how it sutures—the spectatorial gaze and agency. The term *suture* medically refers to the stitching of a wound. In film studies, this notion has been used to theorize ways in which the narrative "stitches" the spectator to the text. Starting with Jean-Pierre Oudart, who introduced suture into cinema theory in the late 1960s, the term has had a long history motivated by the need to describe the relationship between the workings of a filmic narrative and the viewer. Largely influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, theoreticians since then have delineated various cinematic suturing devices that direct and arrest spectatorial attention: shot/reverse shot sequencing, which offers an illusion of completeness of vision and hence a sense of narrative wholeness; the narrative, which provides the spectator with a subject position; the ideological effects that influence the viewer; point-of-view sequencing, which captures the viewer's gaze, and linear narrative closure. What is at stake in these arguments is how the filmic artifice, through its signifying practices, creates and hides its own fiction of reality.[17]

Through these different ways of theorizing suture, most film scholars would agree that, by definition, suture is always in a sense "without release."[18] The term that I am using in this essay, "suture without release," is thus, at least initially, redundant—until, that is, we consider the process of *desuturing*.[19] Slavoj Žižek employs a dialectical reading of suture by arguing that the spectator always oscillates between suture and desuture: "suture is the exact opposite of the illusory, self-enclosed totality that successfully erases the decentered traces of its production process: suture means that, precisely, such self-enclosure is *a priori* impossible, that the excluded reality always leaves its traces within."[20] In other words, to speak of the logic of suture, Žižek posits, means to consider both processes simultaneously—stitching and antistitching or, better yet, a critical awareness of the way the narrative tempo takes the spectator in and out of its filmic world.

One way to understand this process of oscillation, which helps to illuminate further the construction of *Kobieta Samotna,* is through the metaphor of breathing. Typically, the diegesis of narrative cinema operates through the continual containing and releasing of its energies, thus guiding the spectatorial engagement, allowing us to "breathe." If we accept Žižek's dialectical theory of suture, then Holland's film, with its affective intensity, might be read as a self-conscious set-up of *hypersuture*, deliberately thwarting and negating this dialectic. The effect of such exaggerated suture is a sense of relentless stitching to the text, indeed "without release," not allowing its audience any comfort zones through even fleeting unstitching, thus creating overpowering feelings of suffocation by the diegesis.

As the narrative enunciates Irena's emotional and physical journey through her severely bitter circumstances, the spectators are bound to experience the violent limitation of her agency. This journey toward an unforgettable telos shows us how the protagonist becomes progressively and increasingly emotionally dead, to the point that all her codes of morality, honesty, and decency are corroded beyond repair. The narrative does not excuse Irena's actions; it merely reveals gender-centered social and cultural intensities that, in desperation, lead her to various transgressive acts. She not only steals money from her workplace but also feels forced to leave Boguś in an orphanage. As she briskly walks away from him while he keeps running and shouting after her, all the presumably stable signifiers of womanhood and motherhood are called into question. Not even maternal love and familial bonds are free from an emotional erosion.

The closing sequence ends on a paralyzing note. Unlike the rest of the film, the sequence engages a surrealist tonality and, once again, addresses the issues of belonging, aloneness, homelessness, and a desire to escape somewhere else, a desire to be untrapped. The first shot features an imaginary flying Irena as a postal carrier over the courtyard of the orphanage; the figure has angellike wings. We hear Boguś's voice-over: "My mommy flew by and dropped me a letter. 'Dear son, be a good boy. Soon I will come for you and we will be happy together in our little house.'" We watch Boguś's running toward a wire fence; and his hopeful face is caught through a freeze-frame, the last image of the film; this image is undoubtedly reminiscent of the memorable ending of François Truffaut's *400 Blows* (1959), also featuring a "capturing" of a boy's face. The difference between those two endings is crucial to an understanding of Holland's film. The last shot of a young protagonist in Truffaut's film freezes him by the sea, leaving the ending ambiguously open, underscored by the surrounding mise-en-scène of vast, unobstructed spatiality. By contrast, *Kobieta Samotna,* freezing Boguś's face behind the wire fence, ends on a note of visual entrapment, already without a possibility of redemption. He is caged inside the courtyard, locked inside, his bearing evoking Irena's social stifling. If Irena did not have a chance at mobility and did not manage to escape the brutal misery, certainly Boguś's confined face suggests that the next generation remains equally trapped.

second-world hypersuture

> *I am surprised about my success in the United States. In my opinion, I am not the kind of person who can be successful in the States. I am somebody quite independent, from a small country far away. I am a woman, which is rare in the film industry, and*

I am not a beauty who can sleep with...important people. And the way I have done movies, every story I have told, the basic point is that I think the world is very complicated. Normally what makes the American cinema strong is to say the world is not so complicated.

—Agnieszka Holland, "Holland without a Country"

Despite Holland's intense focus on socially engaged films, many of which deal distinctively with women's cultural positioning, like many other contemporary Polish women artists, she has never called her artistic perspective a feminist one. As Grażyna Stachówna writes, "[Polish] women directors do not manifest their female identity in interviews or official speeches. Rather, they identify themselves with their artistic generation; for example, Agnieszka Holland with the 1968 generation and the group of filmmakers belonging to the 'Cinema of Moral Anxiety.'" This refusal to be associated with a feminist aesthetics or politics is actually not surprising, considering that in Poland to be called a feminist amounts to being marked as a leper. This term has been feared, shunned, mocked, and considered shameful: "Both notions [sexism and feminism] are suspect in Poland; they still signify something strange, non-authentic, ridiculous and compromising. . . . There is also a psychological factor to be found in the modern Polish mentality: there is a fear of strange models that are not understandable, and therefore considered ridiculous or menacing."[21]

However, to consider Holland a "Polish" filmmaker at this point in her career feels somewhat problematic: the Polish-Jewish artist has intermittently lived in exile in France since 1981; she has a French citizenship; she has worked in Hollywood; she claims that her native city, Warsaw, has become foreign to her; she shuttles among different locations as a person who "belongs nowhere."[22] The politics of her films caused problems for her not only in Poland, where *Kobieta Samotna,* for example, was banned, but also in France where, after the screening of Andrzej Wajda's film *Korczak* (1991), for which she wrote the script, she was vehemently accused by critics of anti-Semitic sentiments.[23] In her transnationality, thus, Holland has had a contentious relationship with more than one homeland.

Even though it is clear that Holland does not readily associate her transnational filmmaking with feminist practices per se, many of her films, and especially *Kobieta Samotna,* offer an unusual representation of Second World femaleness. As my students came to find out, to work within transnational feminist cultural studies without a critical awareness of the Second World female positionality robs the field of an important and urgent perspective. The depicted image of the specific Second World in *Kobieta Samotna* reveals an entirely new terrain in relationship to

discussions of transnational mobility. By emphasizing abjecting enclosure, political, social, and material constraints imposed on mobility, and yet desire for it, especially for a female of Irena's class, the film presents us with a particular cinematic vision of Polish realities before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The specifics of those realities gesture toward larger social issues of this historical era and shed light on the reasons why it is the film's hypersuture that represents Polish Second Worldness.

Speaking of realism in cinematic representation, Shohat and Stam comment that "although there is no absolute truth, no truth apart from representation and dissemination, there are still contingent, qualified, perspectival truths in which communities are invested."[24] The perspectival "truth" of *Kobieta Samotna* is that Irena's dire economic circumstances, the ostracism she experiences, the violence of patriarchal heteronormativity, the surveilling gazes of her neighbors, claustrophobia, and her particular liminality (she is not welcome by her neighbors but has no other place to go; she yearns for a better life, which is inaccessible to her) are not necessarily exaggerated filmic aberrations of one unfortunate female character but the norm for many during that time. That is, the film is not so much a "faithful" mimetic utterance of the end of a socialist era but an evocation of a cultural aura and particular ideological contingencies, which the audience is invited to feel viscerally. Commenting on her single motherhood, Irena says, "I don't know how to raise a child to be a good, honest Pole. . . . Everything is topsy-turvy. I don't know what to do; I can only pray. Maybe it's good that they fixed our lives so we have no time to think." The sense of physical and conceptual quarantine, a result of a long imposition of a socialist regime infused with acute patriarchal norms, is thus what the audience is sutured into. The exhausting hypersuture my students sensed as viewers purposefully "arouses corporeal reactions";[25] we, too, experience the simultaneous desire to become unanchored and the impossibility of that unanchoring.

acknowledgment

I thank Mara Holt for her provocative responses, which helped me shape this essay.

notes

1. I borrow this term from the work of Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. See Grewal and Kaplan, "Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity," in *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*, ed. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1–33; and Grewal and Kaplan, "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides," in *Between Woman and Nation:*

Nationalism, Transnational Feminism, and the State, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcón, and Minoo Moallem (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 349–63.

2. Caren Kaplan, "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Critical Practice," in Grewal and Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies*, 137.
3. See, for eaxmple, *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002); *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflections from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993); and *Post-Communism and the Body Politic*, ed. Ellen E. Berry (New York: New York University Press, 1995).
4. I develop this discussion further in Katarzyna Marciniak, *Quivering Bodies: Of Aliens, Exile, and Citizenship in Transnational Discourses* (forthcoming, University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
5. Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999), 11.
6. Kaplan, "The Politics of Location," 138.
7. Trinh Minh-ha, "Introduction," *Discourse 8* (1987): 3.
8. Ella Shohat, introduction to *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age*, ed. Ella Shohat (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 2.
9. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Crafting Feminist Genealogies: On the Geography and Politics of Home, Nation, and Community," in Shohat, ed., *Talking Visions*, 485, 486.
10. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 26.
11. Ibid., 27.
12. Zygmunt Bauman, "The Making and Unmaking of Strangers," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, ed. Pnina Werbner and Tarig Modood (London: Zed, 1997), 51.
13. In Poland, Holland made three memorable feature films: Aktorzy prowincjonalni (*Provincial Actors*, 1978), Gorączka: historia jednego pocisku (*Fever: The Story of the Bomb*, 1980), and Kobieta Samotna (*A Woman Alone*, 1981). On December 13, 1981, martial law was imposed in Poland; filmmaker Holland, in Sweden at that time, could not return as international travel in and out of the country was no longer possible; she went into exile in France. For more biographical information, see Agnieszka Holland, "Interview with Agnieszka Holland" by Gordana P. Crnković, *Sight and Sound 8* (1998): 2–9; Agnieszka Holland, "Holland without a Country," interview with Roger Cohen, *New York Times*, August 8, 1993; and Barbara Quart, "Three Central European Women Directors Revisited," *Cineaste 19* (1993): 58–61.
14. For other readings of the film, see Janina Falkowska, "Agnieszka Holland, Barbara Sass, and Dorota Kędzierzawska in the World of Male Polish Filmmaking," in *Women Filmmakers: Refocusing*, ed. Jacqueline Levitin, Judith Plessis, and Valerie Raoul (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 2003), 167–79; Grażyna Stachówna, "A Wormwood Wreath: Polish Women's Cinema," in *The New Polish Cinema*, ed. Janina Falkowska and Marek Haltof (Trowbridge, England: Flicks, 2003).
15. My use of the term transnational requires a further qualification. Although not a new phenomenon, since the early 1990s the concept of transnationalism has been gaining urgency across disciplinary boundaries. Within the contemporary context of globalization, the term is often used

to refer to current changes in advanced capitalist societies that reconfigure traditional boundaries of national economies, identities, and cultures. However, rather than treating it as the latest "fashionable" concept, many scholars see the need to analyze transnationalism within the context of its historical reconfigurations. See, for example, Luis Eduardo and Michael Peter Smith, "The Locations of Transnationalism," in *Transnationalism from Below*, ed. Luis Eduardo and Michael Peter Smith (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1998), 3–34.

16. "Empathy," *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1992), 468.
17. I rely on the standard explications of suture in Kaja Silverman, "On Suture," in *Film Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gerald Mast, Marshall Cohen, and Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 199–209; Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema," in *Mast*, 179-191; William Rothman, "Against 'The System of the Suture,'" in *Mast*, ed., *Film Theory and Criticism*, 192–98; and Stephen Heath, "Notes on Suture," *Screen 18* (1977–78): 48–76.
18. For these important insights I thank my colleague Bob Miklitsch.
19. The process of self-conscious antistitching is discernible, for example, in Trinh Minh-ha's films. *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989) is one such narrative that my students often find perplexing, commenting how they "cannot get into the film." Through a variety of innovative cinematic techniques, Trinh foregrounds the difficulty rather than ease that is required to perform the role of an engaged spectator. For a theoretical discussion of this issue, see Trinh Minh-ha, "All-Owning Spectatorship," in *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and the Imaged*, ed. Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel (Langhorne, Penn.: Harwood Academic), 189–204.
20. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), 58.
21. Stachówna, "A Wormwood Wreath," 102, 101.
22. Holland, "Holland without a Country," 30.
23. *Korczak* is based on the life of Polish-Jewish pediatrician, writer, and educator Janusz Korczak, who devoted his life to children. He took care of two hundred orphans in the Warsaw ghetto and did not abandon them till the horrific end: they were all gassed at the Nazi concentration camp, Treblinka, in 1942. The film's controversy has to do with the finale, which shows Korczak and the children in the transportation train on its way to the camp. The train stops amid the fields, and onto the intensely white fog, in a slow motion, they all leave the car, disappearing into whiteness. Even though it is possible to read this moment as a metaphoric rendition of their death, the ending has been read by critics (Claude Lanzmann, the director of 1985's Shohat, was the leading voice in the ensuing debates) as an ambiguous, deviant distortion of the truth that potentially expresses hope, deemphasizing the demise of Korczak and the children in the gas chamber.
24. Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, 179.
25. Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), viii.

two

what's in your head

history and nation in ibolya fekete's *bolse vita* and ghetto art's *making the walls come down*

marguerite waller

The Hungarian transition from Communist party rule and Soviet occupation to a market economy and a parliamentary political system in the years following the 1989 vote by the Hungarian Communist Party to dissolve itself was felt by many Hungarian filmmakers to have triggered an "identity crisis." After years of honing their skills as subtle dissidents, dodging censorship and sensitively criticizing the social and psychological damage done by the passing years of great and petty repressions, it was not at all clear what they should be making films about. They also lost the security of the salaries, however modest, and production budgets they had received when the film industry was state owned. Both artistically and financially, then, filmmakers faced traumatic changes.

The alternative foci that presented themselves to a majority of the Hungarian film community were the Hungarian national scene and an "international" scene—conceived of as free of local reference—that could enter the Hollywood-dominated international movie market. The binary categories *national* and *international* largely, if complexly,

organized the debates and practices of the Hungarian film community in the wake of the events of 1989. Film director Ibolya Fekete's heterodox reading of this moment in Hungarian political and cinematic history emerges as a significant anomaly in the context of the tight-knit Hungarian film community's internal debates. Fekete characterizes her experience of 1989 not as a crisis, but as a revelation.[1] As she puts it in the introductory voice-over of her debut feature film *Bolse vita* (1995), the events of 1989 provided a "sudden flash" that illuminated the past, present, and future and offered an opening—all too quickly closed again—onto a different set of political, social, and artistic possibilities.[2] The exploration of those possibilities in *Bolse vita* evolves into a compelling web of connections—empirical and conceptual—linking the scene in Budapest with the war breaking out in Yugoslavia.[3] In the events whiplashing the day-to-day lives of citizens and expatriates in Budapest, we witness at a microlevel the virulent complex of interlocking forces featuring murderous "mafiacracies" in one setting and murderous ultranationalisms (seen as different modalities of the same grab for political and economic control) in another.

Fekete's film meanwhile reframes the debate over cinema's role in transitional Hungary in terms of a much older debate concerning the properties and potentials of the cinematic image. As it has seemed to Béla Balázs, Walter Benjamin, Gilles Deleuze, Sergei Eisenstein, Teshome Gabriel, Dziga Vertov, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and others who have been drawn to cinema as the art form of a new human "sensorium," for Fekete, the question of power—political, epistemological, and emotional—and the question of cinema are intimately related. For some years Fekete has collaborated with György Szomjas, who is also a keen experimenter with film language. Both filmmakers have developed an unorthodox notion of nation, or at least of "Hungary." One of Szomjas's post-1989 films, *Junk Movie* (1991), looks at Hungary as a "junk" nation, not only in the negative sense of "trashy," but also in the positive sense that its culture is a fascinating and illuminating postcolonial bricolage, built up of formations invented by other people, often from other places, for other purposes.[4] Fekete wrote the script for Szomjas's 1989 prize-winning documentary *Könnyü vér* (*Fast and Loose*), which dealt with one such formation—the international "transitionist" crowd who descended upon Budapest in the late 1980s. *Bolse vita*, derived from this documentary, continues her exploration of the cultural scene produced when the borders of both the West and the East began to open and entrepreneurship took center stage.[5]

The film's title, on its most literal level, refers to a small rock pub called the Bolse Vita (in Hungarian the *s* is pronounced like the English *sh*), opened in Budapest by a pair of enterprising East Germans

and frequented by an international assortment of young people. The film follows an ensemble of characters who congregate at the pub to socialize, swap impressions, and listen to music. This group includes two young street musicians, Yura (Yuri Fomichov, who plays himself, reprising his own story from Fekete's earlier documentary) and Vadim (Igor Chernevich), both from the former Soviet Union (Yura is from the Urals, which form the border between European Russia and Asian Russia; Vadim is from the small resort town of Kislovodsk, in the Caucasus region of Georgia, west of Chechnya, known historically as a link between Europe and Asia). The group also includes two young women, Maggie (Helen Baxendale, now well-known to English-speaking audiences) and Susan (Caroline Lonq), who are from Wales and Texas, respectively (Wales and Texas, not by chance, having once both been autonomous from the nation-states of which they are now parts). Another character, a Russian engineer named Sergei, crosses paths with Yura and Vadim at the apartment of a middle-aged Hungarian woman, Erzsi (Agnes Mahr), a former Russian-language teacher retooling to teach English, who temporarily makes her living by renting space in her apartment to impoverished Russians in transit to the West. To appreciate the significance of Erzsi's space (a kind of perverse, heavily binarized version of the Bolse Vita pub), one needs to know that under the Communist regime, Russian was required in Hungarian schools. That requirement was dropped in 1989, throwing the country's large contingent of Russian teachers out of work. In a move that mirrors the binary Cold War logic that Fekete's film is critiquing, but that makes little sense pedagogically, many of the Russian teachers were retrained to teach English.

When Erzsi's young English tutor Maggie (the Welsh woman) drops by to return Erzsi's car, Maggie and Yura begin an impassioned conversation, despite the fact that they have no common language. Maggie invites Yura and Vadim to stay with her, and she and Yura become lovers. Vadim soon becomes sexually involved, but is less successful conversationally, with Maggie's impervious Texan flatmate Susan. The engineer Sergei somewhat grudgingly responds to Erzsi's invitation to share her bed. From there the trajectories of the protagonists, and several others whose situations we glimpse along the way, take dramatically different courses. These courses are profoundly, if unpredictably, bound up with what is happening on the macrolevel, where the Chechen mafia is muscling its way into the fabric of Budapest's economy, and the "West" is making clear, with varying degrees of rudeness, that it does not want the "Easterners" who, having reached varying kinds and degrees of extremity, are trying to enter it.

The multiple narrative, though, is only one facet of the film's complexity. Beginning with the resonances of the title, *Bolse vita*,

Fekete's film quickly takes us into the thick of interlinguistic, intertextual, cross-cultural communication. The Russian word "Bolshevik," spelled according to Hungarian pronunciation and punning on the Italian "dolce" or "sweet," of Federico Fellini's 1960 film *La dolce vita* (*Sweet Life*), becomes emblematic of the potential signifying power unleashed by the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences that proliferated with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Fekete's appropriation of the East German entrepreneurs' tri-lingual pun, *Bolse vita*, acknowledges an intertextual, intercultural matrix in which newly urgent questions of imagined communities, identifications, and constructions of difference may be entertained. Alluding to the glamorous life orbiting around Fellini's Via Veneto, the play of *Bolse* against *dolce* acknowledges all the clichés contrasting the affluent, colorful, cosmopolitan First World to the bleak, drab, isolated Second World. It also subverts that opposition, suggesting that life is life, and that Soviet occupation could not stamp out youthful yearnings. From this perspective, the word play of the name also suggests another way of considering the difference between "First World" and "Second World," "West" and "East." The veterans of the *bolse vita,* of life under the Soviets, are deeply rooted in their own set of circumstances, interrelated with those of the "West," wherever and whatever that is, but not readable only as variants of a Western standard. In this sense, the *bolse vita* may present itself, paradoxically, as richer than the dolce vita. Playing off Fellini's representation of the glamorous *dolce vita* as conceptually and spiritually impoverished, the term *bolse vita* evokes a more multi-dimensional community where people, news, and languages mingle in a space that includes, but is not governed by, the categories of the Cold War.

From snatches of conversation we overhear in scenes set in the pub we discover, for example, that Yura has no knowledge of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, which occurred, of course, before he was born. Typical of its dry wit, the film lets the spectator have the pleasure of deducing that the Hungarian "revolution" was not a centerpiece of the history curriculum in the Soviet Union. Just previously, an American journalist had said, in all earnestness, to one of the Russians, "The trouble with you is that you never had a revolution," meaning, one realizes, that the Russians had never rebelled, like the Hungarians, against Soviet Communist rule. Ringing with irony unintended by the speaker, this occlusion of the Bolshevik revolution against the Tsars, which first brought the Communist party to power, need not be read solely as ignorance. Both these partial perspectives, if not immediately discounted as inaccurate, are potentially very productive in the manner suggested by Teshome Gabriel's discussion of the relationship of "popular memory" to "official history."[6] The past is reopened as a question and subjected to the collective meaning-making of people

whose memories coincide neither with one another nor with the chronological and teleological mythmaking that Benedict Anderson has found typical of nation-state historiography.[7]

One may stop to reconsider, for example, how to characterize the "Bolshevik" or "Russian" "Revolution," not only in the terms available "then," but in the terms becoming available "now"—and not from a moral or ideological position, but from a "deterritorialized" position that makes new linkages and departures possible.[8] Similarly, to encounter a new generation of "Russians" who know nothing of the watershed 1956 uprising (or revolution) in Hungary takes a bitter chapter in Hungarian history, significant in Soviet, U.S., and Western European history as well, and lets it signify in new ways. It works as a potential correlative, for example, to the bitter enmity between "Chetnik" and "Ustashe" during World War II. Whether these categories are rooted in "memory" or have been unnecessarily resurrected and redeployed by cynical manipulators matters less than the idea that, if there are Russians in Budapest who have never heard of the Hungarian revolution, then "ethnic hatreds" in the Balkans cannot be universal or immortal either. It is not that history can or should be "forgotten," but that the constructedness of the categories and the identity politics into whose service these categories are pressed become obvious when the complexity of popular memory comes into play. The Bolse Vita pub offers a particular kind of space (conceptual as well as geographic), in which individual and cultural diversity become available as reasons, and *resources*, for dialogue. Similarly, the political collapse of one pole of the capitalist/communist binary might have opened the way, as it does for Fekete, to a different order of temporal, spatial, emotional, political and even metaphysical de- and re-territorializations.[9]

The film opens with an evocation of the relativity of the terms *East* and *West* themselves. Shots of a port with ships at anchor as the camera looks out over a choppy sea are identified as Vladivostok, which faces the Sea of Japan and, beyond, the Pacific Ocean. It is 1989; and the two itinerant musicians Yura and Vadim comment, as they clutch their instruments to their chests and contemplate the chilly waters, that the West is only a little farther east. This is followed by a documentary montage of demonstrations in Budapest, including a shot of a Soviet statue being lifted off its pedestal by a crane and long lines of battered buses and smoky Trabants (highly polluting but affordable small cars, ubiquitous in the Eastern bloc before 1989) waiting to cross various borders. The camera eventually finds Yura and Vadim headed "west" with a busload of amplifiers they are helping to smuggle into "Eastern" Europe. From Hungary they hope to head south into nonaligned

Yugoslavia, from which they will enter the "West" via Southern Italy. Sergei arrives in Budapest more conventionally by train, but also hopes to get from Hungary to Italy via Yugoslavia. Sergei knows, though, what Yura and Vadim do not: that he will have to raise $200 in hard currency in order to enter the supposedly open-bordered Yugoslavia. (Ironically, the border that is theoretically open to both East and West is in practice closed to Eastern bloc citizens, who do not have access to hard currency). Within the film's first ten minutes, that is, the mise-en-scène moves from Vladivostok to no fewer than four national frontiers, and Budapest enters the picture not as anyone's destination, let alone as a capital city, but as a transit camp for people who find themselves unable to proceed with their journeys.[10] Indeed, *Bolse vita* enjoys the curious distinction of being a "Hungarian" film almost none of whose characters or dialogue are in Hungarian.[11]

Very significantly, then, viewers (like me) with only a sketchy, outsider's knowledge of Hungary's language, history, culture, and politics are not automatically at a greater epistemological disadvantage vis-à-vis this material than Hungarian spectators, or even than the director herself. Fekete's film suggests, on the contrary, that simply having or acquiring information without questioning the inherited categories and thought patterns of the Cold War is futile, perhaps even fatal. At one extreme, for example, the (small-town Texan) American character Susan, who has been everywhere and seen everything, exits the narrative with her obliviousness to the realities of people without U.S. passports intact. Like a walking allegory of international Hollywood-movie distribution, Susan compulsively crosses borders without engaging with anyone. Her movement merely maintains her solipsism, as she almost acknowledges in her comment to Vadim, "[It] doesn't matter where you go. I can be free anywhere. Freedom is a state of mind. You just have to keep moving." (One of the film's throwaway jokes is Susan's parting announcement that she is marrying a man in Tashkent—where it is unlikely that she will be called upon to be either engaged or responsible.) Meanwhile, Sergei—who lacks hard currency and a Western passport—pays with his life for his inability to question the Manichean East/West terms on which he seeks "freedom." Erzsi, the film's one Hungarian character, aspires to mastery of the languages of both East and West, but she merely shuttles between the two. Real involvement seems to pass her by as she facilitates the passage of people and goods from one pole to the other, remaining trapped within the binary paradigm.

The film itself, to borrow from Gilles Deleuze's famous discussion of the mutation of cinema away from images of action, perception, and affection, concerns and facilitates the kinds of "thought and thinking" that can occur in the cultural space created when ideological, cultural, and identificatory

hegemonies are disturbed.[12] Many cultural theorists and artists have postulated such spaces, including Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa, filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha, and popular culture theorist Vida Penezic. Penezic's characterization of this space, derived from her own history as a citizen of the former Yugoslavia, perhaps comes closest to describing the space of *Bolse vita* the film and Bolse Vita the pub. Penezic conceives of what she calls this "transcultural" space in three ways: "(1) as a complex, and/or heterogeneous space in which all other cultural categories are immersed, and out of which they are sometimes molded; (2) as an aspect of everybody's culture, and, potentially, as a culture all its own; a culture of people with across-groups-similar values and beliefs, and/or of people with complex, transcultural experiences and affiliations; (3) and . . . as a mode of interaction that works among groups and people aware and accepting of cultural difference but not prepared to let that difference permanently divide them."[13]

As both Hungary and Yugoslavia in 1989 oscillate in different and complicated ways between East and West, (having been located by the film geographically as west of Russia and the Urals, east of Austria and Italy, and both east and west, not to mention south, of Vladivostok), they become (as they have been for centuries) a kind of ground zero of transculturation, a place where valences shift and meanings change even when its inhabitants are stationary. In a sequence set in the snack bar of the open air market where many of the new arrivals sell goods to make enough money to move on, we hear a man retell an old Hungarian joke about nation and location. He fell asleep in a meadow in Romania, he says, and when he awoke, he found he was in Hungary, where he decided to stay. This fluidity also characterizes borders of time and history, life and death. A young Ukrainian, who, because he is a Chernobyl victim is referred to as "the Orphan," suffers from terminal radiation sickness. Since he considers himself and his mother, who is also radiation-poisoned, already *dead*, he makes a *living* for both of them by smuggling plutonium.

A cautiously positive exploration of this deterritorialized, but not deracinated or universalized, space occurs in a sequence set in Budapest's Ferihegy International Airport. Near the end of the film, after Maggie has become pregnant and has agreed to marry Yura, the couple anxiously await the arrival of a friend bringing Yura's divorce papers before they catch a flight to England to get married and have their child. In the sequence's opening shot, Maggie, screen left, is facing the sliding mirrored doors, screen right, through which passengers emerge from customs. The figure of Yura looking away from the doors in the next shot is also screen left, rhyming with the figure of Maggie. In some sense, the film grammar implies here, these characters are spiritually or psychologically in the same place, even though they appear to be

facing in opposite directions. Their kinship established, they begin to interact in the third shot. Maggie, now more verisimilarly screen right, whirls around and faces Yura, who turns and meets her gaze. The camera pans left, following Maggie to a spot next to Yura, where they begin one of their characteristically polyglot dialogues using a mixture of their own and each others' languages, punctuated comically with Yura's Hungarian *"nincs problema"* ("no problem"). Their exchange, though, is contextualized visually within two different backgrounds, even as the characters remain framed within the same two-shot. Yura, standing in front of a pillar, appears more restricted, while Maggie, pacing back and forth against the more open vista of the waiting area, appears to have a greater degree of freedom. Taking the hint from this spatial heterogeneity, one can begin to glean immensely valuable information from their otherwise ordinary quarrel. If one assumes that their words refer differently and to different circumstances, Yura and Maggie become walking, talking historians and political theorists, offering up a treasure trove of analyses—not to be found in any book or "news" program—of the differences between their respective political systems and subject positions. "One can't *lose* one's divorce papers!" Maggie exclaims in exasperation, responding, apparently, to a suggestion that Yura's ex-wife might not have been able to locate the requisite documents. Two takes of this shot are included in the film, jarring the spectators out of any simple diegetical reading. We are invited instead to think about how and why one might well lose one's divorce paper. In the secular, totalitarian Soviet Union, for example, where resistance to bureaucratization and state control might be more a sign of health than of immaturity, it might be quite a different thing to lose one's divorce papers than in Anglican England, where, at least in theory, the state exists to protect the individual rights of free citizens, and marriage may be a spiritual as well as a civil transaction. There, losing one's divorce papers would more probably signify irresponsibility, while entering into a potentially invalid marriage, as Yura innocently suggests they do, would be tantamount to not marrying at all. Note, among the several paradoxes here, that the citizen/subject of the "free West" appears distinctly more bound to the state psychologically and emotionally than is the citizen/subject of the "totalitarian East," thus reversing the readings of their respective spaces that I offered earlier.

Giving up the argument, Yura slides out of frame, but eccentrically via the bottom frame line rather than to the left or the right. When the camera tilts down and discovers him, he is miming his devotion by leaning against Maggie's leg and stroking her left foot with his right hand while she ruffles his hair with her right hand. Their bodies thus form a circle that contains a section of the boundary between the two visually disparate spaces, making the boundary itself the center

of their relationship. As they have since the moment they met, they communicate well and passionately because of—not in spite of—their differences. It is precisely their assumption that they are different from one another that allows them to become ever more deeply involved with each other, to learn more and more of each other's languages, literally and figuratively, without either one's having to abdicate her or his own. In the absence of an overarching metaphysics of truth, or a binary, moralizing politics, neither position needs to colonize the other in order to sustain itself.

Just then, as if on cue, the mirrored doors of the customs area slide open and the friend emerges, holding Yura's divorce papers aloft. Fekete's film makes brilliant use of the way in which those doors, common in large, international airports, merely reflect the images of those in the receiving country until someone walks through them, when they suddenly become magic portals through which messengers arrive from other places and other "time zones." For a moment, until the doors slide closed again, the gaze sees past its own projections.

After their quick greeting and the transfer of the precious document, though, the homogeneous Euclidean space that grounds the nation-state and identification with it seems to swallow them up.[14] The trajectory of their dash to the flight to England is all perpendicular and horizontal relative to the frame line. Then, in an Eisensteinian montage edit, their disappearance through the boarding gate is succeeded by a shot of the proprietor of the Bolse Vita closing and locking its doors. Within seconds we understand that the Chechen mafia, which has also taken over the market where Sergei tried to sell knives, is about to replace the heterogeneous space of transculturation with its dark double—sexual commodification and exploitation. In a sense then, *bolse vita* reverts to the *dolce vita,* as a sign saying "Sex Shop," in monolingual English and uniform, machine-written letters, is lowered over the hand-drawn Italian, Russian, and orthographically Hungarian, Bolse Vita sign. Sex sold by the mafia serves as a precise metaphor for, and an all too literal product of, the return of the repressed binary Cold War paradigm in the form of a "globalization" that combines the worst of both empires—"Western" commodification and "Eastern" strong-arm enforcement.

More subtle is the implication that this is also the paradigm of the nation-state, with its militarized borders and top-down governmental apparatus, resulting in the sexualized domination, homogenization, and atomization of diverse inhabitants and histories that might otherwise engage and nourish one another. Both Yura and Maggie complain that "at home" people never talked to each other.

Henri Lefebvre links the space of sexual objectification with the space of violence, conflict, and destruction, the space that "subsumes and

unites scattered fragments or elements by force." That is, connections and relationships that are generated by—and depend upon—difference are destroyed, and difference itself is denied in the insistence on a logic (and politics) of isomorphism. This "abstract space" underwrites bureaucratization, militarization, ultranationalism, and commodification alike. "Over abstract space reigns phallic solitude and the self-destruction of desire," notes Lefebve.[15] The Sex Shop is the perfect exemplification of abstract space's destruction/commodification of the desire for human interaction.

Sergei's anonymous death at the hands of an unseen mafia sharpshooter continues this montage, which culminates in a sequence of shots of Vadim playing the saxophone in wintry solitude on the banks of the Danube River intercut with documentary footage of riots and war. The images of violence keep returning to the image of the solitary Vadim, whose only audience—since the takeover of the Bolse Vita and his refusal to join Yura and Maggie in England—is the collection of atomizing Soviet-era housing projects seen on the other side of the river. Violence may be "hot" or "cold," the shelling of a city or the building of one; either way it amounts to, and could be defined as, the destruction of creative, interactive relationships. The shots of militarized conflict emphasize the destruction and desecration of social space: water cannons scatter civilians, tanks lumber through a graceful cityscape, rural landscapes are clotted with military personnel, a man cries as he is forced down a road at gunpoint, city streets are filled with men shooting each other, civilians walking along a sunny street abruptly scatter as they come under mortar fire. Four men are forced to risk death as they rescue a fifth who has been wounded in another fierce urban battle. Another group of men face the traumatic task of loading a bloody, headless corpse onto a truck. A blind man taps his way through the ruined streets of the formerly multicultural Sarajevo. Graffiti on the wall of a refugee dormitory equates the current situation in Albania with Bangladesh. Finally, an Albanian woman with a baby in her arms cries "You are our Europe" as she is turned back at a border. Even though each shot, taken on its own, works as an empirical example of the kinds of violence Lefebvre links with "abstract" space, the sequencing of so many different circumstances, and Fekete's punctuating blackouts, make the shots interrogative as well. The question of what these images mean—and more important, how we interact with them—does not diminish the horror. But, like an intensification of the space of the Bolse Vita pub, their heterogeneity creates a matrix within which the viewer is included as a participant rather than as a voyeuristic observer. We not only witness these traumatic moments but are also given some agency and responsibility for responding to them.

The final moments of the film—shots of Yura, Maggie, and their three-year-old child on Brighton Beach in 1994—deepen the effect. Three enigmatic shots of the family—gazing inland, gazing seaward (recalling Yura and Vadim in Vladivostok at the beginning of the film), and gazing directly at the spectator—ask that we locate the documentary images of armed violence and the reproductive heterosexual romance in relation to each other, questioning any residual segregation between "battlefield" and "home," "the Balkans" and "Europe," " East" and "West." The cinematic linking of Budapest and former Yugoslavia is not only empirically accurate—the mafiacracies in Budapest were not separable from the paramilitary gangs in the Balkans; the Soviet Kalashnikov rifles we see bought and sold in the Budapest market were certainly destined for use in the south—it is also conceptually illuminating. The powerful visceral image of the corpse with its head blown off tells us little of any analytical usefulness about "what is happening in the Balkans" while the difficulty of interpersonal relationships in Budapest (and Wales, Georgia, Russia, and Texas) speaks volumes. Conversely, quotidian (non)relationships become normalized in ways that obscure their political significance. The headless body and the other graphic images insist that we *look,* and that we *see differently*.

Significantly, it is not subject positions themselves that are at issue. No single character in the film, nor any filmgoer, is called upon to be more intelligent, more virtuous, more in control (either of meaning or of action), or in any way "better" than any other. Indeed, when Vadim begins to identify with the great tradition of Russian musicians and to see his loneliness and isolation in exile as romantic, his collaborative relationship with Yura (which they earlier contrasted with coerced "collectivism") begins to unravel. True to form, the film does not romanticize the nuclear family either. What are at issue are the possibilities of intersubjectivity, including the contexts and communities that enable the offering and receiving of one another's stories. At the time the film's narrative leaves off (1994, during the darkest days of the siege of Sarajevo), neither British nor Hungarian culture, neither the former "West" nor the former "East," seem likely to offer the kind of matrix in which Maggie and Yura could sustain their conversation.

making the walls come down

Fekete's migrants, as I have intimated, do and do not come from geopolitical "margins." Wales, Texas, Georgia, the Urals, as well as Hungary itself, have complex histories vis à vis imperial and national borders. Thus, in its focus on migrants, exiles, and diasporas, *Bolse vita* bears some resemblance to, but also differs from, the "accented" and "outlandish" cinemas analyzed by scholars such as Hamid Naficy and Sandra Ponzanesi.[16] The foreigners taking refuge in Budapest from the solipsism of their homes in the West

were better off than most Hungarians in 1989. None of the characters, from either the "West" or the "East," aspires to acceptance by "Hungarian" society." The radicalism of the film lies less in its use of margins to deconstruct centers than in its discoveries of spaces in which the ontologies and vectors of power are not clear-cut. Histories and subjectivities become less exclusionary, more interactive in these spaces, able to counter the violence of isomorphic atomization on a very fundamental level.

Closer analytically and aesthetically to *Bolse vita* than the migrant cinemas of Western Europe is a charismatic twenty-minute videotape clandestinely made by a group of urban Albanian Kosovars calling themselves Ghetto Art. Directed by talented painter Iliriana Loxha, *Making the Walls Come Down* was created in Pristina in the spring of 1998, in the context of a decade of martial law/occupation under president Slobodan Milosevic (who rescinded the province's autonomous status in 1989), and one year before the bombing of both Serbia and Kosova by U.S.-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces.[17] The hijacking of Kosova *and* Serbia by a violent, intensely militarized, deeply divisive identity politics has proved prophetic of similar hijackings now occurring within nation-states of the West; and the videotape provides precisely the kind of space needed in order for a Western audience to put these mirror-image histories in illuminating relation.

Opening with a fast-paced, computer-graphic-rich montage of Pristina's thriving creative community—"Live Music," "Theatre," "Exhibitions"—*before* the intensification of repression, it represents Pristina as a distinctly good place to be young and gifted. Too soon there is an abrupt change of pace as "And Now" becomes the topic. The clips of young people in motion are replaced by interviews with isolated young men and women—a painting student, a medical student, a musician/composer, a student activist, and an acting student—who appear, by contrast, to be locked in place.

The videotape itself, though, sustains an extraordinary conceptual agility, which it ultimately poses as the essence of nonviolence. Neatly problematizing the Western tendency to equate "Europeanness" with the rule of law and to project "non-Europeanness" on the unruly Balkans (particularly the largely Muslim Kosovars), the medical student exclaims that she and her fellow students never thought the situation could go on for so long—"*not in Europe!*" Shots of students dressing for a demonstration calling for the reopening to ethnic Albanians of the schools and universities from which they have been expelled show chic shoes and slacks reflected in full-length mirrors. Here, as elsewhere, the video mischievously mirrors "us" as it presents "them." The West's projections of the exotic and the unknown onto these hip Europeans becomes a joke that we all share. Though we are, in a sense, being criticized for our orientalizing, we are also being befriended, even flirted with.

Having created this comfort zone, however, the savvy Kosovars go on to insist that they do *not* reflect a familiar face in one fundamental regard. They belong to a culture that historically privileges nonviolence. The student activist defines nonviolence precisely as the practice of overcoming the isolation imposed by polarizing identities as a recognition of the commonality among all who are against genocide, apartheid, torture, and other versions of warfare. The most terrifying kind of war of all, he says, is contemporary warfare in which there are no front lines—no confrontation of armies—but a kind of crazy asymmetrical warfare between armed forces and civilians. When he states categorically that he would never pick up a gun, one believes him. By the time he makes this statement, nonviolence has emerged as a logical and effective response to both local and global manifestations of state violence.

A concluding montage—shots of tanks, beatings, shootings, people weeping, dead people, the women's bread march to a blockaded town (Drenica), and artwork about the violence and the violated—is accompanied on the soundtrack by U2's song, "What's In Your Head?" Like Fekete's montage, this sequence configures the relationship between spectator and screen as one of inclusion. What we see *can* and urgently *must* be engaged. "What's in your head?" refers to the viewer, the figures on screen, and the people whose perceptions and decisions have sent the tanks and the guns into the streets. Brilliantly, the videotape creates a virtual community of all these participants, thereby placing us all potentially in the empowering "nonviolent" position of interactivity. Though addressed to Westerners (everyone in it speaks excellent English—another violation/revelation of Western stereotyping), *Making the Walls Come Down* is not an ordinary plea for help but a condensation of hard-won insight offered to its audience in friendship.

It is highly likely that not all the members of the group who documented themselves in the video survived the deportations and bombings carried out by Serb and NATO forces in 1999. Certainly their infrastructure and much of their art were destroyed. Likewise, the sudden flash of the transition in Budapest has faded, indeed had already faded even before Fekete began *Bolse vita*. The possibilities of engagement and agency offered by the transitionists and Ghetto Art, however, are not as vulnerable, and constitute an opening to dimensions of theory and practice that we remain free not to ignore.

notes

1. Ibolya Fekete, interview with the author, February 1997.
2. *Bolse vita*, dir. Ibolya Fekete, prod. Motion Picture Innovation Company and Foundation and ZDF, 1996, 35 mm., 90 min.; distributed on videotape by European Video Distributors and Facets.

3. All this seemed to have little connection with the events just south of Hungary in post-Tito Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia had not been aligned with, or occupied by, the Soviet Union. It had enjoyed a higher standard of living than Britain. And, with borders open to both the East and the West, it had seemed worlds away from the Eastern bloc during the Cold War; see Vida Penezic, "Women in Yugoslavia," in *Postcommunism and the Body Politic*, ed. Ellen E. Berry (New York: New York University Press 1995), 59–60. The months between the end of Communist rule in Hungary and the declarations of independence by Slovenia and Croatia in June 1991 did not witness any radical change in that psychological distance.
4. Marguerite R. Waller, "Hungarian Film Week, 1994," *American Historical Review 99*, no. 4 (1994): 1252–56. An anonymous piece titled "Budapest: Space—Effects," in *Hungarian Film Guide '96* (Budapest: Montasz 2000, 1996), 9, describes Budapest as "a capital in the centre of the Carpathian basin conquered by the Magyars 1100 years ago, a place on the 'highway of peoples,' occupied by different nations for 2000 years, on the Eastern border of the ancient Roman empire and the Western border of the medieval Turkish empire."
5. *Bolse vita* has gone on to win many festival prizes, among them the prize for Best First Film and the Prize of the Foreign Critics at the 1996 Hungarian Film Week, the Prix Europa at the Berlin Film Festival, the Satyajit Ray Prize at the London Film Festival, and the Grand Prize at the Soci Film Festival; see *Hungarian Film Guide '96* and the *Bolse vita* videotape cover).
6. Teshome Gabriel, "Third Cinema as Guardian of Popular Memory: Towards a Third Aesthetics," in *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (London: British Film Institute, 1989) 53–64.
7. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 27.
8. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 21.
9. Ibid., 10.
10. Fekete's use of Budapest in this way ironically references the Hollywood film *Casablanca* (1942), which was directed by Hungarian émigré Michael Curtiz (a.k.a. Mihály Kertész).
11. Gyula Gazdag, conversation with the author, November 1997.
12. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 211–15.
13. Penezic, "Women in Yugoslavia," 73.
14. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 170–74.
15. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1984), 308, 309.
16. See Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Sandra Ponzanesi, "Outlandish Cinema—Screening the Other in Italy," in *Migrant Cartographies: Cultural Travelers and New Literatures in Postcolonial Europe*, ed. Sandra Ponzanesi and Daniela Merolla (Lanham Mass: Lexington Books, 2005).
17. I will herein spell Kosova with an a (the Albanian spelling), echoing the preference of Ghetto Art.

three

playing the western eye

balkan masculinity and post-yugoslav war cinema

tomislav z. longinović

The cinema author finds himself before a people which, from the point of view of culture, is doubly colonized: colonized by stories that have come from elsewhere, but also by their own myths become impersonal entities at the service of the colonizer. The author must not, then, make himself into the ethnologist of his people, nor himself invent a fiction which would be one more private story: for every personal fiction, like every impersonal myth, is on the side of the "masters."

—**Gilles Deleuze,** *Cinema 2*

The cinema of Eastern and Central Europe never managed to develop the industrial dimension characteristic of Hollywood and the rest of the West. Cinema was a priori assigned the role of representing the political, and engaging the poetic function within the context of the ideological debates of the moment. The artistic function and communicative power of film

were appropriated by "the people," whose party officials imagined different types of control over the poetic articulation of political reality.

The communist period began to fade after the dissolution of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia in 1988 and gave way to the interethnic conflict that culminated in the 1991 dissolution of the common South Slavic state. Before that, the foregrounding of politics was mandatory in the arts in general and cinema in particular. In the now erased country of Yugoslavia, the war cinema genre emerged after the communist revolution in the mid-1940s, charged with the task of representing the glory and moral superiority of Tito's partisans in their struggle against different types of foreign and domestic enemies. The demand for realism in the official representation of this originary struggle for Yugoslavia developed out of socialist realism, which was the official doctrine throughout the lands conquered by the communists. In Yugoslavia, cinema developed a specific "national" articulation that would serve as a tool of political separation from the Warsaw Pact countries and Soviet domination. It was not until the 1960s that cinema managed to emerge from overt political control by the party apparatus, which demanded the glorious representation of one's own armed struggle against the Nazi conquest.

The so-called Yugoslav black wave of films in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the reaction to this stifling embrace of the official cultural establishment and its political dictates, requiring strong revolutionary messages from the works of art. The culmination of the protest against this form of political control and struggle against the totality of communist party power was evident in the cinematic creations of directors from this period such as Dusan Makavejev, Zivojin Pavlovic, and Aleksandar Petrovic. The view of proletarian life and working-class struggles was not glorious enough for the officials, who were active in banning the films from this period, deeming them too depressing. However, the new form of political engagement that was to become dominant in later years was already being formulated by these cinema auteurs. It was especially Makavejev's poetics of the absurd that irked the most stubborn agents of Titoist vigilance against ideological deviation, since his film *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (*Misterije organizma*, 1971) created quite a stir in international cinema circles. The global visibility of Yugoslav cinema was enhanced during this period, a fact that would have a significant impact on the later poetic incorporation of the gaze from the outside into the films themselves.

During the 1980s the political waning of communism emerged simultaneously with an increase in the production of apparently apolitical films courting a popular audience and mimicking Hollywood's "B" film production. The proliferation of films like *Tesna Koza* (1982), directed by Mica Milosevic, starring popular singer Lepa Brena (Fikreta

Jahic), was part of the new tur bo folk culture characterizing the years dominated by the politics of Slobodan Milosevic. The Yugoslav low-brow cinema during the 1980s was the first East European attempt to create a new cultural form devoid of any overtly political dimension. By mimicking the industrial relationship to cinema symptomatic of Hollywood, the new nationalists no longer viewed the impact of cinema as part of the ideological enlightenment of "the people" as they spurned communism. Cinema in particular and visual culture in general were recognized for their diversionary value, especially as impending political and social crises loomed large on the horizon. The emergence of ethnic totalitarianism was simultaneous with the lowering of political vigilance characteristic of the communist period.

At the same time, the art cinema of auteurs like Srdjan Karanovic, Emir Kusturica, Goran Markovic, and others picked up the remnants of the absurdist legacy initiated by the black wave, reworking it into a new urban idiom that crossed the boundaries of national cinema and further engaged the global cultural imaginary. Yet, it was not until the 1990s that the full scale of the new war created the conditions for the emergence of films reminiscent of Gilles Deleuze's observation about the doubly colonized author in Third World cinema. Since the wars of Yugoslav succession (1991–95), the national cinema financing had collapsed, forcing most of the cinematographers to seek funding abroad, counting on the visibility potential of the conflict to secure foreign financing for their films. Struggling to break free from the personal/collective dichotomy through a variety of poetic strategies, the directors discussed in this essay elaborate certain representations of men and their temporality as a response both to the local patriotic simplifications of gender relations and the global "Balkanist" view of post-Yugoslav masculinity represented as the major cause of predatory violence.[1]

The position of the auteur in a peripheral cinema often elicits poetic strategies whose ambiguity tends to be misread during the reception process in globally hegemonic cultures. Unable to break from the "ethnological" approach to the lesser-known area of the world, critics and reviewers from dominant cultures often imposed the narratives of the media-driven vision of peripheral ethnoscapes onto complex cinematic texts.[2] Often forced into adopting one or the other moral stand, these gazes tend to structure the overtly Gothic vision of post-Yugoslav reality. One of the most effective strategies for overcoming the domination/submission dichotomy in the global theater has been the incorporation of the dominant view, or what I metaphorically designate the "Western eye" into the poetic texture of cinematic performances. Since the dynamic dialectics between watching and being watched are rooted in a sadomasochistic economy of domination and

submission, the post-Yugoslav war cinema has transformed this mechanism into one of its most powerful esthetic features.

This esthetic is engendered as a response to being watched and classified as a global example of volatile masculinity gone mad. A curious historical fact about this region of the world is that it was featured as an exemplary zone of war and terror by the first film reporting from a war zone in the history of visual media. Its World War I designation as the "powder keg" of Europe owes this reputation to the way in which film footage was used to reproduce the violence of the area for the Western viewer. According to Frank Stern, "Over twenty cameramen filmed the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. By 1913, most Balkan governments had banned filming by foreign correspondents, so the film companies resorted to staging the action—which soon became a media event or pseudo-event. In the Balkan Wars, a Danish cameraman and a British aristocrat who had failed to arrive in time for a deadly battle staged some battles on location."[3]

death by camera: *before the rain* (*pred dozhdot*)

The visual regime of simulated war embraced by the British aristocrat and his Danish cameraman is grounded in the certainty that the Balkan masculine subjects will perform the inevitable historical violence, both as fantasy and as reality. Prodding them into action by staging a battle only enhances the true local color broadcast by the war reporters who were not late in arrival, but played the Balkan war stories for the Western eye. Thematizing this gaze at the war zone, Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* (1994), the least ironic and the most "ethnological" of the films discussed here, features the camera as the deadly weapon of war. Playing into the perception about the inevitable outcomes of masculine rage, the conflict between Slavic Orthodox Macedonians and Moslem Albanians, Manchevski naturalizes the warring ethnoscapes as locations of entrenched fear and hatred, while simultaneously turning the gaze of the Western Eye backward. Refracted through the camera lens, the main protagonist suffers from depression induced by the sadistic violence inherent in the epistemic act of watching.

The lead protagonist of *Before the Rain* is a photographer who earns his living as a Pulitzer Prize–winning war journalist. The role is played by Rade Serbedzija, whose masculine physique requires a separate examination, since it has become a landmark in portraying Balkan and East European characters for the global visual imaginary. Appearing in films ranging from Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) to John Woo's *Mission Impossible 2* (2000) alongside Tom Cruise, this post-Yugoslav actor has played a range of masculine icons, usually of the negative kind. From bad and sleazy in Phillip Noyce's *The Saint* (1997) alongside Val Kilmer, to Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000), Serbedzija's pure physicality has become emblematic of the dangerous yet attractive masculine subject at the end

of the 1990s. In *Before the Rain* Rade Serbedzija plays Aleksandar Kirkov, who decides suddenly to quit his glorious profession and return to his native village in post-Yugoslav Macedonia.

The return of the male hero to the native location has been one of the essential narratives of Western civilization since Homer's *Odyssey*. Manchevski attempts to place his peripheral native land at the very center of the European legacy by featuring the return of his main protagonist to the place of his birth. The real reason for Kirkov's return is a moral ailment, which has caused him to lose his human grounding after an incident during the Bosnian War. The war photographer complains to one of the paramilitaries that things are pretty slow. The paramilitary pulls the prisoner out of the line and points the gun at his head.

"My camera killed a man," says the broken-down Kirkov in a letter to the woman he loves in London. This confession to an English magazine editor underscores his sudden insight into the literal violence of watching and being watched. Divided between the locality he can never fully return to and the professional trajectory ruining his humanity, the exhausted photojournalist attempts to create a temporal bubble inside of the disappearing Yugoslavia as he opens up an old suitcase.

Inside the shabby piece of luggage Kirkov finds a pack of Drina cigarettes and an old issue of the *Nova Makedonija* daily with Tito's picture on the front page. This Yugoslav time capsule brings back the paternal metaphor now gone, since the new masculinities adopt a negative posture toward Tito and his self-management ideals. The soundtrack underscores the cinematic mourning for that which can never be the same, since at that moment the song "Sanjam/Dreaming" by the Sarajevo band Indexi, evoking the beauty of imagination and missed opportunities in love and life, begins to play. The forgotten symbolic father of the disappeared common Slavic state is there only for a fleeting moment, as photographer Kirkov reaches for the red pack of Drinas and lights what is to be his last cigarette.

Yet this episode is symptomatic neither of restorative nor reflective nostalgia, since Kirkov can no longer see a way out of the time warp he finds himself in.[4] As the new ethnic totalities loom large on the horizon, the main hero of the film realizes his life is only possible inside the temporal bubble, which will burst under the pressures of the new ethnic temporality. Kirkov is saying goodbye to his own life, since the violence of the new time of the nation will soon teach him a lesson, as the predictable course of ethnic imagination brings him closer to his tragic end. Those who return face the new time enforced by brothers who no longer have a symbolic father, left to untie the common fabric of the conflicted legacy of Tito.

It is interesting that the film does not dwell on the current leaders as paternal ideals but envisions different ethnoscapes through the

ancient religious buildings. The camera associates Macedonians with frescoes and icons in an Orthodox monastery on the shores of Lake Ohrid, while ethnic Albanians inhabit a location that is introduced by a panoramic shot of a minaret, repeating the story of how new ethnicities are also about the return to the very old temporality, the ancient roots that have undermined the ideology of secular Yugoslavism.

The unmediated hatred between the formerly brotherly ethnicities is produced through the violent rites performed by men who preclude the crossing of symbolic borderlines resting on differences between languages and religions. The friendship between the Albanian girl Zamira and the Macedonian monk Kiril is opposed by the angry men led by Mitar, who performs the heroic masculinity of the nineteenth-century holy orthodox warrior against Islam, even articulating it in a quarrel with monks who try to stop his posse from capturing Zamira: "And what about five centuries under the Turks?"

This heroic masculinity evokes the return of medieval times, calling for revenge for all the past injustices, real or imagined. Therefore, the Albanians are figured as surrogate victims for the oppression due to the Islamic culture they share with the Ottomans. On the other hand, the Albanian men, lead by Zamira's grandfather, end up killing her for transgressing and consorting with a man outside her ethnic group. It is as if the Romeo and Juliet narrative had been transposed from the fictional temporality of Shakespeare's age to yet again confirm that the Balkans are more central to "Europe proper" and its historical imaginary than what Europe is able and willing to see in the media reports about Yugoslav conflicts. The ethnic pride of men previously castigated by the declarative internationalism of communist ideology becomes central to the return of new/old temporality.

underground: the hysteria of history

The most original auteur to emerge within the poetic paradigm responding to the gaze of the Western Eye is certainly Emir Kusturica. His film *Underground* (1997) became emblematic of the region's complex relationship to history, politics, and gender issues, polarizing both audiences and the critical establishment. For example, most of the supporters of Western interventionism in the Balkans, like the French "new philosopher" Alain Finkelkraut, read the film as the covert endorsement of Slobodan Milosevic's nationalist politics.[5] The most bizarre of these ideological indictments came from none other than the former compatriot of Kusturica's, the notorious Slovene theorist Slavoj Zizek, who accused Kusturica of "reflexive racism," labeling *Underground*'s creator as the subject "celebrating the exotic authenticity of the Balkan Other." It turns out that this "Balkan Other" is none other than the overtly masculine Serb, exhibiting a "prodigious lust for life" denied to the "inhibited, anemic West Europeans."[6]

Kusturica's poetics-of-war cinema is hardly celebrating any kind of identity, since *Underground* foregrounds a deep suspicion of political master narratives. Instead, the focus is on aspects of destiny that foreground the absurdity of Yugoslav "brotherhood" and unity. Forced into nomadic performances, the humans are represented as guinea pigs inhabiting a series of falsified historical realities imposed from both inside (fascists, communists, nationalists) and outside of the Yugoslav imagined community (Germans, the United Nations, etc.).

The film opens up with the Nazi bombing of Belgrade in 1941 and closes with the 1991 civil war between the former "brotherly" nations of Yugoslavia, spanning half a century of history at a hysterical pace. The story focuses on the evolving relationship between the two overtly masculine Serbs (Marko and Crni "Blackie") and their "brotherly" adventures, as they negotiate the unpredictable and rapidly insane course of historical events. Their initial reaction to the Nazi bombing (filmed mainly through the reaction of animals in the Belgrade Zoo) is less than predictable: Marko masturbates as the bombs fall around him, while Blackie chews on the electric cord out of rage. This initial "animalization" through sex and violence as a response to the German invasion and occupation is engaging the Western eye by playing back the obscene truth about Europe itself, constructing the symbolic zone of lesser humanity in its own Eastern and Southern peripheries. The Balkans in general, and the former Yugoslavia in particular, had been transformed into a metaphor for this lack of civilized behavior during the 1990s.[7]

Using the perpetual shifting between the frame of the cinema as the realm of the imaginary and the "documentary" footage of bombings and invasions, Kusturica engages in "playing" our sense of the real and involves the viewer in the fundamental deception of the subject by laughing at human cruelty and gullibility. The history of post–World War II Yugoslavia is told through the tale of the two weird "brothers" who assert their excessive masculinity by lying, cheating, and trying to kill each other, which exaggerates their bizarre relationship to lay bare the fundamental lie of communist identity. The heroic feats of Crni's revolutionary masculinity, trapped inside the basement of Marko's red bourgeois villa, represent the way "the people" were entrapped by the lies of their party leaders. Crni is the leader of the revolution in another time warp created by his "best man" Marko, who is enjoying the lifestyle similar to those wealthy Westerners who are the supposed enemies of the people's revolution, while professing the ideology he does not adhere to himself. The perception of their humanity is structured as an entity tarnished by a series of ideological shifts that they have been forced to endure as a result of foreign invasions and domestic self-colonization by virtue of the Titoist version of communism. The heroic

image of Tito's resistance fighters during World War II promoted by the Yugoslav cinema during the socialist period is transformed into the image of profit and thrill-seeking gangsters, while the invading Nazis are trivialized through the character of Franz as a bunch of displaced imbeciles unable to comprehend the local mores and passions.

The artificiality of the film's plot is underlined by the silent-film intertitles and the exaggerated acting style, which transforms the Yugoslav subject into a cross between animal and cartoon, evoking laughter almost immediately from audiences. Kusturica develops the cinematic ethnoscape as the violent masculine reaction to the fact that this subject now performs on the stage of history, being watched by a global audience. The performativity of the masculine evolves in a temporality of infinite deception, underscored by the "stealing of time" inside *Underground*'s basement. Marko charges one of his agents in the basement to turn back the large wall clock while Crni and his people are sleeping.

The noble strivings of heroic freedom fighters are replaced by the comically exaggerated outbursts of the characters, aware of their own farcical status inside the grand narratives of politics and history. Focusing on the animals, especially on a chimpanzee named Sammy, Kusturica reifies the dominant gaze of the averagely informed Western subject, who constantly displaces the humanity of a war-enveloped subject either by the liberal "concern" for the victim and "intervention" to restore the proper human order, or by the conservative dismissal of and separation from the Balkan subject as the agent of "ancient ethnic hatreds." It is the use of Sammy in the shot–reverse shot technique during dialogues with the stuttering zookeeper (Slavko Stimac) and Crni in search of his drowned son that fully rounds out this strategy, since the sad monologues of both protagonists are greeted solely by simian hooting and chirping. The comic effect produced by this type of slapstick poetics is haunted by the laughter of those who manipulate our vision of history and reality. The Western eye is the silent witness of the evil that turns the average viewer into a stupefied news consumer witnessing a crime.

Supplemented by the play-within-a-play structure of the film narrative, *Underground* evokes the hysteria of history as a process of perpetual deception, perpetrated by both domestic myths and imported techno-ideologies. Modernity is seen as a force detrimental to the subject, the evil that breaks down the humanity of the characters. Lies structure reality and promote deception in order to serve those who tell them. Between the pressures of time and its unreality, the subject emerges as damaged, yet free from excessive moralizing. The question of identity as a stable identification with any political and national ideal is posed by the hysterical performances of characters caught in the violent web

of historical deceptions. *Underground* assembles their roles as barriers against the tide of overwhelming temporal twists.

fear of mocking: *bure baruta* (*cabaret balkan*)

Goran Paskaljevic released his film *Bure Baruta* (*Cabaret Balkan*), based on a theater play by young Macedonian playwright Dejan Duvoski, in 1999, the same year that U.S. president Bill Clinton started his air war to save Kosovo from the Serbs. This film features masculine time outside civilization, where men engage in mutual destruction in the city under the impending intervention. Before embarking on this frantic cab ride through Belgrade, the master of ceremonies, whose masculinity seems complicated by his effeminate mannerisms, turns to the audience behind the camera and asks, "Why do you laugh? Because I'm different? Because I'm a freak? Well, then welcome! Tonight, I'll fuck with you, children!"[8]

This is the most explicit poetic reference to "playing" the Western eye, in a negative sense underlying the intentional deception of the auteur involved in a cinematic escape from the ethnographic representation of his people. The intentional identification with the Western mis(perception) of local identities is used as a basis for a performance of cruel uncertainty, where lies and truths are no longer distingushable. The nation is reduced to an assemblage of violent men, who have internalized their identity as a menace brought about by historical and political forces beyond their reach or understanding. This cinematic assemblage is conceived of not as an emblematic representative of the time and space of the nation but as a repeatable series of singular events connected only by the location. The local space is bared of any particular national meanings as it begins to function as a supreme signifier of global violence during the 1990s. Time and space are constructed as a consquence of this violence, which begins and ends with the processes of watching and being watched.

The constant blare on the taxicab radio is the first sign of local temporality after the master of ceremonies finishes a prologue foreshadowing the theater of cruelty that is to come. The transitory temporality of Belgrade subjected to ongoing outside negotiations provides the background to the promise of the ultimate orgy of masculine rage. The film's original title, *Bure Baruta*, refers to the proverbial powder keg, whose explosive effects were featured by the film crews outside the Balkans. The position of being watched by the West through the camera eye requires the common masculine subject to perform some exceptional act beyond good and evil. It is an automatic invitation to desublimate civilizational prohibitions, opening up the abyss of fraternal hatred. The loss of subectivity under new temporal demands brings men to the edge as they engage in the torturer/victim game of mutual annihilation.

Belgrade resembles a human zoo, where the secret passions of its male inhabitants are openly displayed. Simultaneously, the artifice of the cabaret performance questions the reality of violence, turning it instead into yet another artistic device. There is a strong implication that the disjointed narrative of the film is held together by the perverse enjoyment of the implied viewer, imagined as the agency framing the film narrative. Unlike other war films about the time space of the Yugoslav 1990s, which refer to the violent location through the mediating point of view of the Western subject—the foreign correspondent in *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (*Lepa sela lepo gore*, 1996), directed by Srdjan Dragojevic, or a United Nations aid worker in *No Man's Land* (*Nikogarsnja zemlja*, 2001), directed by Danis Tanovic—*Bure Baruta* creates a claustrophobic effect by leaving the viewer in the grip of misdirected masculine rage without any reflection from the outside. It is the gaze of the camera that stands for the absent addressee of the freaky cabaret master of ceremonies, framing the narrative with a sense that performance and reality are interchangeable in this outlawed location.

Besides the constant drone of the car radio's news about the unsuccessful negotiations happening abroad, the outside is present in the first episode of this omnibus film through the return of Mane (Miki Manojlovic) with a load of German marks to try and win back his only true love. He hires a taxi, which becomes the other narrative device that brings together the destinies of the film's protagonists; it is transformed into the vehicle of cinematic temporality, providing the connective tissue for the random wondering of the camera through the urban ethnoscape of the last Yugoslav capital city. Mane is a diasporic subject whose noble feelings obviously arose abroad, while the taxi driver is decidedly imagined through the prism of Balkanist masculinity. He immediately declares his national feelings: "Fuck this country!"

The taxi driver is soon revealed as a perpetrator of an assault on a police officer, whom he intentionally disables by breaking his bones, one by one, with a hammer. The violence happens off camera; we see only Mane and the taxi driver talking about it over a beer in a bar. We learn that the police officer had brutalized the taxi driver in the past, when he had caught him having sex in a car as a teenager; the police officer had beaten him with a nightstick and had intentionally struck him in the genitals. This symbolic attempt at castration is emblematic of the story of the volatile masculinity of the perverse subject repeated in different variations throughout the film. Men are vulgar and vile, yet strangely intimate with each other—a sentiment working against their apparent monstrosity.

Caught in cyclical violence visited upon their compromised humanity, the men exchange the roles of victims and victimizers with apparent

indifference, as in a story of two best friends (Dragan Nikolic and Lazar Ristovski) sparring in the boxing ring. It is apparent they have known each other since childhood, yet that closeness has been devastating. One has poisoned the other's dog, while the other has slept with his friend's wife. There are even doubts about the authenticity of fatherhood, since one of the friends implies that his friend's son is really his. The notion of "impure blood" brought about by the ethnic mixing of the Yugoslavs activates the uncertainty about one's progeny, since the story of a unitary origin is compromised through the intimacy of masculine subjects, the proximity imposed on them by external circumstances.

On the other hand, the women characters in *Bure Baruta* are reduced to the role of props as they attempt to escape the volatility of their male counterparts. They seem to be governed by the deep resentment of subjects existing on the other side of proper national identity, completely usurped by the enforced masculine domination. As their lives begin to crack under sanctions and isolation, one of the friends is even willing to forgive the other by openly degrading his own wife: "Well who cares, she's just a woman." In this world permeated by masculine resentment and rage, women are always escaping the role of genetic commodity; they are allowed subjecthood only insofar as they can be inseminated by the national male; and their destiny is often subject to the contingencies of male bonding. They are cast in the roles of either victims of violence or innocent bystanders, forced to participate in the displays of masculine rage and frustration. Ana, for example, is forced to ride on a city bus abducted by a disgruntled passenger brandishing a knife, who makes her spread her legs in front of an older man in front of other passengers. "Can you get it up?" he keeps asking the old man, until the driver of the abducted bus, a Bosnian refugee, knocks the perpetrator over the head with a crowbar—likely, the viewer would think, killing him.

It is interesting that the man with the knife begins his rampage by questioning an elderly lady (Milena Dravic) about how deep her memory of collective victimization goes: "Do you remember life under the Turks?" When she declares that she has no memory of the Turks, the young thug continues, "But you must remember the Germans." His questions are ironic and rhetorical, at once mocking the historical imaginary of the nation and insulting the woman with the invocation of her age. As in the other cultural formations symptomatic of nationalism, there is a strong metonymic link between these women and the imaginary body of the people, ravaged by the infantile reactions of the men they are forced to accommodate.

In this manner the women of the film are not simply abused, but once again placed on the outside of the national as possible causes for

masculine volatility and violence. This outside is transitory and prone to treason. Always part of the imaginary of minor nations, the woman becoming the enemy of the people is a perpetual possibility. Like the character of Natalija (Mirjana Jokovic) who is forced to escape the volatility of Marko, Crni, and Franz, women are constructed as simultaneously incidental and central to the erection of ethnic pride by the men of the nation. It is as if masculine muscle always depends on this unreliable agent of imagined genetic reproduction. Incidentally, the woman Mane (Miki Manojlovic) pursues in *Bure Baruta* is also named Natalija; she is a disgruntled musician who never made it into the Belgrade Symphony. In a grand final gesture, Mane hires the entire symphony to come to the shores of the Danube and serenade her, a woman he had abandoned when he left the country. Natalija is another metonymic device for a lost country and its noxious influence on any form of nostalgic longing for any return. Mane's return from abroad with handfuls of German marks is what allows him a luxury of trying to conquer her again, but he is only clubbed by her less-then-masculine lover Kosta. Mane's affair with Yugoslavia ends with his drowning—a tragedy, just like all the other stories about volatile masculinity in *Bure Baruta.*

The two wrestling friends continue to drink together, until Lazar Ristovski's character stabs Dragan Nikolic with a broken bottle and kills him in the shower. The murder is the result of the stifling proximity between the two men, whose ambivalent attachment is symptomatic of the entire nation of men forced into roles they did not choose to play. The perversity of the national imaginary is exposed as an effect of the global gaze. Men of the nation relish their hate for each other to satisfy their deep urge for domination, awakened by the fact that they are being watched. Yet this abject bond that continues to drive them to further destruction and annihilation is also implicitly characteristic of the global subject who finds meaning in watching the effects of masculine rage gone wild.

postscript

These films are the symptoms of an internalized culture of "self-Balkanization" articulated by the auteurs as a response both to the exclusion of their native locations from the Western vision of civilization and an implicit critique of the domestic glorifications of righteous uses of violence. The experience of being watched by the West has reduced the repertoire of available masculine images worthy of being played back to its distant visual source. Characterized by the hopeless repetition of masculine stereotypes, these films represent the post-Yugoslav space as a zone where distortions of extreme passions strive to satisfy the imaginary demand for violence coming from the Western Eye.

notes

1. Maria Todorova, in her seminal study *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 14, describes the entrenched Western view of the Balkan masculine subject as "uncivilized, primitive, crude, cruel, and without exception, disheveled," an integral part of the Balkanist discourse of European semialterity.
2. I have used the term ethnoscapes as developed in Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1996), 33–34, to denote the human landscape of the "shifting world" that is displacing the identities produced by the imaginary efforts of the nation-state.
3. Frank Stern, "Screening Politics: Cinema and Intervention," *Georgetown Journal of International Studies 1*, no. 2: 4.
4. Svetlana Boym, in *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic, 2001), classifies nostalgia as either restorative or reflective.
5. For a detailed discussion of Kusturica's reception by the French "new philosophers" Levi and Finkelkraut, see Stern, "Screening Politics."
6. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute* (London: Verso, 2000), 5.
7. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), and Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić, eds., *Balkan as Metaphor* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), for theoretical elaborations of the historical and political relationship between the European center and its multiple peripheries.
8. Andrew Horton, "Laughter Dark and Joyous in Recent Films from the Former Yugoslavia," *Film Quarterly 56*, no. 1 (2002) establishes a connection between Bob Fosse's *Cabaret* (1972) and *Cabaret Balkan* in using the form of the low brow performance of the cabaret to speak to the totalitarian violence.

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four

the politics of representing gender in contemporary polish cinema and visual art

elżbieta h. oleksy

The first years of this new millennium brought an interesting debate on the representations of gender in Polish cinema. Grażyna Stachówna's "Suczka, Cycyfon, Faustyna i inne" discusses the roles women played in Polish films during the transition decade (1990–2000).[1] While her discussion of feminine stereotypes in recent Polish film harks back to Molly Haskell's seminal study,[2] Stachówna does not relate these visualizations to social developments but rather to the fact that in Poland (as arguably elsewhere) men own the film industry. She notes that men "are the absolute owners of mass imagination . . . [they] write film scripts; they are producers. . . . a Male value system, male interests impact the choice of themes and problems; male sensitivity permeates the film style; male dreams and longings, male stereotypes, male fears and frustrations are presented on screen directly or obliquely."[3]

This may well be so. However, it should also be kept in mind that Stachówna discusses the decade when Polish women, for the first time since the mid-nineteenth century, organized themselves for change. The 1990s boasted an unprecedented growth of women's organizations

and women's studies programs. Additionally, toward the end of that decade the phenomenon of the "city single," a professional woman who puts off family ties for a career, began to threaten family values in the most Catholic of all European nations. The spectrum of negative female roles that Stachówna discusses in her essay may well reflect the archetypal male fears and fantasies which Western feminist film scholarship has discussed for over three decades, but it also testifies to the actual fear that women might be taking over in the professions and posts previously reserved for men.

In a complementary article, Mirosław Przylipiak builds on Stachówna's argument to suggest that representations of men don't fare much better in Polish film. Whereas Stachówna's examples focus on one decade, Przylipiak targets the whole history of postwar Polish productions. He concludes that the fundamental weakness of the Polish man on screen rests on a "lack of identity, uncertainty about his identity, which leads to multiple identities or a split identity."[4]

The undeclared war against Polish women that emanates from the films that Stachówna discusses, and the masculinity crisis permeating those that Przylipiak analyzes, curiously bring to mind two influential books written by Susan Faludi, *Backlash* and *Stiffed*.[5] Faludi argues that the fear articulated in the oft-quoted question of NBC correspondent Maria Shriver—"'Is this surge in infertility the yuppie disease of the '80s?'"[6]—shaped the tenor and content of numerous American journalistic endeavors of the 1980s and early 1990s and, in turn, influenced Hollywood's portrayal of women. Likewise, the Polish film industry received the incentive to produce backlash films in the 1990s from other media—notably, press and television—but also in reaction to rising financial insecurity. Not confined by the journalistic code of verisimilitude, Polish films took to shaping their celluloid women at ease, distorting and demonizing their portraits for commercial purposes.

Distortion is one of the key concepts mobilized in the study of gender and representation. Whereas North American (as well as some European) feminist media scholars call for more realistic images of women and definitions of femininity, other European critics contend that this call per se is problematic, for "arguing for more realistic images is always an argument for the representation of 'your' version of reality."[7]

At the heart of this discussion is the contention that gender is a *relation*, not a *thing*.[8] Conceptualizing gender as a thing—that is, as a stable and identifiable difference between women and men (practiced in some feminist transmission models of communication)—neglects both the dynamic nature of gender and its cultural and historical specificity. For example, Western feminist theoreticians take gender as a starting point for the analysis of oppression. Numerous film and media studies scholars have used the Freudian-Lacanian scenario as a key element in

patriarchal culture, which displays woman as spectacle—to be looked at, subjected to the (male) gaze.[9] This standpoint was initially problematized in the United States by lesbian feminists and, subsequently, by African-American theorists, who pointed out that the psychoanalytic model of spectatorship blocked out other considerations and, through reinforcing white middle-class values and norms, tended to reproduce the categories of the oppression of women. Similar reservations were expressed in East European feminist scholarship before 1989 and, subsequently, during the period of transformation.[10]

In this essay I will examine the politics of representing gender in Polish visual culture with a special emphasis on the strategies of resistance to particularly confining images of men and women. Since gender is linked to representation, it will be analyzed on two levels, as delineated by the feminist epistemologist Sandra Harding: (1) as a *dimension of personal identity*, and (2) as the *basis for normative values*.[11] On the second level, gender is explored as a system that produces socially enacted meanings, representations of masculinity and femininity that, in this context, are intersected with issues of nationality and religion.

The growing need to see not only women but also men as gendered and to discuss representations of masculinity in a variety of social, political, economic, and linguistic contexts has prompted a heightened research interest in men's issues and practices in the last two decades,[12] recently also in Poland.[13] The analysis of representations of masculinity in Polish media reveals a paradoxical absence of men. Although they often appear in political, economic, and sports events or in crime reporting, men are not given any meaning as gendered in these contexts; they generally remain either transparent or concealed behind deeply rooted cultural and social stereotypes. Furthermore, whereas an explicitly gendered approach to men's practices is infrequent, most media coverage validates the ideal of hegemonic masculinity. The images of men firmly uphold traditional beliefs about gender construction and refuse to acknowledge the fluidity and continuity of regimes of identification.

The preoccupation with men's violence in the media and the scanty coverage of other aspects of men's lives are inferential of the constituents of the ideology of masculinity dominant in Poland. This kind of representation asserts the stereotype of men for whom "the experience of violence is . . . *routine*" and "is essentially part of that which is constitutive of the category of men."[14] A passive reproduction of popular opinions enables the media to stay outside the discussion on gender politics and to avoid a direct involvement in the debate on the cultural and societal conditioning of men. This repetitive use of approaches that are "static, and unable to explain a real situation which is continually changing and developing"[15] makes it difficult to identify those factors that have

formative influences on gender construction and representation. The absence of an explicit interest in men's issues allows the media to stay away from sociopolitical debates on gender equality and, consequently, the performative diversity of masculinities.[16]

There have been very few attempts in Polish cinematography to problematize masculinity. The most freavently performed and ritualized masculinity is that of the romantic hero in all its variants—as warrior, insurgent, and dissident, as well as parodies of these representations in contemporary cinema. The Polish man on screen, according to Michael Stevenson, "comprises on the one hand a messianic purity of purpose in order to defend Poland to the last, and, on the other hand, a certainty that this attempt would always end in failure."[17] This kind of reductive masculine ideal is deeply rooted in Polish history. Poland was subjected to foreign invasions, occupations, and alien rule for almost two centuries. First partitioned in 1772 between neighboring Austria, Prussia, and Russia, it regained independence in 1918, only to lose it again in 1939 to the occupying Nazis. And for over forty years following World War II, Poland, along with several other countries of Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe, was economically and politically under Soviet domination—the period that, in the popular imagination, functioned as an extension of the foreign rule.

Participation in uprisings during partitions, in resistance to the Nazis during World War II, and in opposition to the communist authorities inter alia throughout the legal and clandestine phases of the Solidarity movement constituted the rite of passage to politically disempowered Polish men. A close look at Polish film fully supports the opinion that in the representation of men, "the threat of extermination [is combined] with the threat of castration; the struggle for independence with the struggle for masculinity. . . . Generations of Polish men had to choose between the struggle, which would surely lead to physical liquidation, and submission to the oppressor, which would certainly result in symbolic castration."[18]

There are abundant examples of such visualizations of men in the history of Polish cinema; we need only to mention the protagonist (played by Zbyszek Cybulski, known as the Polish James Dean) of Andrzej Wajda's three-part World War II trilogy, *Pokolenie* (*Generation*, 1954), *Kanał* (*Canal*, 1956), and *Popiół i diament* (*Ashes and Diamonds*, 1958). Later decades bring a parody of the Polish hero in Andrzej Kotkowski's *Obywatel Piszczyk* (*Citizen Piszczyk*, 1988) and Juliusz Machulski's *Seksmisja* (*Sexmission*, 1984). All these characters undergo, however, a dramatic or humorous rite of passage; they function in the war or a warlike reality where their masculinity is put to test.

When the threat of oppression disappeared in 1989, the filmic representations of Polish men changed. A typical example of the "new man"

is the hero of a pair of films made by Władysław Pasikowski with the titles *Psy* (*Dogs*, 1992) and *Psy 2—Ostatnia krew* (*Dogs 2: Last Blood*, 1999). The secret policeman Franz Mauer (Bogusław Linda), whose name curiously suggests a German rather than a Pole, tries to come to grips with the new situation (the film is set at the beginning of the transition decade), and he does so by committing violent acts, including violence against women. This movie and many other productions of the 1990s were *films policier* and gangster films. In Poland—as, arguably elsewhere—such films were characterized by brutality, rough language, and the absence (or negative portraits) of women.

The only film that does not adhere to such logic is a Polish candidate for the Academy Award, Magdalena Piekorz's *Pręgi* (*Scars*, 2004), which is comprised of two parts. In the first, set in the 1980s, Wojtek (Wacek Adamczyk), a boy of twelve, is reared by Father (Jan Frycz). Father is a religious fanatic and an excessively demanding, brutal parent, who wants Wojtek to be a perfect version of himself. He regularly abuses the boy verbally and beats him with a black whip. Wojtek is on the alert day and night—watching, listening, waiting. He invents ways to escape punishment—for example, sleeping all night on a tile bathroom floor, spreading his body on a window frame, or running away to spend the night at a friend's house. One day he escapes permanently, never to see his father again.

In the decades of the pronounced crisis of Polish cinema, this film merits praise on several counts. The acting—by both adults and children—is superb, and this is refreshing to see, for historically children have generally not performed well in Polish film. *Pręgi* is a low-budget movie that takes the wind out of the argument, often made by directors, that Polish cinema would perform much better if granted millions of Euros. Above all, *Pręgi* is a daring film in the way it depicts moral and religious hypocrisy. The father's bigotry manifests itself in the harassment of Wojtek and, simultaneously, in taking prodigious care of the boy's "soul"; Wojtek studies religion and regularly goes to church to confess his sins. The priest who takes his confessions is not interested in Wojtek's imperfections; he keeps asking the boy about "dirty thoughts and impure deeds." The first part of the film evidently condemns, in the words of one commentator, "false patriarchs and false priests . . . religions of plastic figures, empty inside, the pornography of the confessional, a black whip which constitutes the nerve of the relationship between father and son."[19]

This message of *Pręgi* is compromised in the second part of the film, which takes place eighteen years later. Thirty-year-old Wojtek is now a speleologist, a writer of articles for magazines, and a recluse. The segment opens with a scene in which Wojtek beats up a colleague; and here it is evident that his father still has a hold on his psyche. Religious overtones mix with mawkishness. Father dies of cancer, and

leaves Wojtek an audiotape on which he had recorded a plea for forgiveness. Wojtek now symbolically crucifies himself by running his hand into the nails that he himself planted in an outside window ledge to deter pigeons.

Wojtek is rescued from recollections of his father and from his sadomasochistic self by Tania (Agnieszka Grochowska), a madonna-like woman who, as a deus ex machina, appears in his life. A promising reversal of traditional gender roles at the beginning of their romance (it is she who takes the initiative) gives way to abundant conversations about God and recitations of love poetry. As Bożena Umińska notes, "There has arrived, hooting, a Polish Catholic-metaphysical-metaphorical cinema. . . . So Tania is not a girl but a Holy Mother, who descended into the hero's life in order to save him through love and to reward his sufferings."[20] Allusions to the central national female icon, the Polish Mother, are notorious in Polish cultural texts. She embodies the femininity most valued to the Poles, as she is the personification of patience and altruism. The idea of Polish womanhood is, simultaneously, related to the religious cult of the Holy Virgin and to the heritage of the Polish resistance movement. The Polish Mother was first brought to life as a trope at the end of the eighteenth century, when in an address to women, Tadeusz Kościuszko, the commander in chief of the Polish insurrection against the Russians, euphemistically granted her citizen's rights and defined her public mission.[21] The Polish Mother then starred in revered Romantic poet Adam Mickiewicz's famous invocation to her ("Do matki Polki," 1830) and, with the passage of time, became a trope interwoven into various works, both written and graphic—as in Artur Grottger's drawings and paintings, especially his *Polonia* (1863)—produced during the era of romanticism. Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (*Forefathers' Eve*, 1832)[22] reveals her most powerful representation; here Mrs. Rollison, dressed in mourning clothes in accordance with a prevalent visual representation of the Polish Mother, comes to a palace sequestered by the Russians with a plea to release her imprisoned son. This image returns in several cultural representations of Polish womanhood in films (such as Wanda Jakubowska's *Ostatni etap* [*The Last Stage*], 1948) and plays (such as Leon Kruczkowski's *Niemcy* [*Germans*], 1949) produced after the Second World War. With a brief interval in the early 1950s, when another construction of feminine identity, the superwoman,[23] was propagated by the media, the image of the Polish Mother has remained a constant signifier in what E. Ann Kaplan calls "'Master' Motherhood Discourse."[24] Her body and soul were crucial in constructing narratives and images of the nation.

What is always interesting to audiences (and critics) is not a repetition of being but what may be perceived as oppositional threads to mainstream culture. In Poland, the first attempt to complicate the dominant

stereotype of Polish womanhood was made by Andrzej Wajda in *Człowiek z marmuru* (*Man of Marble*, 1977). In opposition to the prevalent opinion among Polish film critics that this film attempts to "masculinize" the image of Polish women, I have argued that it is a transgressive text, in opposition to the dominant discourse of the Polish Mother.[25]

Most criticism of *Człowiek z marmuru* centers on how the film narrates the tragic story of one oppressed individual—bricklayer Mateusz Birkut. The story, set in the 1970s with flashbacks to the 1950s is, briefly, this: Agnieszka (Krystyna Janda), a graduate student in film school, sets out on a project that is as ambitious as politically risky: she wants to produce a film about an exemplary worker and a union activist of the Stalinist period, the bricklayer Birkut. She discovers her theme when, while watching some old newsreels, she spots a huge marble statue of a worker—that of Birkut, as she later discovers. Her interviews with the people who knew the man, who is dead by that time, reveal that Birkut was a national hero, whose accomplishment was to lay a thousand bricks in record time. Agnieszka's film shows how Birkut toppled down from his high position as a figure revered by the party functionaries and became a victim of the communist system.

Wajda's film is just another example of the revisionist project—the critique of Stalinism. The uniqueness of this film, compared to others made roughly at the same time, lies in the fact that Wajda assigns the role of a romantic rebel against the system not to a member of the intelligentsia but to a plebeian—a manual worker. Most outstandingly, however, *Człowiek z marmuru* offers the first attempt in Polish postwar productions to openly address the issue of the social construction of gender. The questing heroine, who is the moving force of the narrative, possesses the attributes traditionally associated with men in Polish culture: she is assertive, independent, dynamic, and courageous; she derives her power from her ability to think and live independently; and she is the competent manager of a film crew consisting of four men. Responding to criticism from the *Człowiek z marmuru* film crew that Janda's performance in the film was a "caricature," Wajda said, "I did not agree with this [criticism] for a minute; I wanted for this film to be contemporary not only in the shots and narration but, above all else, in Agnieszka's way of behaving."[26] And Janda confessed that Wajda had communicated to her that she "must act in such a way as to make the viewers love her or hate her. One or the other, doesn't matter, but they mustn't stay indifferent."[27] In one of the early sequences in the film, Agnieszka bends her arm and kisses her hand—a common masculine gesture of defiance. By this wonderful sleight of hand (quite literally), Janda transgresses the assigned role in the script (she apparently introduced the gesture herself) and reconstructs the narrative. She later said that when she had made that gesture she "knew then who

[she] was; [she] had to fight singlehandedly against everybody."[28] What Sharon Willis suggests in reference to transgressive elements of Ridley Scott's 1991 film *Thelma and Louise* very much holds for *Człowiek z marmuru*—namely, that it "remobilizes for women viewers the pleasures of fantasmatic identification with embodied agents of travel, speed, force, and aggression, pleasures that [women] have historically enjoyed in a cross-gender framework."[29] These are the pleasures that, as Laura Mulvey has argued in the context of classical Hollywood cinema, women can enjoy only through identification with men. Willis adds that "the spectacle of women acting like men works to disrupt the apparent naturalness of certain postures when performed by a male body." In other words, *Człowiek z marmuru* offers a rich context in which the "signifiers of freedom and power" of traditionally perceived masculinity *can apply to women*.[30]

As indicated above, responses from the audiences and the critics' opinions after the release of *Człowiek z marmuru* were predominantly negative. Wajda was accused of creating in Agnieszka a masculine figure. Partly in conformity with this response, Wajda made a sequel to *Człowiek z marmuru*. *Człowiek z Żelaza* (*Man of Iron*, 1981) reintroduces Agnieszka (again played by Janda), this time as the incarnation of the Polish Mother, with her eternal black, hooded attire. Agnieszka is now married to Mateusz Birkut's son (Jerzy Radziwiłowicz); one of the witnesses at their wedding is Lech Wałęsa (played by Wałęsa himself), the legendary leader of Solidarity, who is wearing in the lapel of his jacket a pin with the Madonna's face on it. At the wedding, the camera takes this image in a close-up.

In the remainder of this essay I will focus on recent scenarios of resistance to such culturally biased images of Polish women. Meanings, as Annette Kuhn and others have argued, do not reside solely in images; they are "circulated between representation, spectator and social formation."[31] The production of meanings can be analyzed when taking into consideration social and historical contexts, as John Berger does in his historical renderings of the difference between nudity (as being displayed in art) and nakedness (as being oneself)—an issue to which I will return shortly. I also concur with Kuhn that the analysis of images of women in terms of the relationship between representation and sexuality is valid but not always sufficient because, as she notes, "in practice, images are always seen in context; they always have a specific use value in the particular time and place of their consumption."[32] To bring this discussion closer to the Polish context, I will demonstrate what happens to the images of women when an ideology dismantles itself or, as Kuhn says, "effaces" itself and is replaced by another ideology.

In Eastern Europe, the events of 1989 and 1990 (the Round Table in Poland, the Velvet Revolution in the former Czechoslovakia, and the

fall of the Berlin Wall) led to the gradual dismantling of real socialism. The accession of eight East European countries to the European Union (EU), which transpired on May 1, 2004, sealed the process begun with these events. Poland, which is by far the biggest new member state, poses the greatest problems to the EU—both ideological and financial. Despite rapid and quite exemplary economic growth rates in the early 1990s, both the size of Poland and its substantially rural and predominantly Catholic population stall transition processes. Poland brought to the EU the largest percentage of Catholics of all the accession countries, as 96 percent of Poles declare themselves to be Roman Catholics. All new member states, except Cyprus and Malta, could be defined as posttotalitarian quasi-democracies, where the transition from the old to the new system has transpired through the collision of the old system with new democratic elements that randomly modify the old system. Yet Polish conservatism in the ethical sphere, even as it clashes with the influences of Euro-American mass culture, is most conspicuous. Just as the authorities of the Socialist People's Poland made capital of the moral totalitarianism of the Church for their own purposes, so the consecutive governments of the Republic of Poland (presently the Social Democrats, a postcommunist party) reach their political goals by taking advantage of rightist concepts and ideas. Suffice it to say that a relatively high turnout in the European accession referendum with a high positive vote can be attributed to what a commentator in the London *Times* called Pope John Paul II's "partisan pastoral message," saying that "Poland needed Europe and Europe needed Poland."[33]

Popolatry (idolization of John Paul II) runs high in Poland, which is attributed as much to the pope's unquestioned influence on the downfall of communism as to a general absence of figures of authority and exemplary achievers (John Paul II competed for media popularity with Adam Małysz, a phenomenal Polish skier). Thirty years after Mary Daly's *Beyond God the Father* was published,[34] Polish society is struggling with the same dilemmas that she described: the tremendous lobbying power exerted by the Catholic Church against abortion; alliances between the Church and presently leftist political leaders (EU integration being the auction card in their negotiations); the use of pro-life inflammatory language such as *child* for *fetus*, *murder* for *abortion*, and the comparison of abortion to the Holocaust (so much resented by Jewish organizations in Poland and elsewhere). Add to this the total absence of an opposing discourse on the role of the church and religion, the moral hypocrisy of prominent social democrats (including the president and the prime minister) on the issue of reproductive rights and sexuality, and the recent intervention of Polish authorities to include references to Christianity in a draft of the EU constitutional convention, and the picture of the most sizable new member state is complete.

I will add an example. On July, 18, 2003, the court in Gdańsk sentenced a local artist, Dorota Nieznalska, who belongs to the youngest generation of Polish artists, to six months of so-called restricted freedom—she could not leave her city of residence and was assigned community work during this period of time—for having insulted the religious feelings of Poles by exhibiting her work *Passion* (2001) at the Gdańsk Gallery of Art in December 2001–January 2002. Prior to being exhibited in Gdańsk, *Passion* was included in the exhibition *Irreligion* in Brussels, and also at an exhibition of women's art in New York. The work is an installation consisting of a Greek cross (four beams of equal length, unlike the *crux immissa*, the Latin cross with a longer bottom beam, usually identified with Christ's crucifixion) and, attached to it, a photograph of part of the male body with the genitals. In the background a video shows a close-up of a man's face, as he is working out in a gym. Clearly, in this project Nieznalska criticizes various disciplining practices of bodybuilding that men succumb to in order to meet the masculine ideal present in advertisements and men's magazines (many of them either imported from the West or Polish remakes inspired by Western models). Nieznalska is well aware of the potential for violence against women inherent in such practices.

Nieznalska's works belong to a current of critical art that came into existence after 1989. It was preceded by various projects of decolonizing the female body (along with some experiments to degenderize it) carried out by well-established Polish women artists, such as Magdalena Abakanowicz, Alina Szapocznikow, and, recently, Joanna Wiszniewska-Domańska. However, only the most recent years have witnessed an outpouring of creative energy employed in the deconstruction of oppressive representations of femininity and equally oppressive renditions of hegemonic masculinity. The polemicizing aesthetics of such work attempts to counter the scenarios of helplessness that are involved in the act of women looking at women displayed as art. These women's pictures disempower the scopophilic gaze by "sinking into the muck and mire of physiology,"[35] documenting women's suffering and humiliation and showing women's bodies age and endure childbirth, abortion and disease.

For further discussion, I have chosen Alicja Żebrowska's *Original Sin* (1994), which is an intertextual exercise. Żebrowska's point of departure is Praxiteles's *Venus*, where the subject covers her breasts and genitals with hands in such a way as to arouse the viewer's curiosity about these bodily parts; another intertext for Żebrowska's project is Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866). She creates, in a sense, a postscript to this painting by placing within the frame not the lower parts of the woman's body but only the vagina. The action (the work is a video installation) performed in a few consecutive sequences is limited

to things "done" to this vagina: first we see the pulsating flesh, then the act of its penetration, and finally the birth of a Barbie doll. The work elicits a certain unease inherent in both looking at it and trying to describe it. The viewer is forced to absorb the images that belong to the realm of the "unshowable." They reside outside the limits of commonly available visual space.

Julia Kristeva's concept of the "abject" in her book *Powers of Horror* may be adduced when viewing Żebrowska's work, because Kristeva identifies abjection not only with the feminine but also with the maternal (the feminine body, the womb). The abject, she claims, does not "respect borders, positions, rules" and "disturbs identity, system, order." The purification of the abject rests, argues Kristeva, with "that catharsis *par excellence* called art."[36] This aspect of her theory has attracted theorists of the horror film such as Barbara Creed, who argues that the "central ideological project" of the horror film is the "work of purification of the abject" because it brings about "a confrontation with the abject [a corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine] in order finally to *eject* the abject."[37] The womb in Żebrowska's project, giving birth to an alien creature, Barbie doll, is depicted as grotesque, thus giving expression to its monstrous nature.

Żebrowska walks a tightrope between art and pornography. But she also gives credit to what Lucy Lippard has described as a "subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose this insult."[38] The strategy of *Original Sin* is to uncover what is supposed to reside outside art, what cannot be shown and seen within the masculine economy. Żebrowska, whose work has often been interpreted as the artist's voice in a debate on the restrictive abortion law of 1993 in Poland, engages in skeptical deconstruction of women's bodies displayed for pleasurable contemplation as aesthetic objects, created with "no other purpose" but "the deployment of the gaze and the brush . . . whose aim was to display as much as possible while meaning as little as possible."[39]

The works of Żebrowska, Nieznalska, and many other East European artists such as Jana Zelibská in the Slovak Republic and Veronika Bromová in the Czech Republic can be perceived as "resisting texts," opposing the oppressive elements constituent of historically based "home" cultures and equally confining elements often imported from other traditions and present in contemporary mass media. Kaplan has defined such texts as those that employ a "deliberately rational/cognitive stance—a stance often associated with the explicitly political text—rather than any specific aesthetic strategies."[40] It has been argued that pungent, angry art (as also, for that matter, political fiction or poetry) attracts critics but evokes little aesthetic pleasure. What Griselda Pollock has argued about such art is that it is notable for its *effect*. She defines this

effect as the way in which a work of art operates within the specific social, political, and economic space and in relation to dominant ideologies of gender; when it "acts upon, makes demands of, and produces positions for its viewers."[41]

The role of the "oppositional gaze," which throughout the 1970s and 1980s belonged to Polish film (notably, to Andrzej Wajda), has in the new democracy been taken over by critical art. It is an art that, on the one hand, responds to the practice of recycling Western forms of presenting women's bodies in mass culture, from advertisements to pinups on posters and in magazines, in an attempt to decolonize the female body and, on the other hand, reacts to the cultural discourse about the Polish Mother.

It may seem paradoxical that despite a decade-long second-wave women's movement in Poland (both grassroots and academic) and booming feminist scholarship, on the one hand, and a scarcity of profeminist critiques of men and masculinities on the other, the only contemporary film that problematizes gender (with the above reservations) is Magdalena Piekorz's *Pręgi*. If the American experience is relevant, however, the reaction to the backlash 1980s resulted in such later films as *Thelma and Louise* (1991), *Erin Brockovich* (2000), and numerous female "buddy films." The Polish audiences' tastes have been changing; degrading images of women no longer incite cheers from filmgoers. One might hope, therefore, that these audiences' demand for more realistic images of women and men will motivate filmmakers to produce films that will lend themselves to progressive interpretations of images of both sexes.

notes

1. Grażyna Stachówna, "Suczka, Cycyfon, Faustyna i inne" [A Nymphette, Ms. Tits, Faustyna and Others], *Kino 7–8* (2001): 38–43; translation from Polish is mine.
2. Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).
3. Stachówna, "Suczka," 38.
4. Mirosław Przylipiak, "Kompleks Piszczyka: Polski mężczyzna na ekranie" [Piszczyk's Complex: A Polish Man on Screen], *Kino 12* (2002): 7; translation from Polish is mine.
5. Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991); Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: William Morrow, 1999).
6. Maria Shriver, quoted in Faludi, *Backlash*, 104.
7. Charlotte Brunsdon, "Feminism and Soap Opera," in *Out of Focus: Writing on Women and the Media*, ed. Kath Davies, Julienne Dickey, Teresa Stratford (London: Women's Press 1988), 149.
8. See Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,

1990); and Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

9. See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC Books, 1972); and Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke, England: Macmillan, 1989), 14-26.
10. See Elżbieta H. Oleksy, Elżbieta Ostrowska, Michael Stevenson, eds., *Gender in Film and the Media: East-West Dialogues* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).
11. See Harding, *Whose Science?*
12. I draw here especially on the findings of the European Research Network on Men in Europe, which brought together men and women researchers from a range of European countries to investigate empirical, theoretical, and political aspects of the gendering of men. For three years between 2000 and 2003, the network examined contemporary representations of men in a project titled The Social Problem of Men and Societal Problematization of Men and Masculinities, funded within the Fifth European Union Framework Programme.
13. See Elżbieta H. Oleksy and Joanna Kazik, "Men, Masculinities and Men's Practices in Poland: Integrating Gender Research," in *Research and Scholarship in Integration Processes: Poland—USA—EU*, ed. Elżbieta H. Oleksy and Barbara Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (Łódż: Łódż University Press, 2003), 109–24; and Jeff Hearn, Keith Pringle, Teemu Tallberg, Elżbieta H. Oleksy, Emmi Lattu, Ursula Müller, Harry Ferguson, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, Voldemar Konga, Irina Novikova, Janna Chernova, Eivind Olsvik, Carmina Ventimiglia, "Newspaper Representations of Men, Masculinities and Men's Practices: A European Perspective," in *Men in the Global World: Integrating Post-Socialist Perspectives*, ed. Irina Novikova and Dimitar. Kambourov (Helsinki: Kikimora, 2003), 191–200.
14. Jeff Hearn, *The Violences of Men* (London: Sage, 1998), 209; emphasis added.
15. Robert M. Blackburn, Bradley Brooks, Jennifer Jarman, "Explaining Gender Segregation," *British Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 4 (2002): 513–36.
16. For a full discussion of men, masculinities, and men's practices in print media, see Elżbieta H. Oleksy and Joanna Kazik, "Paper Maculinities: Media Representations of Men in Poland," in *Representing Gender in Cultures*, ed. Elżbieta H. Oleksy and Joanna Rydzewska (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2004): 169–80.
17. Michael Stevenson, "'I Don't Feel Like Talking to You Anymore': Gender Uncertainties in Polish Film since 1989. An Analysis of Psy (W. Pasikowski 1992)," in Oleksy et al., eds., *Gender in Film and the Media*, 139.
18. Przylipiak, "Kompleks Piszczyka," 18.
19. Bożena Umińska, "'Pręgi' , czli o tym, że matka (Boska) jest lepsza od ojca" [Scars, or How the (Holy) Mother is Better than a Father], online at http://film.onet.pl; translation from Polish is mine.
20. Ibid.
21. Kościuszko said, "The jewel of humankind! The fair sex! I am truly tormented at the sight of your restless concern about the fate of the courageous enterprise which Poles undertake to free the Fatherland. . . . Let me share with you, fellow-citizens, my thought, in which you will find fulfillment of your tenderness and of your public mission. . . . Your brothers, sons, husbands go to battle . . . the blood they shed is for your happiness, women! Stop its flood with your endeavors. I ask you for the love of humankind to make lint and bandages for the army; this sacrifice

of beautiful hands will ease suffering and encourage valor." Tadeusz Kościuszko, quoted in *Sławomira Walczewska, Damy, rycerze i feministki [Ladies, Knights, and Feminists]* (Kraków: eFKa, 1999), 42; emphasis added.

22. See Adam Mickiewicz, *Poems*, trans. J. Lindsey (London: Sylvan, 1957).
23. The label, usually associated with Western postfeminism, was given to the women of the former Soviet Bloc countries in recognition of their attempt to reconcile the "double burden" of housework and a profession.
24. E. Ann Kaplan, *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama* (London: Routledge, 1992), 8.
25. For a full analysis of this topic, see Elżbieta H. Oleksy, "'Women, Don't Interfere with Us; We're Fighting for Poland': Polish Mothers and Transgressive Others," in *Women and Radical Social Change*, ed. Maja Mikula (London: Routledge, in press).
26. Jerzy Płażewski, *Wajda. Filmy [Wajda: Films]* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1996): 71; translation from Polish is mine.
27. Ibid., 72.
28. Ibid., 40–42.
29. Sharon Willis, quoted in Yvonne Tasker, *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1998), 143.
30. Ibid.
31. Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on the Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.
32. Ibid.
33. "A Polish Europe," *Times* (London), June 20, 2003.
34. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon, 1973).
35. Helena Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex. Russian Womanhood during and after Glasnost* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 89.
36. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4, 7.
37. Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993): 14, emphasis added.
38. Lucy Lippard, "Body Art," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976), 125.
39. Carol Armstrong, "Edgar Degas and the Representation of the Female Body," in *The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 223.
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41. Griselda Pollock, "Feminism and Modernism" (1987), reprinted in *Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. Maggie Humm (New York: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1992), 364.

five

voices from another world

feminine space and masculine intrusion in *sedmikrásky* and *vražda ing. čerta*

petra hanáková

There are only two films in the history of Czech cinema that can be regarded as examples of what later came to be called "the implementation of feminist aesthetics" in its medusan, anarchic, freewheelingly subversive form.[1] Both of them were made during the period of the Czech New Wave, when explorations of concepts like *man*, *hero*, and (his) *quest* became crucial for the politicized aesthetic experimentation in art. Yet the basic terms of human condition (the questions of freedom, truthfulness, and heroism) are here often brought back to a markedly conservative framework of the traditional, essentialist gender roles and positions. The New Wave films thus—more often than the movies of earlier periods—generalize the man's story as a universal human story. This context further underlines the "distinctiveness" of the two "female" films discussed in this essay and indicates a certain inaptness of traditional readings for their analysis.[2]

Despite their thematic and stylistic continuity, these two films enjoy different statuses within the historical canon of Czech film: Věra Chytilová's celebrated *Sedmikrásky* (*Daisies*, 1966) ranks among the most renowned works of the New Wave; much less known yet more

striking, Ester Krumbachová's *Vražda ing. Čerta* (*The Murder of Engineer Lesser Devil*, 1970) appears rather as the New Wave's later reverberation, a deferred echo of the experiments of the 1960s condensed into the excessive but still political formalism of a twisted fairytale romance.[3]

While the scenario of *Vražda* can be read as a grown-up, disillusioned, and more sarcastic version of *Sedmikrásky*, they both address the question of female desire and pleasure. Female desire appears in these two cases either as an eruptive, destructive agency or as a cyclic, repetitive, self-denying urge to appropriate the image of perfect femininity. Positioning women as active agents of the story in these two films results in the fragmentation of narrative development and inspires questions about the possibility of storytelling that would elude the standard oedipal scenario.

There is also, in the linguistic strata of both films, an almost obsessive focus on the nonsensical, liberating aspect of the female (mis)use of the language that is revealed as "man-serving," not belonging to women. Language here is expropriated, denaturalized, stripped of its power to define the position of women in discourse; it gets broken, preempted, deprived of meaning and determination. In the space of these women-centered stories the power of patriarchal language not only wilts but also starts to work in the service of this specifically feminine conspiracy.

I want to offer here an alternative reading that focuses on the vicissitudes of female narrative and on the role of linguistic games in the subversive performance of femininity.[4] I intend to search for the general consequences and implications of women's handling of the story and language. In addition, I want to mark out a subversive fissure that these two projects by women directors opened at the height of the masculinized New Wave. My argument is based on the conceptual framework laid out by the French feminist thinkers Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray who appropriated Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze woman's exclusion from language and the symbolic order. In particular, I would like to draw on their emphasis on the gaps or fissures created in this order by the female "misappropriation" of language and on the concept of *jouissance*—that is, an unmediated pleasure that presents a potential disturbance of the order.[5]

I am not arguing, however (in the manner of the essentialist impasse of French feminism), that we are dealing here with a true female *cinécriture*, or that the two movies somehow proclaim the return to a specific female essence hidden in bodily experience. The films in question do not work with a conscious political strategy that would intend to subvert the phallocentric meaning. Their subversiveness appears more as a by-product of female creativity itself, as a projection of the biting wit of the authors unpredictedly criticizing the workings of patriarchy. This projection can be read and interpreted by using psychoanalysis as an especially suitable

analytic tool. With the help of this theoretical background we can not only examine the "working through" of desire and pleasure in this film, but can also begin to revalorize the images of female destructivity as a symptomatic reversal of the passivity traditionally ascribed to femininity and, finally, to reappropriate the joyful representation of female misbehavior as a political, liberating statement.

It is astounding that at the time when the feminist counter-cinema was virtually nonexistent in Central Europe there appeared two surreal, invigorating films that not only stood out for their formal and aesthetic experiments but also significantly subverted the existing rules of gendered representation and brought to the screen the flagrant world of female wit and enjoyment. I believe that a thorough analysis of these two films may bring a new perspective to the current mode of reading and analyzing the New Wave, which entirely avoids gender politics.[6] The question of sexual difference, along with issues of ideology (defined in a broader, Althusserian sense, going beyond the analysis of totalitarianism and politics to the ideologies of everyday life), remains one of the most underanalyzed and overlooked problems of Czech film history and, by extension, of East European film history.

the warrior and the oracle

It might be useful to visualize the ambivalent aura attributed to Chytilová and Krumbachová in the historical accounts of the golden age of Czech cinema. These present only "token women" of the time[7]; their characterizations reveal the inherent sexism discernable in many historical and critical assessments of women artists. Besides, being an Eastern European woman at this time meant dealing with both the chauvinistic society and the false, equalizing, emancipatory policy of a state.[8] As a result of this experience, the women "from the East" became deeply inclined to mistrust ideologies, including what they later saw as the ideology of feminism.[9]

Unsurprisingly, their male colleagues and critics have repeatedly described Chytilová and Krumbachová in traditional and stereotypical terms. The two women are primarily pictured as attractive or charismatic, with a particular affinity to the sphere of beauty (as Chytilová was formerly a fashion model and Krumbachová is often considered "only" a costume designer).[10] The obsessive foregrounding of their "uncommon attractiveness" appears almost like a preextenuation of their artistic achievements.

The description of their work also remains within the confines of female stereotypes: Chytilová is described as the "masculine type," an outstanding director with a strong sense of moral values and personal ethics. She is portrayed as uncompromising, aggressive, and gutsy when it comes to the search for truth.[11] All this is often encapsulated under the label *feminist*. Josef Škvorecký sees her "almost militant feminism

that possesses something of the provocative aggressiveness of the suffragettes" (*Bright Men*, 107) as her most prominent artistic trait. He notes, "Sometimes I feel that Věra is first a woman, and only after that a human being—a characteristic which became clear in [*Sedmikrásky*]" (*Bright Men*, 103).

Krumbachová, on the other hand, has been portrayed as the "Ultimate Woman."[12] Always more hidden behind her work, she has been seen as an *èminence grise* of Czech cinema even though her costume designs were ubiquitous. The "queen of Czech film design" was also an inspiring screenwriter, yet her contribution to the New Wave in this respect is often introduced only as that of a collaborator, encourager or even a muse.[13] The inclination to step out of the limelight probably contributed to her depiction as methodically feminine (given her flawless designer-made garments, her perfect perfume, and her charm), mysterious, and cryptic, yet also a woman of profound, striking cynicism and a merciless sense of irony. She was often called an oracle, an ageless being with the gift of prophecy. But as far as feminism is concerned, she has been considered to be the exact opposite of Chytilová, mainly because of her indiscriminating criticism of women and men alike (*Bright Men*, 108).

I would argue, however, that we are dealing here with distinct types of feminist sensibility. Although Krumbachová would probably never describe herself as a feminist, her "black fairy tales," published only in 1994 in a little book called *The First Book of Ester* feature striking gender twists and a deep mockery of gender positioning. Chytilová is mainly a moralist who constructs easily understandable, transparent tales in which female protagonists are mostly characterized by truth and strength, and males by deception and weakness. In the most typical of Chytilová's films, there is no ambivalence. Two of the clearest examples in this respect are *Hra o jablko* (*The Apple Game*, 1976) and *Pasti, pasti, pastičky* (*Traps*, 1998). The multilayered meanings of *Sedmikrásky*, the ambivalence of images, gestures, and words, and the inquiry into the myths of femininity and masculinity can be ascribed, I believe, to a great extent to the influence of Krumbachová.

internal tensions

Chytilová's stubbornness in presenting *Sedmikrásky* as a "philosophical documentary in the form of farce" and "morality play" has been commented upon on several occasions.[14] Many critics claim that this explication, originally prepared to placate the censors, does not hold ground. There is therefore a striking discrepancy between what the authors and traditional critics say about the film and to what alternative readings and spectatorial experiences it opens itself. (Even Škorecký disbelieves the presumed critical distance with which Chytilová and Krumbachová claim to treat the

protagonists and concludes that the critical sarcasm is here aimed mostly at male figures. He further rationalizes that "the tone of a certain mocking acrimony, with which the film treats the majority of male characters" was augmented by Chytilová's "advanced state of rotundity" when shooting the film (*Bright Men*, 108).

Sedmikrásky is traditionally acclaimed for its visual and formal experimentation and acknowledged as an allegorical and philosophical statement against materialism and consumerism. Most of the classical readings intellectualize the film's message and fail to analyze the illicit enjoyment we can experience in the "aberrant," subversive viewing. Besides, although both films foreground sexual difference as their driving force, they have been rarely considered by domestic critics in terms of gender politics.

Peter Hames's well-known assertion that "contemporary Western screenings of the film are often accompanied by exclusively feminine laughter" and the humor is "sometimes only 'seen' by one half of the audience" also applies to the contemporary "Eastern" screenings of both *Sedmikrásky* and *Vražda*.[15] The spectatorial address here gets frequently divided along gender lines: the films create a distinct feeling of joyful conspiracy among the women in the audience and have the power to perplex a number of male spectators. The audience is confronted with an excess of images presenting a female space of desire, enjoyment and disruptive creativity, with the space of jouissance—an experience that can be both threatening and pleasurable.

The interpretation of *Sedmikrásky* is further complicated by its diegetic framing, the footage of wartime bombing and explosions, which shows the consequences of tolerance to the "malicious pranks of everyday life," which encloses the space of the girls' misbehavior in images that are supposed to make clear the ethical message of the film.[16] I want to argue that there emerges a productive tension because the proclaimed moral message of the framing fails to impose itself on the impulsively "naughty" film core.

An interesting reason for this "cleavage" in readings may be the fact that the first version of the scenario was written for Chytilová by Pavel Juráček, probably the most misogynistic writer and director of the Czech New Wave.[17] The script was then significantly reworked by Chytilová and Krumbachová, but it can still be read as revealing traces of the original sexism (destruction appears as a symptomatic trait of female activity) revalorized by the reworking (destruction of norms appears liberating and amusing).[18]

Vražda, Krumbachová's only attempt at directing, was at its time considered by Czech reviewers disappointing and escapist, or else judged as "cute" only because of the critics' evident admiration for Krumbachová the designer. Hames states that it was received with some

Figure 5.1

In *Sedmikrásky*, the audience is confronted with an excess of images presenting a female space of desire, enjoyment, and disruptive creativity, with the space of jouissance—an experience that can be both threatening and pleasurable.

regret particularly by those who saw Krumbachová as "the brains" behind Chytilová and Jan Němec.[19] *Vražda* remains one of the most underestimated and misinterpreted movies of its time, usually judged in the terms offered by Škvorecký—as an homage to sentimental campy kitch, which "ridicules the amorous dreaminess of gentle women" (*Bright Men*, 133). Only Mira and Antonin Liehm see the film as "a sarcastic tract of the myth of maleness," and even consider it "the only really Brechtian film made in Czechoslovakia during the period . . . [a film that] achieves the necessary 'distances' not through cinematic techniques but through acting and staging."[20] *Vražda* has only recently been rediscovered and vindicated by film eccentrics, and, unsurprisingly, by feminists.

broken narratives

Sedmikrásky presents two young girls (played by Jitka Cerhová and Ivana Karbanová), a blond and a brunette of the same age and name, Marie, who one day decide to become spoiled ("abject") to match the spoiled world.[21] They commit various mischief, and delight in eating orgies and in playing hoaxes on older men who treat them to food in posh restaurants. This fragmented chronicle is encapsulated in images of war destruction at the

beginning and by an illustration of the girls' symbolic punishment at the end. In *Vražda*, the main protagonist is a middle-aged, smug woman (played by Jiřina Bohdalová), literally encircled at the beginning in a golden frame, memorizing recipes for good housekeeping first and then commenting on a love affair with an old acquaintance, an engineer called Čert, (the Lesser Devil, played by Vladimír Menšík). The story that unfolds from her commentary presents the affair as vignettes of cooking, baking and feeding the man. This constant flow of food production and consumption gets interrupted only by her decision to kill him. There is a hint at the end that she has actually made a fortune by exterminating him.

These short summaries already show that both stories are severely fragmented. *Sedmikrásky* refuses to construct a coherent diegetic space and time. The depicted world is exceedingly heterogeneous and varied: colors, settings, and costumes but also music and references to genre conventions may change from shot to shot without any continuity. *Vražda* stages a succession of gourmet recipes that the nameless Lady prepares for her beau, orchestrated in infinite sequences of his feasting and gabbling. Much like the two Maries, both films appear rotten or spoiled. Traditional narrative conventions, the rules of social realism, seamless plot development, the illusion of homogenous space and time are all forbidden, along with "good" behavior or emotional involvement for the two protagonists in *Sedmikrásky*. Here surfaces the underlying question: Has this fragmentation of the narrative any connection with the fact that women characters figure at the center of the narrative as active agents? Are we dealing here with destruction on the level of form that is somehow a necessary consequence of women usurping the story?

Traditional psychoanalytic film theory states that all classical narrative is necessarily subject to oedipal structuring, depicting the male quest and inscribing masculine desires and pleasures into the text.[22] The proper position of woman in the oedipal system is as object, feminist theorists logically conclude. Irigaray asserts that for a woman to enter the space of Oedipus means generally that she must enter "into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can 'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men."[23]

Among narrativists, it is Roland Barthes who firmly states the links among language, narrative, and Oedipus. "The pleasure of the text," he notes, is "an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end), if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden, or hypostatized) father—which would explain the solidarity of narrative forms, of family structures, and of prohibition of nudity."[24] The female figures in these films decline "to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end" or to

succumb to the story of male desires and expectations. They dwell in the present, make the most of the moment without thinking about consequences of their acts, without envisioning any teleology for their story. The urge to know, to conclude the plot/journey, to reach an end is here replaced by the imperative to enjoy, to have fun (in *Sedmikrásky*), and to stage oneself as the image of perfection (in *Vražda*). What we witness here in the cyclical action of the protagonists appears as an urge to uphold one's place facing the threat of being overwritten by someone else's story. It is an unconscious aim to create and keep for oneself a heterotopic place outside the confines of traditional narrative, to mark a border beyond which the traditional narrative structure collapses and the habitual positioning of women in language becomes negated.

Teresa de Lauretis links the oedipal narrative with the usurpation of the gaze by which the filmic time-space is controlled: "All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with what has been called an Oedipal logic—the inner necessity or drive of the drama—its "sense of an ending" inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time . . . its quest for (self) knowledge through the realization of loss, to the making good of Oedipus's sight and the restoration of vision."[25] The deferral of the male vision and the abolition of voyeuristic pleasure are the most striking accomplishments of both *Sedmikrásky* and *Vražda*. The magnetism of the male gaze (as defined classically by Mulvey) is broken, even though the two "daisies" are presented quite traditionally, as young, attractive and stylishly dressed, thus logically connoting "to-be-looked-at-ness" and sexual appeal, similar to the heroine of *Vražda* in her "mature beauty."

They escape the defining vision and evade the male gaze because of their staging, their masquerading as the embodiment of ideal femininity—thus creating a distance from their real self by constructing their image as a mask, an explicit lure for the gaze. As Bliss Cua Lim has shown in her insightful reading of the motif of dolls in *Sedmikrásky*, this appropriation of the image of "perfect femininity" serves to reveal traditional femininity as a performative excess, a mask, and leads to the final breaking up of the doll cliché of feminine mystique.[26] Besides, by taking to the extreme the irrationality, destruction and superficiality ascribed to femininity, the characters construct themselves as emanations confronting the patriarchal discourse from which they originated. If, as Irigaray notes, "the feminine finds itself defined as lack, deficiency, or as imitation of the negative image of the subject" within discourse, we can expect that "with respect to this logic a *disruptive excess* is possible on the feminine side."[27] By staging this excess in *Sedmikrásky* and *Vražda*, the work of gender-biased discursive positioning is revealed.

In the case of *Vražda*, it is the hilarious commentary of the female lead character that initiates the necessary detachment from the identification with ideal womanliness.[28] The performance of (the lack of) "female essence," the demonstration of masquerade and constant putting oneself on display in effect blocks the gaze and further restricts the masculine intrusion into the feminine space sustained by the characters. In *Sedmikrásky*, there is a telling sequence in which the girls "steal the scene" from professional dancers in a bar; and both these girls and the woman in *Vražda* actually dominate "their" films from the beginning to the end. These women do not claim the gaze, they don't even look; they just stage their "to-be-looked-at-ness" both as an excess and a lure, and take pleasure in this staging.

Sedmikrásky supports the staging of womanliness with the motif of mirroring (the specular relationship between the two girls). They play with the image of woman as the source of disorder, an abject disruption of stability, an aggressive presence driven by the devouring, insatiable imperative of desire (the Lacanian encore). In *Vražda*, we are presented with femininity constructed by acting out recipes, good housekeeping advice and behavior models, as a seemingly empty space that needs constant reworking. The normative oedipal female development would incite the women to leave the specular regime of the imaginary, face their castration, and realize their inferiority before entering the symbolic. But here, the characters indulge in their resistance to the passage; they revel in the compulsive reenacting/inflicting of castration in ritualized scenes: note the eating orgy in the girls' apartment in *Sedmikrásky*, during which phallic foods are cut, scissored off, impaled and devoured. In *Vražda,* the protagonist at first masquerades as "naturally inferior," but later on confronts male impotence angrily and asserts her independence.

The inscription of female desire and gratification becomes undeniable in the two films—palpable in the eruption of the narrative, in the breaks and fissures the characters' disobedience to the oedipal triggers in the clogged world of expected narrative conventions. This can be read as a stolen story, taken beyond Oedipus, beyond linearity and consistency; this is the story told by Cixous about Medusa—presenting her as still laughing, free and lovely, before being inscribed as a gruesome "borderline creature" in the narrative of the male hero.[29]

"how old is your old lady?"

Like the film narrative, language itself undergoes a radical fragmentation and deconstruction in these films. It has been noted that Chytilová's earlier films repeatedly work with situations in which the character finds herself controlled or defined by someone else's words. For example, Marta in *Strop* (*Ceiling,* 1961) remains silent while "in the off-screen-space, male voices

ironically comment on the model's gestures, the dressmakers' gossiping, the tittle-tattle of fancy hairdressers, the jokes of flirting students and the pseudo-wisdom of a cynical lover."[30] "Overheard" voices in *Pytel blech* (*The Sack of Flies*, 1962) give it the impression of a documentary film. *O něčem jiném* (*Something Different*, 1963) takes on a form of deep self-interrogation. In all of these cases, the influence of cinema verité is mainly felt in the use of "raw" voices, not in the stylized images.

In *Sedmikrásky*, the filmmakers go to the opposite extreme. In contrast with the almost documentary-like use of the spoken word in earlier movies, here the language is extremely worked through, stylized, and reappropriated while it is stripped of its power, coherence and "reason." It can no longer be used to define women's traditional position in society and representation; on the contrary, it opens this positioning for analysis. This reverberates the spell of the "female humor" with which Cixous counters Jacques Lacan's claim that a woman cannot speak of her pleasure; and that power, desire, speaking, and pleasure do not belong to women.[31] In Chytilová's and Krumbachová's answers to the male economy of language we witness how women corrupt the patriarchal language, how they pollute it by echoes of another, nonsensical, anarchic discourse and thus make it speak their own gratification.

As the male characters in these films are trying to uphold the sense and meaning in language, they are losing ground; the emptiness of their phrases is revealed, their invented truth exposed. When language tries to cross the border into the feminine space it becomes "a voice from another world." What the men say loses substance and meaning and turns into a melody that can be either soothing or menacing, but always merely intruding in the background of the women's action.[32] This masculine Muzak is further revealed as a base of untruth, empty phrases, and the coaxing of sexual favors. Note how the interminable regurgitations of the philandering composer in *Sedmikrásky* (played by Jan Klusák)—"I love you, Julie, you are not from this world"—change as their repetition progresses from declaration of love to an eccentric whimpering.

When the Maries speak, they completely eliminate logic and sense from language, displacing them by virtue of their taste for nonsense and bitter irony. The sexist stratum of language is made visible, then ruptured, twisted, and denaturalized. This happens, for instance, when one Marie asks one of the gentlemen, "Jak je stará vaše stará?" (How old is your old lady?). When the "daisies" ask philosophical questions such as "Where are we going?" "Who are we?" or "Why does one say I love you?" they leave them without answers and only laugh. The questions thus appear so pointless and obtuse as the commonsense wisdoms they juggle at every occasion to excess (as in the

statement “We’ve got our whole life ahead of us”). Cixous analyses the consequences of “masculine interrogation,” which we enter as soon as the question “What is it?” is posed.[33] The work of men’s meaning, interrogation, and the desire that mobilizes discourse becomes disregarded here by this gesture of nonanswering.

Language does not support the patriarchal system anymore; it does not define the position of women, nor does it sustain the linguistic routine of seduction. In *Vražda*, it is the man who is given the space to talk, yet his speech not only appears nonsensical but is also revealed as a warrant for power over women (he boasts, for example, “This head of mine, of a real man, knows all the right measures for this world!”). Male language, reaching the border of a feminine space, becomes an intruder and either immediately (in *Sedmikrásky*) or gradually (in *Vražda*) loses its defining authority. It becomes revealed as the locus of deception and manipulation, which the women effectively inhibit (note in *Vražda* the protagonsist’s defense against the “divine wisdom” defining the right position of women: “Stop flaunting God here! Can you imagine a celestial lady broadcasting bullshit for men all the way to the earth?”)

Moreover, common phrases or puns with sexual overtones are repeatedly visualized in both films, often with mockery. In *Sedmikrásky*, the symbolism of the virgin’s flower wreath is parodied. The Czech expression “to invite one over to see one’s collection of butterflies” (which means, “to invite over for sexual adventure”) becomes literalized in one man’s apartment—it is actually full of butterfly collections. *Vražda* functions as a literal illustration of the traditional Czech saying, “Love passes through the stomach” (meaning, “If you feed him well, you will get him,” like the American expression, “The way to a man’s heart his through his stomach”). Unsurprisingly, in the film, the rôtis, pâtés and patisseries turn out to be more erotic and seductive than the female body, and feeding becomes the main exchange between the sexes.

The game of seduction in these films transforms into the game of exchange and consumption, as the female characters have a specific relation to food. In *Sedmikrásky*, the excessive feasting of the two protagonists stands out as another subversive act (if we consider eating as an activity coded as “unfeminine” in contemporary society, extremely controlled and ritualized). And by substituting their sexuality for gluttony and turning the promised consummation into performed consumption the girls caricature the perverse sexual economy of being treated to food. The pleasure of devouring, of feeding off men reflects the male fear of being devoured, being consumed by a *vagina dentata*. In *Vražda*, this politics of feeding gets a more mature twist: while the heroine tries to perform the ideal of “feeding” and caring femininity, it is she who is facing the danger of being eaten by the “devil.”

I have attempted to show in this essay how narrative and linguistic subversion functions in the two films. This linguistic disintegration significantly supports and mirrors the narrative fragmentation and rupturing. Even though the films do not create a new language of desire, they derive much of their allure from the visual and linguistic games of mischievous female enjoyment. The "daisies" in *Sedmikrásky* are not (yet?) angry young girls, as some reviewers claim; rather, they are bored and spoiled young girls craving fun. They are not asking existential questions about the meaning of life but reveal them as the foundation of phallocentric truth. The protagonist in *Vražda* is not the "perfect woman"; rather, she is a fallen, knowing, domestic angel. The women here are not role models, but they refuse to figure as negative or positive stereotypes in the male iconography.

If we agree with classical feminist film theory that dominant films perform a certain exclusion of the female spectator, here we are presented with two cases of joyful, jubilant inclusion, of breaking up the structure of the male gaze and the dominant meanings attributed to the representation of female form. And I believe this is exceptional not only in the context of the Czech New Wave, but generally in the history of cinema.

notes

1. For a definition of feminist aesthetics, see Patricia Erens, "Towards a Feminist Aesthetic: Reflection—Revolution—Ritual," in *Sexual Statagems: The World of Women in Film* (New York: Horizon, 1978), 156–67. B. Ruby Rich presents the category of the "Medusan films" as movies in which women have the "last laugh," and in which humor functions as "a deflator of the patriarchal order and re-inventor of dramatic structure." She sees *Sedmikrásky* as "one of the first films by a woman to move in the direction of anarchic sexuality, though its disruptive humor was received largely as slapstick at the time." See Rich, "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism," in *Movies and Methods*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 353.
2. Even though the period of the Czech New Wave entailed a boom of artistic creativity, it was a time when strong female characters disappeared from the screen, in contrast with a plethora of modern, active heroines in the commercial films of the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, there are marginal but rather disruptive female presences that vivify some of the male New Wave films, such as the characters played by Věra Křesadlová in Miloš Forman's *Konkurs* (*Audition*, 1963) and in Ivan Passer's *Intimní osvětlení* (*Intimate Lighting*, 1965). It would be tempting to reread the films of the New Wave from the point of view of these characters, who are always threatening to burst out laughing or resist the expectations of men.
3. The title *Vražda ing. Čerta* may be found in several translations—as *The Murder of Dr.* (or *ing.*) *Lucifer*, *The Murder of Mr. Devil*, or even *Killing the Devil*. I have decided to keep the translation here as literal as possible to retain the title's ironic tone, for the character Čert is not the devil himself, but a hellish being of a lower rank; we could even say that he is a member of the

"hellish working class." The abbreviation *ing.* stands for a lower degree from a technical university; here, with emphasis put on it, it has a specific "petit-bourgeois" connotation.

4. By "female narrative" I do not mean only a story made by women and focused on female characters. In the female narrative, the implied filmic narrator's approach to the characters (the way they are presented/judged) should also reveal and reflect a kind of female experience. I believe there are many women-focused films, but not many with an implicit female or feminist narrator.
5. See Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 1*, no. 4 (1976): 875–93; Hélène Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation?" *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 7*, no. 1 (1981): 41–55; Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is not One* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); and Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985).
6. A case in point a recent book on the Czech New Wave; see Stanislava Přádná, Zdena Škapová, and Jiří Cieslar, *Démanty všednosti—Český a slovenský film 60. let. Kapitoly o nové vlně* (*The Diamonds of Ordinariness: Czech and Slovak Cinema in the 1960s. Chapters on the New Wave.*) (Prague: Pražská scéna, 2002).
7. Other important female directors of the time are, for example, Drahomíra Vihanová or Eva Sadková, the latter predominantly a television director.
8. The forced "emancipation" meant for the majority of women the double load of both a profession and housework.
9. Further, the proclaimed feminism of some Eastern European women artists appears highly problematic by Western standards, to a great extent because of their "distorted" ideas about activism and mistrust for politics and social analysis. The complex reasons for what Dina Iordanova calls the "reluctant feminism" of Eastern European filmmakers like Věra Chytilová, Agnieszka Holland, and Márta Mészáros deserve further scrutiny. See Iordanova, *The Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (New York: Wallflower, 2003).
10. In his sometimes too personal memoirs of the Czech New Wave, Josef Škvorecký self-revealingly presents Chytilová as "a stunning beauty" whom at their first meeting (she was thirty-one years old then) he took for a "young, unsuspecting kitten." Krumbachová was for him "an uncommonly beautiful woman" and "a perfumed elegant lady in a costume made by the best Prague couturier." See Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A Personal History of the Czech Cinema*, trans. Michael Schonberg (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1971), 99, 118; hereafter cited in the text as *Bright Men*.
11. Chytilová also appeared as an irrepressible artist who did not hesitate to launch a personal campaign when she was forbidden to work; her letter to president Gustav Husák from the autumn of 1975 became a cause celébre and has been widely quoted. Of particular interest here are the passages where she uses the "emancipation rhetoric" of the regime to argue for her "rights as a woman." The English version of the letter can be found as a "special feature" on the *Sedmikrásky* DVD, released by Facets in 2002.
12. For Škvorecký, Krumbachová was "a hundred percent woman." In the Czech version of his book, he even uses the Latin denomination fémina. See Škvorecký, *Bright Men*, 108.
13. The "muse pose" is significantly attributed to her mostly when she worked with her husband, Jan Němec.

14. She also insists that the film shows "how evil does not necessarily manifest itself in an orgy of destruction caused by the war, that its roots may lie concealed in the malicious pranks of everyday life." Both Bliss Cua Lim and Hames express their doubts about this reading. See Bliss Cua Lim, "Dolls in Fragments: Daisies as Feminist Allegory," *Camera Obscura 16*, no. 2 (2001); and Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985).
15. Hames, *New Wave*, 222.
16. A recent reading by Brigita Ptáčková even mentions "a strife between aesthetics and ethics," which becomes insolvable in this film, so that its form prevents the understanding of its messag. She argues that any project of an "esthetically distanced ethical message" falls into pragmatic aporia—for there is no possibility of catharsis or a clear, didactic rendering of the argument. See Ptáčková, "O sváru etiky a estetiky v Sedmikráskách Věry Chytilové" ("The Strife Between Ethics and Aesthetics in Věra Chytilová's Sedmikrásky"), *Cinepur 22* (2002): 28, 26.
17. Characteristic for his treatment of women is the script of *Konec srpna v hotelu Ozón* (*The End of August at the Hotel Ozone*), directed by Jan Schmidt in 1966. This science fiction film depicts a group of women who have survived a nuclear catastrophe, yet, brought up without any contact with men, they lack any morality or ethics and go rampaging around the country like beasts.
18. Unsurprisingly, Pavel Juráček did not like the resulting film and called it "a shiny pot with a piece of shit at its bottom"; see Juráček, *Deník 1959–1974* (*Diary 1959–1974*) (Prague: NFA, 2001), 454.
19. Hames, *New Wave*, 261.
20. Mira and Antonin Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Soviet and Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 287.
21. Krumbachová mentions her best friend Marie and their pranks at school in her book, and this is sometimes taken as a possible source of inspiration for *Sedmikrásky*; see Ester Krumbachová, *První knížka Ester* [*The First Book of Ester*] (Prague: Primus 1994), 33. As well, the two Maries have been seen by some as reflections of the blond Ester and the brunette Věra Chytilová.
22. The classical accounts of Stephen Heath or the gaze machinery delineated by Laura Mulvey unambiguously support the observation that film restages the oedipal drama only from the perspective of men; see Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1981); and Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen 16*, no 3. (1975): 6–18; According to Christian Metz, the whole cinematographic signifier is oedipal; see Metz, "Le significant imaginaire" ("The Imaginary Signifier"), *Communications 23* (1975): 45. Teresa de Lauretis significantly explores the mechanisms of women's inscription in the oedipal plot; see de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
23. Irigaray, *The Sex*, 134.
24. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 10.
25. de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, 125–26.
26. Lim, *Dolls*, 46–62.
27. Irigaray, *The Sex*, 78.

28. Note her introduction: "I've always been . . . from early childhood . . . a little amoral . . . in a way perverted. . . . But I'm not to dispraise myself. After all, I'm a great cook. And I know how to please… how to please men. Whatever they ask, I always answer, 'I don't know. I do not know. You tell me!'"
29. This laughter, to be sure, is bearable only for a female-identified spectator; hence the split in the audience, the dual reading of the protagonists as "monstrous feminine" or a (failed) "slit" of resistance.
30. See Jiří Cieslar, "Now I Don't Know How to Keep Going: Early Films of Věra Chytilová," *Kinoeye*, online at http://www.kinoeye.org/02/08/cieslar08.php.
31. Cixous, *Castration or Decapitation?* 45.
32. Interestingly, this "otherworldly" male voice often intrudes only through the telephone. For instance, in the eating-orgy scene the man wheedles over the phone; the accidental cutting off of his voice parallels the motif of castration inflicted on "phallic" foods.
33. Cixous, *Castration or Decapitation?* 45.

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part two

(post)modernist continuities

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six

somewhere in europe

exile and orphanage in post–world war II hungarian cinema

melinda szaloky

Szerte nézett, s nem lelé
Honját a hazában.
[He (she) looked around and found not his (her) home in the homeland.]

—Ferenc Kölcsey, "Hymn"[1]

The characteristic feature of a good Hungarian film is that it expresses something about Hungary.

—István Szabó[2]

The slightly eccentric émigré Hungarian with a heavy accent has long been a stock character of the international film scene. Hollywood, which has exploited this stereotype as a plot device, has also been the host of a sizable expatriate Hungarian film community, whose ranks include Michael

Curtiz, the director of "everyone's favorite émigré film, *Casablanca*," according to Thomas Elsaesser.[3] In fact, John Cunningham notes, "the cumulative hemorrhage suffered by Hungarian cinema," due to the many migrations of its filmmaking talent, is only surpassed by "the massive exodus from Germany, prompted by the rise of Nazism."[4]

Yet, a multitude of Hungarian émigré filmmakers does not necessarily amount to an exilic Hungarian cinema, considering the findings of current exile and diaspora theory. Exilic cinema, as conceived, for example, by Hamid Naficy, is characterized by an artisanal, independent mode of production, and is constituted by a body of films *authored* by exiled or expatriate filmmakers who seek to portray their relationship to the homeland and their painful yet inspirational experience of deterritorialization through specific thematic and stylistic means.[5] Of course, the liminal experience of self-dislocation that animates the exilic filmmaker's work is also the condition of possibility of modern (Romantic) art and authorship (premised on the exile of the self from the familiar, the commonsensical), which explains the affinity between exilic cinema and aesthetic modernism.[6]

Strikingly, this description of an exilic cinema fits a body of films produced *within*, rather than outside, the borders of Hungary after the communist takeover, including to a certain extent the period following the fall of communism. In fact, Naficy mentions in passing the phenomenon of "internal exile," which he connects to the conditions faced by filmmakers living in totalitarian countries. "Internal exile" implies being displaced in one's home, or, as Elemér Hankiss puts it, "*living outside the system*" in which one lives, "not identifying . . . with the system."[7] Working under an "internal regime of exile," Naficy notes, filmmakers are forced to develop a certain authorial style and to assume an oppositional identity that, ironically, provides them with a stature and a voice that they would lack if they moved to the political freedom of external exile.[8]

I believe that the concept of "internal exile" offers a useful way to approach a significant portion of the filmmaking practice evolving in post–World War II communist Hungary. "Internal exile" appears to be an especially pertinent category in the cage of Hungary, whose tattered history (beset by violent change of power) has established homelessness at home as a key ingredient of the national experience. Being a "satellite" of the Soviet Union for forty years was just the finishing touch. (A poignant formulation of this homegrown homelessness is offered by the author of the Hungarian national anthem quoted in the epigraph.)

Extending the findings of a transnational cinematic exile and diaspora theory to the "internal exilic" cinema of communist Hungary has several advantages. On the one hand, Naficy's claim that the exilic

mode is "transnational" may help explain the affinities between exilic Hungarian films and other similarly inflected film practices, including kindred Eastern European cinemas. The exilic approach, in other words, can make possible the reappraisal of certain national cinemas in a transnational context. On the other hand, the exilic framework is well suited for, and often keyed to, the study of the particular. This is important, since dislocation and ruptures of identity have specific Hungarian manifestations, which Hungarian films latch onto, and which lend these films a distinctive mark within a general exilic discourse. Discrepancies between Naficy's findings and my study of Hungarian exilic filmmaking may point to such local specificity. In this respect I will pay special attention here to the prominent and recurring motif of orphaned and abandoned children in Hungarian films.

from ill fate to fatelessness: a people in search of a nation (as narration)

Describing a national cinema in terms of exile may sound paradoxical. After all, the modern nation has traditionally been an instrument of positive identification, fostering a strong sense of belonging through a narrative of common origins and growth. Physical and psychological homelessness would appear to be incompatible with the ideology of nationhood, based (as identification in general) upon the repression of the self's resident otherness, its constitutive non-self-identity. Hungary's self-understanding in terms of homelessness and self-loss flies in the face of this logic of nationhood and calls for an explanation. Psychoanalyzing a people, in the manner of Siegfried Kracauer, may not be the royal road to the rationale underlying that people's cultural production. However, examining, as Kracauer suggests, prevalent "psychological patterns" and "collective dispositions" in twentieth-century Hungary,[9] in conjunction with historical and social factors, will no doubt contribute to a better understanding of the specific "exilic" subtext (of self-alienation) of this country's national cinema.

Truisms concerning Hungarian mentality abound. Toronto-based expatriate Hungarian psychologist Csilla Nagy's claim that "the whole country is manic depressive" is symptomatic of the widely held view that the Hungarian character is prone to "rapid, unpredictable mood swings," or, as John Lukacs puts it, to a "deeply-rooted (and nonreligious) pessimism [that] is often broken by sudden bursts of appetite for life."[10] Interestingly, the *borderline behavior* associated with the "Hungarian character" chimes with Naficy's description of the "slipzone" of exilic liminality, where "life hovers between the heights of ecstasy . . . and the depths of despondency and doubt."[11] The received view that couples

Hungarian-ness with extreme behavior is sadly corroborated by Hungary's appallingly high rate of suicide, abortion, and alcoholism.[12]

Sociologists and historians have sought to explain the anomalous Hungarian psyche through the country's tattered past, culminating in the recently ended communist period. István Bibó's characterization of the social evolution of Hungary and the "political character of the people" as "deformed" sets the tone for later descriptions of this society as "demoralized,"[13] "alienated," "infantilized," and "atomized."[14] Bibó looks to the middle ages for an explanation of this social deformation, and finds it in a combination of factors, which include the failed emergence of a healthy middle class along with the survival of a feudal mentality, the tearing of the country into three parts in the sixteenth century, and the long domination of the Ottoman Turks.[15] To this list Péter Hanák adds the failure of the revolution of 1848, and the long absolutist Habsburg rule.[16]

Incidentally, consciousness of the country's calamitous, ill-fated past is kept alive by the Hungarian anthem, reminding citizens that the Hungarian people "have already atoned for the sins of the past and the future."[17] It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Hungarians persist in seeing themselves, not without a melancholy satisfaction, as blameless "historical victims" and hapless "historical losers."[18] As I will shortly demonstrate, this victim consciousness—which in Hungary has arguably taken the place of an absent positive national myth[19]—has acquired a new dimension in the second half of the twentieth century as a tragic sense of ill fate has gradually given way to an experience of disorientation or "fatelessness," to use Imre Kertész's well-known term.[20]

In Hanák's estimate, Hungary experienced "no less than *nine turning-points* in the first 70 years of the twentieth century," including several revolutions, the traumatic loss of two-thirds of the national territory, and periodic occupations by foreign troops.[21] No doubt, Miklós Jancsó's penchant to represent modern alienation as an alienation from history, as András Bálint Kovács claims,[22] can be brought back to Hungary's discontinuous, dislocated past. Jancsó's films *Szegénylegények* (*The Roundup*, 1965), *Fényes szelek* (*The Confrontation*, 1969), *Még kér a nép* (*Red Psalm*, 1971), and *Magyar rapszódia* (*Hungarian Rhapsody*, 1979), are a few prominent examples.

In Hanák's view, the "brutal discontinuities" of modern Hungarian history have established adaptation as the basic behavioral strategy for the Hungarian citizen of the twentieth century. Although inevitable for survival, adaptability may have detrimental consequences for the character and mobility of a society. Hanák argues that historical discontinuity, the many abrupt and extreme changes of power, have bred a nation of chameleons with flexible moral values and a relativized sense of loyalty, solidarity, and fidelity to principles.[23]

Schizophrenia, *split consciousness*, and *double life* are terms frequently used to characterize the forty years of Hungarian socialist rule (with János Kádár at the helm) that ended with the Velvet Revolution of 1989. According to Elemér Hankiss, one of the most astute analysts of the period, the "people's democracy" produced a "pathological" and "infantilized" society that suffered from the loss of social identities and of historical continuity.[24] Hankiss shows the irreconcilable inner contradictions of a system that "simultaneously professed egalitarian and meritocratic values, class struggle and social consensus, dictatorship and democracy," a system that "preached human autonomy and dignity but enforced dependence and subject mentality."[25] Even worse, people under socialist rule were prompted to act according to certain norms and then punished for doing so. This "cruel game," labeled in psychiatry as a "double bind," may cause schizophrenia in sensitive children, and has, in effect, "driven a large part of the Hungarian population into a pathological state of indifference and anomy."[26] Hankiss quotes the European Value Systems Study of 1985, which shows that only 11 percent of Hungarians could tell with certainty what is good and what is bad.[27]

The "doublethink" strategy of the regime was met by a nationwide cynicism and a penchant to "read between the lines," to at best doubt and at worst automatically disbelieve all official communication. As Susan Arpad and Sarolta Marinovich note, Hungarians developed a "split consciousness" between the private and the public, where values were limited to the most private circle of life, to the family, given that public life was fraught with lies and false appearances.[28] (This, in turn, strengthened the traditional domestic and maternal role of women.[29]) According to Catherine Portuges, the "schism between the language of outward conformism and that of inner dissent . . . has also been called a form of 'inner exile' or emigration." This "double life," Portuges claims, continued to haunt the cinematic practice of East-Central European countries until the end of the 1980s.[30]

Predictably, the ever-adapting "deformed" Hungarian social character (floating on an unanchored referentiality) has an important role to play in the country's cinema. Hungarian films of the period teem with "shifter" characters, to borrow Naficy's term. ("Shifter" characters with a "situationist existence" are also a fixture in exilic and diasporic cinema.[31]) The shocking metamorphosis of the protagonist of Szabo's *Apa* (*Father*, 1955) from Jewish deportee to fascist Arrow Cross henchman (through the device of a film being made within the film) exemplifies this tendency. Remarkably, performative identity in Hungarian films is seldom liberating and empowering, as it may be in exilic, and especially diasporic, films.[32] Rather, social chameleons—as the protagonists of Pál Gábor's *Angi Vera* (1978) and Zsolt Kézdi-Kovács's *A kedves*

szomszéd (*The Nice Neighbor*, 1979)—are symptomatic of a systemic malaise caused by traumatic ruptures of symbolic continuity. Even the postmodern masquerade in Gábor Bódy's *A kutya éji dala* (*The Dog's Night Song*, 1981) carries harrowing connotations of identity loss.[33] Arguably, Ildikó Enyedi's *Az én XX. századom* (*My Twentieth Century*, 1989) is an exception, as it celebrates women's pleasurable performance of femininity (as masquerade).[34]

Enyedi's film is also a rarity because it constitutes an accent within the "official" accent of post–World War II Hungarian cinema, questioning in the process the projected neutrality, and collectivity, of the state-sanctioned exilic cinematic discourse, and, by implication, the standard version of the Hungarian exilic self. Indeed, the spectacular self-abrogation propagated by Hungarian films leaves little room for otherness outside of the purportedly shared otherness of an oppressed, disinherited nation. The national bond in oppression, Anikó Imre confirms, has allowed Eastern European modernist films to examine "their political-social reality through the lens of a supposedly homogeneous national resistance, which suppressed concern with gender, race, or any other difference within the nation."[35] It is of the essence to remember the internal contradictions (the social, political, economic, and gender disparities) that are cloaked by a unified exilic Hungarian self-image—conceived, as a matter of course, from a white, heterosexual, middle-aged male intellectual perspective.

Remarkably, the disavowal of internal difference (and especially gender difference) through a shared concern with external oppression is a phenomenon that is frequently described by postcolonial feminist critics who discuss the struggle of certain First World and Third World communities for a national identity and/or autonomy.[36] Indeed, the preoccupation with national identity and origins further aligns the multicultural, postcolonial situation with the Hungarian experience of "fatelessness," crystallizing in the 1970s and 1980s. There exist remarkable mutual structural affinities between socialist "schizophrenia," colonial and postcolonial syncretism, and the postmodern symbolic free-for-all.[37] However, adaptability, fluid identity, and relativism—the purportedly liberating values of the postmodern—have been deemed to be disempowering for the subaltern fighting for political agency. This is the reason why political activists and artists of ethnic minorities in postcolonial settings are seen to be engaged in the same national identity politics as are the exilic Hungarian literati (including filmmakers) under Soviet colonialism.[38]

Exile, then, appears in many respects to be an appropriate term to describe the body of films under scrutiny. A history of fragmentation culminating in the partition of the country by the Versailles Peace Treaties have led Hungarians to feel exiled from Europe, a feeling enhanced by the country's banishment behind the Iron Curtain

following World War II.[39] We have also seen that key aspects of the Hungarian experience of expatriation are comparable to postcolonial dislocations. Certainly, Hungarians' sense of self-alienation, of not feeling at home in the international socialist camp, was shared by other Soviet "satellites," which suggests that Naficy's framework could be equally applied to, say, Polish or Czechoslovakian films with a social and aesthetic commitment. However, since the history of colonialism and national self-alienation in Eastern Europe cannot be reduced to the Soviet era,[40] caution should be exercised when treating countries of the defunct Soviet Bloc *en bloc*.

In what follows, I will map key points of Naficy's framework onto a body of Hungarian films. I will reveal how Naficy's distinctions between exilic and diasporic filmmaking—two separate yet closely interrelated trends within the large umbrella of "accented cinema"—can further the understanding of conceptual and stylistic disparities between generations of Hungarian filmmakers, as well as, in certain cases, within the career of a single filmmaker. An additional accented practice, not specified by Naficy, will be that of women filmmakers (e.g., Ildikó Enyedi and Márta Mészáros) working within the traditional male discourse of the clairvoyant, missionary artist/intellectual.

exilic and diasporic strains in the "internal exilic" cinema of communist hungary

My reexamination of Hungarian cinema through the lens of a cinematic exile and diaspora theory will be focused on the period of socialist dictatorship bracketed by the crushed uprising of 1956 and the fall of communism in 1989. I believe that this political configuration provides a clear-cut "internal exilic" context, with varying degrees of repression and censorship. In addition, occasional forays will be made into the transitional years following 1989 (the postcolonial *senso stricto*), a period burdened by the communist legacy but also fraught with the existential uncertainties of sweeping political change. I will not discuss the large crop of (typically escapist and/or doctrinaire) "mainstream" fare produced during this time period, but will concentrate on work committed to the "world-disclosing" mission of modern art, which also animates the exilic, and diasporic, artist.[41] It is such critical, inquisitive "quality" films that have often been considered under the rubric "national cinema."[42]

Naficy's definition of "accented cinema" as an alternative to the Hollywood paradigm suggests an affinity between "accented" filmmaking and modernist film practices (often categorized as "art cinema"). It is Naficy's exilic cinematic mode that appears to have the closest relation to cinematic modernism(s), a relationship underpinned by the modern's use of the "'condition of exile as the basic metaphor for . . . the human condition.'"[43] The orphic mission of the "transcendentally-homeless"

Romantic-modern artist is shared by the exilic filmmaker, whose "interstitial" and liminal position licenses him (the role has a male pedigree) to assume a defamiliarizing, illuminating (and highly politicized) vanguard role, which is performed on behalf of the homeland and its people.[44] The strong auteur figure of both modernist and exilic cinemas is driven by metaphysical concerns (a nostalgic search for identity and origins), which accounts for the films' tendency to interpret the fragmentation and multiplication of subjectivity within these works as anxiety inducing and pathological instead of liberating and empowering.[45] (Diasporic filmmaking, by contrast, will be less centered, more prone to postmodern relativism.)

Modernist and exilic cinemas also converge in their alternative (nonindustrial, "artisanal") mode of production, which allows filmmakers to be involved on all levels of the creative production process as writers, directors, and editors of their films. Moreover, Naficy's claim that films made in the exilic mode are generally "narrative, fictional, feature-length, polished, and designed for commercial distribution and theatrical exhibition"[46] suggests that the exilic mode—as opposed to the more rudimentary techniques and experimental bent of diasporic films—may have a leaning toward a classical, institutionalized cinematic modernism, a new "tradition of quality." The reliance of exilic filmmakers (and small "national cinemas") on the outlet provided by international film festivals (with a known taste for a palatable brand of "high art"[47]) supports this view.

It appears that the flair of the exilic mode to couple key ingredients of a modernist aesthetic with social engagement and a historical consciousness makes this practice eminently comparable to the filmmaking tradition that takes shape in Hungary in the aftermath of the heavily repressive Stalinist period and the crushed uprising of 1956.[48] The consolidation under Kádár in the early 1960s creates favorable conditions for the emergence of a generation of filmmakers who can claim artistic license to represent contemporary reality. (However, the relative ideological permissiveness, and elation, of the mid- and late 1960s would give way to a tightened censorship, and growing disillusionment, in the early 1970s.)

Naficy's statement that every exilic film is "in some measure a state-of-the-nation film that takes stock of the nation and passes judgment on its values and performances" is a fitting description of the critical fervor with which the Hungarian New Wave films (which owed a great debt to the French New Wave) address social problems of the day[49]—typically from the perspective of young (intellectual) characters who attempt to find their place in an inhospitable social setting. Tellingly, these early "social problem" films are often labeled as "questioning film," "active film," and "thinking film."[50] Exemplary

of this trend are István Gaál's *Sodrásban* (*Current*, 1963), András Kovács's *Nehéz emberek* (*Difficult People*, 1964), István Szabó's *Álmodozások kora* (*The Age of Daydreaming*, 1964), and Pál Sándor's *Bohóc a falon* (*Clown on the Wall*, 1967).

A parallel manifestation of exilic "epistephilia" ("a burning desire to know and tell about the causes, experiences and consequences of disrupted personal and national histories"[51]) is the emergence in the mid-1960s of Hungarian films that probe troubled periods of the recent past. Miklós Jancsó's *Így jöttem* (*My Way Home*, 1964), for example, reexamines the Hungarian experience of the end of World War II, while András Kovács's *Hideg napok* (*Cold Days*, 1966) addresses the question of Hungary's complicity in war crimes during World War II. István Szabó's *Apa* (*Father*, 1966) offers the "autobiography" of the fatherless generation growing up after the war.[52] (I will return to the film's treatment of the theme of orphanage in the next section.) The traumatic 1950s are cautiously revisited in János Herskó's *Párbeszéd* (*Dialogue*, 1963), Zoltán Fábri's *Húsz óra* (*Twenty Hours*, 1965), and Sándor Sára's *Feldobott kő* (*Upthrown Stone*, 1968).

The persistent concern with history shown by post–World War II Hungarian auteur cinema from the mid-1960s aligns well with Naficy's observation that exilic filmmakers have a "vertical and primary" relationship to their countries of origin, which is manifest in retrospective, authoritative reevaluations of the "there and then" of the homeland.[53] Of course, the same could be said to apply to other "national cinemas" of the former Soviet Bloc countries. As Imre observes, "a tragic or ironic preoccupation with national history" has been considered "a unique regional sensibility" in Eastern European cinemas.[54] (However, this sensibility for the national past may be the mark of a general exilic, rather than an exclusively Eastern European, preoccupation.) In Hungary, moreover, films treating the recent past—notably the period of the 1950s—show a remarkable variance in their relationship to, and reading of, this history.

András Bálint Kovács argues that while films made in the 1960s about the 1950s emphasize the historical continuity, the mutual permeability, between their own decade and the previous one, the cycle of the so-called "fifties film," which arises toward the end of the 1970s, turns the traumatic 1950s into a hermetic, distant world, a mere metaphor for the identity crisis, and existential anxiety, that grips the established Hungarian auteur generation in the 1970s. It is through revealing the misdeeds of the 1950s (epitomized by a systemic, and systematic, corruption of individual integrity) that the makers of these films attempt to hold onto their (self-issued) mandate as anointed social healers and soothsayers, a role rendered all but superfluous through the social disillusionment of the 1970s.[55] Representative of the "fifties film" is

Pál Gábor's critically-acclaimed *Angi Vera* (1978), a claustrophobic dystopia where "there seems nothing to hope for, nowhere to escape to," according to Bryan Burns.[56]

Kovács's unqualified inclusion of Márta Mészáros's first two *Diary* films in the "fifties-film" subgenre may be contested, given the more personal, autobiographical voice of these films that suggests a participation in this history rather than simply a detached critical attitude. Moreover, by targeting the Soviet Union, Mészáros threatens to breach a serious taboo in *The Diary* films, which is reflected in the considerably delayed release of *Napló Gyermekeimnek* (*Diary for My Children*, 1984). In addition, Mészáros's commitment to controversial women's issues, her courting of feminism, distinguishes her directorial accent from the mainstream exilic style, even though her activity as a director is certainly rooted in this tradition.

The crisis of the prophetic exilic Hungarian auteur, reflected in the "fifties film," points us toward a related inquiry, one that considers diasporic signs in Hungary's exilic film practice. Besides many shared characteristics, Naficy's exilic and diasporic modes have important differences. Highlighting these differences may help account for anomalies that arose within Hungary's internal exilic cinema in the 1970s.

Diaspora, Naficy notes, is a collective experience (as opposed to the singularity of exile) that entails a shared syncretic communal present. As a result, filmmakers in this context are more likely to eschew exilic binarism and exclusivity in favor of plurality, hybridity, and performativity of identity. Diasporized filmmakers are thus less fixated on an exilic cathexis to a homeland or on the mission of representing the homeland and its people. Naficy detects a generational divide between older émigré filmmakers and a younger breed of directors born in diaspora. It is this latter group that engages most often in formal experimentation, using lower-gauge film stock or videotape, shooting films that make a virtue of their homemade quality, films that are frequently nonfictional, and are seldom designed for widespread theatrical distribution.[57] In sum, diasporic films are prone to postmodern experimentation, to bending and blurring the boundaries between "video and film, fiction and nonfiction, narrative and non-narrative, social and psychic, autobiographical and national."[58]

One might say that since a diasporic sensitivity points toward fluidity and a mistrust of established norms, the diasporic is the *truly exilic* (decentered, dispersed), at least when compared to an "institutionalized exilic" discourse, so to speak. Drawing a distinction between *institutionalized* and *diasporized* exilic forms will allow us to distinguish stages of stagnation from those of experimentation within a larger alternative ("accented") representational practice. For example, the work of many Hungarian New Wave directors from the mid-1970s could be

described as institutionalized exilic. Jancsó, on the contrary, appears to have moved toward a diasporized exilic stance in his late career, which shows signs of a mixing of genres and media, as well as a taste for an ironic self-reflectivity, for the absurd and the carnivalesque.

Remarkably, the Hungarian state has, since the early 1960s, provided a venue for the upkeep of a disaporic spirit within the exilic establishment. At Béla Balázs Studio (BBS), young filmmakers and other audiovisual artists have been given a relatively free reign for collective expressive experimentation beyond the limits of the officially tolerable.[59] It is at BBS that we find the early dissenting (diasporic) voices of, for example, Dezső Magyar's *Agitátorok* (*The Agitators*, 1969) and Gyula Gazdag and Judit Ember's *A határozat* (*The Resolution*, 1972).[60]

It is also under the tutelage of BBS that the so-called Budapest school of the documentary feature film takes shape. (The scarcity of funds available at BBS—the studio's annual budget never exceeded the cost of a Hungarian feature film—promoted cost-effective production methods including location shooting and the use of mobile equipment and nonprofessional actors, all of which came to be incorporated in a novel pseudo-documentary style.) Similar to genre-bending and present-oriented diasporic films, the Budapest school combines documentary methods with a socially committed dramatic purpose—typically, the depiction of generational conflicts, the rootlessness of young people, as well as the clash between the values of village and city.[61] Representative works of this approach include István Dárday and Györgyi Szalai's *Jutalomutazás* (*Holiday in Britain*, 1974) and *Filmregény* (*Film Novel*, 1977); Béla Tarr's *Családi tűzfészek* (*Family Nest*, 1977); and László Vitézy's *Békeidő* (*Peacetime*, 1979).

BBS is also the site of avant-garde formal experimentation as championed, for example, by Gábor Bódy and Miklós Erdélyi in the 1970s and early 1980s. Significantly, in 1981 a new film studio, Társulás, is created, comprising, until its 1985 liquidation, the most progressive, least conformist talent of the day in the directors Bódy, Jeles, and Tarr. For these filmmakers aesthetic innovation and iconoclasm constitute an explicit statement of non-cooperation with the regime.[62] (For example, Jeles's brilliant *A kis Valentinó* [*Little Valentino*], 1979, pioneers the cinema of "fatelessness" that emerges in the 1980s.) The demise of Társulás—brought about according to Kovács by the joint efforts of the "official" film elite and the Party's cultural politicians—resulted in the complete disengagement of Bódy, Jeles, and Tarr from filmmaking in the 1980s.[63]

Another practice attuned to the diasporic is the nonprofessional Hungarian film movement, which arises roughly parallel to the alternative, avant-garde wing of BBS. These "amateur" filmmakers often portray subcultures and social actors marginalized by the regime.

Their low-budget, rudimentary, freestyle filmmaking exhibits a taste for the grotesque, the absurd, and the burlesque, as illustrated by the work of, for example, György Szomjas (who also champions the movement within professional circles with, e.g., *Kopaszkutya* [*Bald Dog*], 1981, and *Falfúró* [*The Wall Driller*], 1985), as well as Miklós Ács and András Szőke. Finally, diasporic parameters apply to the conditions and preoccupations of many young Hungarian filmmakers who enter the trade amid the political, financial, and aesthetic upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s (among them Ildikó Enyedi, Ibolya Fekete, Péter Forgács, András Szirtes, and Péter Tímár).

a hungarian cinema of orphanage

The limited scope of this essay precludes an examination of the many intriguing thematic and stylistic affinities that can be traced between Naficy's "accented cinema" and exilic (and diasporic) Hungarian filmmaking. By way of summary, it can be noted that Hungarian films favor dystopian, closed forms rather than a utopian open structuring. Naficy's description of the closed cinematic form in terms of claustrophobic settings (e.g., constricted living quarters), entrapped and alienated characters, dark lighting schemes, and tight, partially blocked shot compositions is a fitting characterization of what could be called the group style of the Hungarian film practice examined here.[64] As I will now show, exilic and diasporic entrapment is frequently tied to the motif of orphanage in Hungarian films.

Naficy's observation that exilic and diasporic films frequently use the trope of the house as a sign of deterritorialization (since possessing a home "seems to require first the expulsion of its current residents"[65]) is equally appropriate in the Hungarian context, where the "small, dingy, overcrowded immigrant apartments" portrayed in exilic and diasporic films appear in the guise of tenement-house squalor. There exists a whole subgenre of "housing-problem films," topped by Béla Tarr's *Családi tűzfészek* (*Family Nest*, 1977), Kézdi-Kovács Zsolt's *A kedves szomszéd* (*The Nice Neighbor*, 1979), and Péter Gothár's *Ajándék ez a nap* (*A Priceless Day*, 1979), which offer a mordant treatment of Hungary's (and especially Budapest's) desperate housing shortage and the resulting physical and psychological homelessness, including the disintegration of familial relations and values.

Much could also be written about Hungarian cinematic manifestations of the archetypal exilic motif of border crossing—linked to scenarios of political oppression, violence, and a carnivalesque suspension of norms, as exemplified by Pál Sándor's *Herkulesfürdői emlék* (*Improperly Dressed*, 1976) and *Szerencsés Dániel* (*Daniel Takes a Train*, 1982), and Károly Makk's *Egymásra nézve* (*Another Way*, 1982).[66] There is, however, a ubiquitous motif—indeed, a leitmotif—in Hungarian cinema that does not figure

on Naficy's list. The pervasive presence of orphaned, abandoned, and maltreated children in the crop of films under scrutiny may be a specific expression of the nation's exilic consciousness ("orpha-nation"), and deserves to be considered here.[67]

The tattered group of orphaned and dislocated children populating Géza Radványi's *Valahol Európában* (*Somewhere in Europe*, 1947) has long been an emblem of post–World War II Hungarian filmmaking. Orphanage here is directly motivated by the destruction from World War II, which makes the (ill) fate of these calamity-stricken but hopeful and healing children a metaphor for the entire war-torn country. Predictably, the ravaging of the nation is illustrated through the rape of a young woman by a German soldier—portrayed through a shadow play that reveals Béla Balázs's hand in the production.[68] Remarkably, the woman whose fate embodies the devastation of Hungary is Jewish—passing as a boy in the ragamuffin pack.

The topic of war orphanage is revisited in István Szabó's *Apa* (*Father*, 1966). Labeled as the "autobiography of a generation," Szabó's film traces how the disorientation of fatherlessness creates a collective need for strong substitute father figures, paving the way for the cult of personality, and dictatorship. (Incidentally, the chameleonic, social-climbing title character of Pál Gábor's 1978 *Angi Vera* is also a war orphan.) Szabó's conception of fatherhood as the depository of order and legality reconfirms the ethos of a deeply patriarchal society. The film features a feeble, subservient mother figure whose ministrations cannot counterweigh her son's keen sense of being orphaned. The character of the ineffectual, insignificant mother proves to be a recurring motif of Hungarian orphan films.

War-inflicted orphanage provides the subtext of Márta Mészáros's autobiographical *Napló Gyermekeimnek* (*Diary for My Children*, 1984), although here the heroine's father—who is another formidable but absent, and fantasized-about, father figure—falls victim to Stalinist purges in the Soviet Union while her mother—another loving but weak, and ultimately ineffectual, mother—succumbs to illness during the war. The threat posed to the good father by a strong mother figure is driven home by the film's portrayal of the protagonist's authoritative and highly principled stepmother as a Stalinist henchwoman. (The representation of women as vicious communist *apparatchiks*, as in Mészáros's film or in Gábor's *Angi Vera*, may appear as a disguised reassertion of patriarchy.) In *Diary*, Mészáros reconfirms Szabó's diagnosis of fatherlessness as a national malaise; however, she points to Stalinism, and, in general, a Soviet-style communism, as the cause of the national identity crisis.

There is a distinctive use of orphanage in Mészáros's early, more "diasporized exilic" films such as *Az eltávozott nap* (*The Girl*, 1968), *Szabad lélegzet* (*Riddance*, 1973), and *Örökbefogadás* (*Adoption*, 1975). These films

feature young, determined, and independent female characters abandoned by neglectful, living parents and brought up in state orphanages. The rootlessness of these young (working-class) women is counterbalanced by their strength of character and will to succeed on their own. These young women are the descendants of the abused but spirited orphan girl (played by the young Zsuzsa Czinkóczi) featured in László Ranódy's *Árvácska* (*No Man's Daughter*, 1975), another emblematic piece of Hungarian "orphanage cinema." (The connection between Ranódy's *Árvácska* and Mészáros's heroines is underscored by the reappearance of Zsuzsa Czinkóczi as the protagonist of *Diary For My Children*.) Árvácska cannot survive in the brutal semi-feudal world of the early-twentieth-century Hungarian countryside, while Mészáros's orphaned heroines are given a chance in socialist Hungary. Here orphanage still connotes ill (but changeable) fate rather than fatelessness.

Mészáros's straightforward, documentarylike portrayals of rejected young people (typically young women) and state-run homes anticipate the cycle of films appearing in the late 1970s and early 1980s that view social disintegration and hopelessness through the problem of abandoned and institutionalized children, such as János Rózsa's *Vasárnapi szülők* (*Sunday Daughters*, 1979) and *Kabala* (*Mascot*, 1981), and Pál Erdőss's *Adj király katonát* (*The Princess*, 1982). In these films the thick walls, barred windows, and oppressive barbed-wire fences of the confining institutions (state orphanages, schools, student hostels, hospitals) seem to engulf the entire country, and, in fact, pass judgment on the state of the country. The labyrinthine, shadowy school corridors in Péter Gothár's *Megáll az idő* (*Time Stands Still*, 1981) harbor another fatherless (and, in retrospect, fateless) generation, the children left behind after the cataclysm of 1956. Similarly, Árpád Sopsits's *Torzók* (*Abandoned*, 2001) situates the orphaned or unwanted children of the post-1956 era within a punitive boarding school environment.

Gyula Gazdag's *Hol volt, hol nem volt* (*A Hungarian Fairytale*, 1986) is perhaps the epitome of an "orpha-nation" film, weaving the motif of orphanage (and, more specifically, the search for the absent father) together with Hungary's nostalgic longing for a lost, mythic homeland—a "fatherland," no doubt. The film's memorable final scene depicts the newly reconstituted nuclear family (that shares no blood bonds) ready to alight on top of a rare national monument surprisingly not purged by the communists: the larger-than-life iron sculpture of the totem bird of ancient Hungarian myth, the *turul*. While Gazdag's home-seeking fantasy harnesses a giant bird's uplifting sublimity (Figure 6.1), Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister harmóniák* (*Werckmeister Harmonies*, 2000) captures the hollowness of utopia through the monstrous sublimity of a dead whale (Figure 6.2), pushing the "holy fool" protagonist (an orphan character of a kind) into the fateless state of psychosis.

Figure 6.1

Toward utopia on mythic wings in *A Hungarian Fairy Tale*.

Figure 6.2

Transcendence dehumanized: the monstrous whale in *Werckmeister Harmonies*.

To conclude this brief review of Hungarian orphanage cinema, I wish to highlight, yet again, the marked tendency of this tradition to equate the state of being orphaned with fatherlessness, and to dismiss the mother as inconsequential, incapacitated, or—worse—self-serving and altogether unmotherly. I believe that through this plot device, orphanage cinema not only makes a statement about Hungary as a fundamentally patriarchal, misogynistic society but also reveals the crisis of this patriarchal structure due to the dysfunction of the family

unit, which is taken to be the depository of social cohesion and order. A disturbing summation of this theme can be found in János Szász's *Witman fiúk* (*The Witman Boys*, 1996), a work of the transitional postcommunist years, in which two fatherless boys prefer the ministrations of a young prostitute to the care of their inattentive, unemotional mother, whom they kill. Perhaps the global (even madly cosmic) escapades of the twin orphan girls (who doubly reincarnate their mother) in Ildikó Enyedi's *Az én XX. századom* (*My Twentieth Century*, 1989) manage to break the spell of the tragic sense of the "orpha-nation" conveyed in Hungary's cinema of exile and orphanage.

concluding notes

In this essay I have reevaluated the national cinema of post–World War II Hungary through a framework that maps transnational cinematic trends linked to the exilic and diasporic dimensions of the postcolonial age. My argument that a branch of Hungarian films fits this framework has been supported by the complex exilic subtext of the Hungarian experience, composed of the joint internal and external oppression of the communist years (Hungarian socialist dictatorship and Soviet colonialism), as well as a history of national fragmentation and dislocation.

I have found that the Hungarian cinema of this period is, by and large, eminently comparable to the transnational accented practices described by Hamid Naficy. This comparison, furthermore, may apply to other Eastern European cinemas, given the shared "internal exile" and Romantic humanist traditions of the countries of the now defunct Soviet Bloc. This implies that certain national and regional cinemas may in fact connect to, and follow the logic of, transnational audiovisual representational trends.

The analysis of an "accented cinema" is considerably enhanced through Naficy's distinction between an exilic and a diasporic (or, more precisely, a "diasporized exilic") mode, which is more than a simple exercise in historical periodization (where the exilic equals modernism, and the diasporic equals postmodernism). These intimately related yet separable categories are excellent qualifiers, helping to distinguish politically and aesthetically innovative and stagnant practices within a generic exilic context, and even within the career of a single filmmaker. I hope to have demonstrated the benefits of these classifications through my cursory review of Hungarian accented cinema.

The steadily recurring motif of orphaned and abandoned children in fifty years of Hungarian cinema may be the central cinematic trope of the "protoexilic" Hungarian self, forged through a series of disruptive, even cataclysmic historical moments. The theme of orphanage appears to slightly shift meaning from that of "ill fate" to that of "fatelessness" in the late 1970s and early 1980s, possibly in keeping with the

changing political and social climate of the day. Moreover, the routine manifestation of orphanage as fatherlessness in these films calls attention, yet again, to the deep investment of patriarchy in the nuclear family, and in the nation-state. Ultimately, Hungary's exilic cinema may be first and foremost a cinema of "orpha-nation"—a cinema, that is, of a disoriented and rootless society—acting to continually replay the search for a national identity misplaced by fatelessness, some *where* in Europe.

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notes

1. The epigraph is from Ferenc Kölcsey's "Hymn" (1823); reprinted in István Simon, A magyar irodalom (Budapest: Gondolat, 1973), 459–61. The first stanza of this poem serves as the lyrics of the Hungarian national anthem. My translation of the third person singular personal pronoun as "he (she)" and "his (her)" is due to the lacking gender distinction in the Hungarian language in the third person singular. In other words, the neuter pronoun could, in theory, imply both genders. However, in practice, this neutrality has cloaked a male subject, at least in public affairs and official discourses.
2. István Szabó, a Hungarian director of international acclaim (e.g., *Mephisto*, 1981), is quoted in Bryan Burns, *World Cinema: Hungary* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1996), 90.
3. Thomas Elsaesser, "Ethnicity, Authenticity and Exile: A Counterfeit Trade? German Filmmakers and Hollywood," in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 100.
4. John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex* (London: Wallflower, 2004), 191. Elsaesser questions the "canonical version" of the German filmmaking exodus (which attributes this movement exclusively to political causes), offering a more nuanced picture of the situation in "Ethnicity, Authenticity, and Exile," 97–123.
5. Naficy argues for an overarching theory of "accented cinema," one able to encompass the "characteristics common to the work of differently situated filmmakers . . . across the globe—all of whom are presumed to share the fact of displacement and deterritorialization." "Accented cinema," in other words, encompasses all filmmaking practice that poses an alternative to the classical Hollywood paradigm. See Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 21; see, in general, the first chapter of the book (10–39) for a concise introduction into the key concepts.
6. Naficy acknowledges a close relationship between exile "from the larger society" and "great authorship." Ibid., 12.

7. Hankiss's claim, however, needs to be qualified. No one can live "outside a system." One can, at best live on the border of the system, in between complicity and resistance. Elemér Hankiss, quoted in Tamás Kolosi and Richard Rose, "Introduction: Scaling Change in Hungary" in *A Society Transformed: Hungary in Time-Space Perspective*, ed. Rudolf Andorka, Tamás Kolosi, Richard Rose, and György Vukovich (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), 9; emphasis in the original.
8. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 11.
9. Kracauer's psychological study concerns German films of the early twentieth century. See Siegfried Kracauer*, From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton,N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), 8, 9.
10. Csilla Nagy and John Lukacs, quoted in Richard Teleky, *Hungarian Rhapsodies: Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 85, 86.
11. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 12.
12. On Hungary's high suicide rate, see, e.g., Maria Adamik, "Feminism and Hungary," in *Gender Politics and Post-Communism: Reflection from Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller (New York: Routledge, 1993), 210. On Hungary's abortion statistics, see, e g., Enikő Bollobás, "'Totalitarian Lib': The Legacy of Communism for Hungarian Women," in Funk and Mueller eds., *Gender Politics*, 204.
13. István Bibo is quoted in Péter Hanák, "Discontinuous History, Deformed Society," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 2 (1995): 58.
14. The terms describing Hungarian society are quoted in Elemér Hankiss, *East European Alternatives* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 121.
15. Bibó is discussed, in Hanák, "Discontinuous History, Deformed Society," 58.
16. Ibid., 59.
17. Kölcsey, "Hymn," 459–61; my translation. "Ill fate" is a recurring theme throughout the poem.
18. See, for example, Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 222, n. 25.
19. András Bálint Kovács, *A film szerint a világ: tanulmányok* (*The World According to the Cinema: Essays*) (Budapest: Palatinus, 2002), 302–3.
20. See Imre Kertész, *Sorstalanság* (*Fatelessness*) (Budapest: Magvető, 1975). The celebrated novel by the Nobel Prize–winning Hungarian writer commemorates the experience of a Jewish concentration camp survivor.
21. Hanák, "Discontinuous History," 59–60; emphasis added.
22. Kovács, *A film szerint a világ,* 306.
23. Hanák, "Discontinuous History," 61.
24. Hankiss, *East European Alternatives*, 121.
25. Ibid., 122.
26. Ibid., 123
27. Ibid., 123.
28. Susan Arpad and Sarolta Marinovich, "Why Hasn't There Been a Strong Women's Movement in Hungary?" *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 2 (1995): 79.
29. Arpad and Marinovich argue that the home has been ingrained in the consciousness of Hungarians as a "safe haven," as a guarantor of survival during the communist years. This has prevented most Hungarians from being able to "conceive of home and family as a place where women's

oppression in the public world is replicated in more intimate scale." Ibid., 91, 89.

30. Catherine Portuges, *Screen Memories: The Hungarian Cinema of Márta Mészáros* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 18
31. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 32.
32. Naficy argues that being a "shifter" is not necessarily morally detrimental, and might be politically empowering. However, he also acknowledges that "accented cinemas" are about a search for identity. Ibid., 32, 34.
33. *A kutya éji dala*, an experimental film with a decidedly postmodernist sensitivity, features a priest who turns out to be an imposter. The priest is played by director Gábor Bódy, a formidable auteur figure whose legendary status has been further enhanced by his suicide at the age of thirty-nine. Kovács, in *A film szerint a világ*, 277–81, reveals that Bódy's masquerading as a fake priest in the film was a covert confession by the filmmaker, who was a police informer throughout much of his career. Bódy's dual identity is a source of anxiety and fear from identification.
34. Anikó Imre believes that Enyedi's *Az én XX. századom* uses postmodern playfulness to convey a message about the malleability of gender identity; see Imre, "Twin Pleasures of Feminism," *Camera Obscura* 54; 18, no. 3 (2003): 191, 197–200. I am tempted to add that although the twins miraculously survive the seemingly random and debilitating historical events of the twentieth century, their final journey to the light (back to the womb) in the final shot seems a refusal of the present in favor of starting over with the past. The twins are orphans cast into a world strange to them and are forced to adapt to a male-dominated world in order to survive.
35. Imre, "Twin Pleasures of Feminism," 187. It is worth noting, though, that Hungarian modernist cinema neglects, in various degrees, issues of internal otherness. While the topic of Jewish and Roma (i.e., Gypsy) minorities does receive some attention, the minority status of women (as well as children and the elderly) is disavowed. For a succinct description of Hungarians' controversial relationship to Jews and the Roma, as well as an overview of cinematic treatments of these subjects, see John Cunningam, "Jews, Gipsies, and Others," in *Hungarian Cinema*, 171–82.
36. See, e.g., Cherrie Moraga, *Loving in the War Years* (Boston: South End, 1983), 105–11.
37. On colonial syncretism and code mixing, see Mike Featherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity" in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), 65.
38. Moraga's (controversial) advocacy for a "Chicano nation," her open declaration of an allegiance to "la Raza" (the Chicana/o race) is a telling example of the pull of nationalism within ethnic communities placed within another, dominant, nation; see Cherrie Moraga, *The Last Generation* (Boston: South End, 1993), 125, 150. See also Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 34–35.
39. On Hungarians' sense of exclusion from Europe see, e.g., Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 1.
40. Hungary, for example, was first a colony, then a colonial partner, of the Habsburg Empire before being carved up according to the imperial interests of the leading powers of the early twentieth century.

41. Accented cinema theory, Naficy confirms in *An Accented Cinema*, 34, is "an extension of . . . authorship theory." The notion of authorship, in turn, is rooted in the Romantic idea(l) of creative genius, a person whose imagination is thought to transcend the constraints of schematic, ordinary thinking and bring forth new, unexpected connections and truths.
42. Andrew Higson offers four different criteria for the definition of the concept of "national cinema." Besides (1) "economic," (2) "text-based," (3) "exhibition-led, or consumption-based" approaches, Higson names (4) a "criticism-led" approach that "tends to reduce national cinema to the terms of a quality art cinema, a culturally-worthy cinema steeped into the high-cultural and/or modernist heritage of a particular nation state." Higson argues that it is inappropriate to consider a national cinema without taking into account the desires and tastes of popular audiences. See Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," *Screen* 30, no. 4 (1989): 36–37, 46.
43. Aijaz Ahmad, quoted in Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 194.
44. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 12.
45. Ibid., 11–13, 46, 270.
46. Ibid., 21.
47. Azadeh Farahmand, for example, argues for a link between the aesthetic and political preferences of the international film festival circuit and the rise to international fame of a body of Iranian films, produced under state censorship, in a situation that I would call "internal exilic." I believe that festivals played a similar role in the rise to fame of Eastern European cinemas during the socialist years. See Farahmand, "Perspectives on Recent (International Acclaim for) Iranian Cinema" in *The New Iranian Cinema: Politics, Representation and Identity*, ed. Richard Tapper (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 99, 93–98.
48. Several sources mark 1963 as the beginning year of the Hungarian New Wave. See, e.g., Mira and Antonin Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film after 1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 385, 386; Balogh Gyöngyi, Gyürey Vera, and Holffy Pál, *A magyar játékfilm története a kezdetektől 1990-ig* (*History of Hungarian Feature Film from the Beginnings to 1990*) (Budapest: Műszaki könyvkiadó, 2004), 125–29.
49. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 93–94.
50. See Balogh, Gyürey, and Holffy, *A magyar játékfilm története*, 126.
51. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 105.
52. It is Szabó who calls *Apa* "the autobiography of a generation." Szabó, quoted in Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 100.
53. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 14.
54. Anikó Imre, "The Politics of Hiccups," *Cineaction* 64 (2004): 8.
55. Kovács asserts that Jancsó's *A zsarnok szive* (*The Tyrant's Heart*, 1981) is also a reaction to the crisis of the intellectual's role, although the time period depicted in the film is different from that of the "fifties film." Szabó's *Mephisto* (1981) treats the same theme, choosing a different, less problematic (historically better analyzed) age—amely, that of rising fascism. See Kovács, *A film szerint a világ,* 283–98.
56. Burns, *World Cinema: Hungary*, 139, 140.
57. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 21.
58. Ibid., 22; see also 13–15.
59. During the socialist years, Hungarian cultural products were classified, according to the "3T" policy, into "supported" (*támogatott*), "tolerated"

(*tűrt*), and "prohibited" (*tiltott*) works. During the period, Hungarian filmmakers constantly tested the limits of official tolerance, attempting to expand the boundaries of the "supported" and the "tolerated." See, e.g., Balogh, Gyürey, and Holffy, *A magyar játékfilm története*, 126, as well as Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema*, 95.

60. Both *Agitátorok* and *A határozat* were banned by state censors. All three directors continued to tackle controversial topics and produced several more banned films.
61. For an informed account of the Hungarian "pseudo-documentary," see Graham Petrie, "Reconstructing Reality: The Hungarian Documentary and 'Pseudo-Documentary' Film," *Hungarian Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (1982): 39–72. For a brief history of the BBS, see "The Béla Balázs Studio," online at http://www.filmkultura.hu/articles/teaching/bela.en.html.
62. Társulás produced the three most formally innovative films of the period: Gábor Bódy's *A kutya éji dala* (*The Dog's Night Song*, 1983), András Jeles's *Álombrigád* (*The Dream Brigade*, 1983), and Béla Tarr's *Őszi almanach* (*Almanac of Fall*, 1984). Bódy committed suicide in 1985 (the year when Társulás ceased to exist). Jeles's film was promptly banned for its utterly disillusioned portrayal of the working class of contemporary Hungary. Tarr's film marks a change of direction in the artistic development of this talented filmmaker (and his codirector, Ágnes Hranitzky), anticipating the internationally acclaimed later films *Sátántangó* (*Satan's Tango*, 1994), and *Werckmeister harmóniák* (*Werckmeister Harmonies*, 2000).
63. See Kovács, *A film szerint a világ*, 256–58, for a cogent discussion of Társulás as well as the work of Gábor Bódy (274–81), András Jeles (268–74), and Béla Tarr (314–39).
64. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, 153.
65. Ibid., 169.
66. In *Herkulesfürdői emlék*, the politically motivated border crossing is anticipated by the cross-dressing of the male hero, who passes as a nurse (in a clinic on the Austro-Hungarian border) in order to escape capture and execution following the fall in 1919 of Hungary's first Soviet-style republic. In *Szerencsés Dániel*, a group of 1956 refugees engage in a carnivalesque *danse macabre* in the transit space of a small hotel on the Austro-Hungarian border. In *Egymásra nézve*, the female protagonist's oppositional politics is coupled with lesbianism, a deadly mix in the Hungary of the early 1960s. Indeed, she is shot dead as she tries to traverse the closely-watched border zone in the repressive early 1960s.
67. Obviously, the motif of orphaned children is not restricted to Hungarian cinema. Italian neorealist films, for example, often feature abandoned, orphaned children. However, most frequently, orphanage is associated with a cataclysmic historical event, for example World War II, whereas in Hungarian cinema the theme appears to have a wider range of application. A fuller investigation of the orphaned children motif as a distinct element of Hungarian exilic cinema would gain from a close study of similar or related motifs in the cinema of other countries over the same period.
68. Balázs coauthored the script of *Valahol Európában*. It is my conjecture that the rape scene, filmed as a shadow play on the wall, follows the aesthetic principles that Balázs formulated as a film theorist. In *Theory of the Film*, Balázs argues that certain scenes work better if shown indirectly, though mirrors or shadows, writing, "There are certain tragic scenes which would appear trivial in direct pictures and lose their tragic character. If a director shows these in indirect shots, he does not do so in order to avoid crude effect; on

the contrary, his object is to heighten the effect of some scene in danger of becoming banal. . . . If we see only a shadow of the scene on a wall, then we see the wall, the room of which it is a part, and the physiognomy of the things which witness the deed." See Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art,* trans. Edith Bone (New York: Dover, 1970), 110.

seven

global aesthetics and the serbian cinema of the 1990s

dušan i. bjelić

> [A]ll art is subject to political manipulation, except for that which speaks the language of this same manipulation.
>
> **—Laibach, "10 Items of the Covenant and Other Statements"**[1]

Closely tied to ideological state apparatuses, national cultures often play a dual role in the process of globalization: they are at once the normalizers of and a source of rebellion against imperial codes of representation.[2] Serbian national cinema of the 1990s illustrates this paradox well. Taking the cliché of the "wild Balkan man" produced by the global media through their coverage of the ethnic war and the United Nations sanctions imposed upon Serbia and Montenegro,[3] Serbian cinema succeeded in exploiting the stereotype brilliantly, using Hollywood's own language of cinema to turn the global media against itself. According to Fredric Jameson, it is this paradoxical relation to Hollywood and its mainstream aesthetics that gives Balkan cinema its geo-aesthetic significance.[4]

Responding in part to this paradox, Jameson theorizes that a national cinema is distinguished from the Hollywood mainstream by innovative form and style, and by telling a story through the movements and interlinking of "collective assemblages" rather than through individual characters.[5] Another hallmark of a national cinema, according to Jameson, is the emergence of a dominant auteur whose work becomes successful on the international scene and then calls attention to the work of others. In addition to mainstream Hollywood and national cinemas, Jameson suggests a third type, "global cinema." Like national cinema, he explains, global cinema preserves a distinct style, the auteur's vision, and a collective decentering of the subject; but, instead of resisting Hollywood, it adopts Hollywood stereotypes and aesthetic codes precisely in order to subvert them. In so doing, it creates an innovative aesthetic form.[6]

It may be useful here to elaborate on the concepts of *resistance* and *subversion*, as the subtle distinction between the two is central to Jameson's theory regarding the difference between national and global cinema. Resistance, in Jameson's context, is explicit opposition to a hegemonic system of stereotypes (in this case, Hollywood), which oppresses by means of representation. Subversion, on the other hand, is the exposure and undermining of that hegemonic system by means of performative destabilization. To use a cinematic example, there is a scene in Stuart Rosenberg's *Cool Hand Luke* (1967) where the prison rebel Luke (Paul Newman) convinces the prisoners to finish building a road before the deadline imposed by the prison authorities. As a result, rather than slowing down the work as much as possible (a form of primitive resistance), the convicts rush to finish it better and faster than expected. The prison authorities respond with guns at the ready, as if to an impending riot. Watching this scene, we are first surprised by the guards' hostile reaction; then we come to understand that performing oppression better than the system that imposes that oppression—whether a prison or a representational order—trumps the system's strongest card, predictable and calculable resistance.

As the product of a global industry, every national cinema is, in a literal sense, global. However, it is the aestheticizing practices of global hegemony and global community (rather than mythologizing a nation as a special group) that makes cinema global in the larger sense. National cinema may exhibit global aesthetics and be transformed into a global cinema only by engaging the imaginary of global hegemony. For example, Hollywood's industry of stereotypes represents populations by categorizing and systematizing them into reductive names and pictures. Stereotypes thus become a form of oppression and fingerprints of global power, artifacts of both global aesthetics and global ideology. National cinema, in its effort to resist Hollywood, tends to reject stereotypes and to

seek an authentic self-representation. However, this direct engagement paradoxically makes such cinema part of, and reinforces, the hegemonic system it seeks to oppose. Cognizant of subversive strategies—"Let stereotypes have a riot!"—films by recent Hollywood directors such as Spike Lee, Oliver Stone, and Quentin Tarantino redeploy stereotypes and provide a powerful example of the global cinema proposed here by Jameson.

A retrospective look at Serbian cinema provides a case in point of the distinction between resistance and subversion (and between national and global aesthetics). The Yugoslav "black film" of the 1960s and early 1970s, portraying the misery of the working class under communism, represented an aesthetic resistance to the regime's cosmetic view of social reality. However, this apparent resistance was actually a function of the system itself. Titoism, relying on a delicate balance of power among ethnic groups within the country and, in the context of the Cold War, between the censorship of Soviet Stalinism and freedom of expression of Western liberalism outside the country, had to have space for its critics. Therefore, the creative power of filmmakers such as Živojin Pavlović, Dušan Makavejev and Aleksandar Petrović was actually derived from the system itself—and sanctioned by it. These filmmakers were not true dissidents, but the system's own "built-in" critics. Then, in the 1970s, Tito's regime became more conservative, resulting in many repressive measures. Among them was the closing of the space for cinematic resistance, and the introduction of an apologetic "Hollywoodization" in its place.[7] High-budget film spectacles by Veljko Bulajić *Sutjeska* (*Sutjeska*, 1973) and *Bitka na Neretvi* (*Battle on Neretiva*, 1969), loaded with Hollywood stars, were the successors of the "black movies"; bright images and the spectacular history of partisan resistance replaced images of the poverty and misery of socialism. In the minds of the viewers, Tito's image was interwoven with those of Richard Burton, Orson Welles, and other Hollywood stars, all merging into a single stream of history.

Serbian cinema of the 1990s inherited the Hollywoodization of domestic ideology that typified the 1970s, and deployed the stereotype of the wild Balkan man, an ideological and global media cliché of the 1990s, in order to confront both nationalism and globalism at once. Certainly, this stereotype existed in the Serbian cinema before the 1990s—for example, in Slobodan Šijan's *Maratonci Trče Počasni Krug* (*Marathon Family*, 1982)—but it was the collapse of Yugoslavia that elevated it from regional to global significance. Books such as Robert D. Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*; Hollywood films such as John Moore's *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001), or Elie Chouraqui's *Harrison's Flowers* (2000); as well as domestic films such as Emir Kusturica's *Bila Jednom Jedna Zemlja* (*Underground*, 1995) and *Crna Mačka, Beli Mačor* (*Black Cat White Cat*, 1998),

are but a few examples of the global dissemination and marketing of the wild Balkan man stereotype. By choosing to exploit this stereotype at a time when global media representation had colonized the entire nation, Serbian cinema was also choosing to engage directly with the conditions of global domination and so elevate its aesthetic response from national to global.

globalization: preamble to serbian cinema

The fall of Yugoslavia and the resurgence of Balkan (particularly Serbian) nationalism have challenged the neoliberal view regarding the end of ideology, nation-state, and nationalism.[8] In truth, nationalism is not antithetical to globalization. Neoliberalism dreams about the end of class conflict, and nationalism produces classless conflict. Ultimately, these ideologies converge to form one system of domination.

Neoliberalism attempts to suppress class conflict through the overproduction of goods and the creation of desire for goods; nationalism does the same through the fiction of national unity, which shifts the arena of conflict from the desire for goods to the desire for community and identity. Because nationalism serves to suppress class conflict and uses ethnicity as the cause of conflict, ethnicity has become, Etienne Balibar asserts, an ideological asset to global capital.[9] As Louis Althusser argues, no economic system can produce goods, mobilize labor, or tap into natural resources without daily reinforcement of the system of production in and through the ideological agency of the interpellated subjectivity that unifies and makes sense of structural contradictions. Thus, the global subject is ultimately shaped by local ideology.[10] Sociologically speaking, then, the fictive identity of ethnicity enables reproduction of global capitalism without the threat of rupture by class conflict.

This split between production and ethnic subjectivity, global and national, regulates the important distribution of global wealth within the framework of the nation-state by means of regional hierarchies often based on ethnic divisions, debunking the neoliberal myth of the "powerless state" in the age of globalization.[11] Wealth, globally generated, is distributed within the national welfare state according to the rule of ethnicity; the European system of national socialism demonstrates that labor is global and wealth ethnic. Socialism is for native Europeans, global capitalism for immigrants and Eastern Europeans. The European Union globalizes its population by means of balkanization—its deep secret violently reproduced through Serbian nationalism. In that respect, globalization in Europe and Serbian nationalism share a system of ethnic discrimination: balkanization. The European Union promulgates balkanization legitimately through its economic system, as the Serbian state has done through nationalism.

The wild Balkan man has emerged in the context, and as a result of, the balkanization of Europe. He, in contrast to the Eurotechnocrats, embodies the enemy of European civilization. He is, at the same time, truly European in that he represents a new and energized European man who uninhibitedly acts out a system of masculinity. His uninhibited homosocial bonding and homoerotic desires, effervescing in nationalism ingrained in the institution of a nation-state, are revealed in his passionate and violent exclusion of women and minorities. He expresses with passionate physicality what Eurotechnocrats emotionlessly express in economy and law. His ethnic essence is thus a threat, and, at the same time, the first principle of European integration. But his real threat to the system of exclusions is that he is the embodiment of it. That is what the Serbian cinema of the 1990s reveals in its deployment of the trope of the wild Balkan man.

bure baruta (*cabaret balkan*): belgrade against belgrade

Violence has been a common theme of the Balkan cinema since its inception. In the 1990s, however, during the civil wars and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, ethnic violence became the prevalent mode of representation among Yugoslav film directors, underscoring the importance of ethnic conflict as a new reality for those living on the periphery of global capitalism. I focus here on two Serbian films from this period, *Rane* (*Wounds*, 1998), written and directed by Srdjan Dragojević, and *Bure Baruta* (*Cabaret Balkan*, 1998) directed by Goran Paskaljević. Both focus on urban violence, mostly by urban Serb against urban Serb, at a time when Belgrade was carrying out a program of violence against other ethnic groups outside its walls. By redeploying violence as an aesthetic problem rather than an ideological tool, these Belgrade films have produced an urban image that in itself subverts the pastoral semiotics of Serbian nationalism, the very source of ethnic violence.[12] In addition to this, by deploying the trope of the wild Balkan man (a not-yet-globalized peripheral being) and using the Hollywood idiom of "going through" the stereotypes of the global media,[13] Dragojević and Paskaljević also mounted a critique of globalization.

A significant achievement of both *Rane* and *Bure Baruta* is to make us aware that the city and its global media, rather than the site of "deep-seated" Balkan hate, are the sources of Balkan violence. Artistically, the films accomplish this by placing violence squarely in its urban nest, and thus uncoupling it from the ideology of the nation and from any ethnic "essence." The city streets, television, phone booths, and road rage are all parts of the grid of the global city, which has provided the imagination, logistics, ammunition and flesh for the ethnic wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. The violence of the wild Balkan man operates in these films as a cloudbuster of parochial aesthetic, a technovisual signifier informed by the logic of nonlinear narrative—as

are, for instance, Alejandro Gonzales Iñarritu's *Amores Perros* (*Love's a Bitch*, 2000), Robert Altman's *Short Cuts* (1993), or Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), recontextualized for local purposes to challenge the pastoral semiotics of Serb national unity originating in romantic literature and art. On the global level, the films also challenge the neoliberal, Hobbesian concept of social peace by insisting that violence is not always a form of social disintegration but, as Georg Simmel argues, it may be seen as a form of urban sociation, *Vergesellschaftungsform*.[14]

Belgrade's recent history reveals the genealogy of violence there. Before the collapse of Yugoslavia, Belgrade was the Hong Kong of Eastern Europe, a strategic outpost for Western corporate capital to camp and await the imminent collapse of communism. Once the purveyor of violence to its periphery, the city has now, ironically, itself become prey to global violence. *Rane* captures the beginning of the period when Belgrade began to export its violence to Croatia; and *Bure Baruta* covers the post–Dayton Peace Accords period when the violence was on the way to Serbia. At that time, Belgrade was under an embargo; the rate of inflation was 40 percent per day. Diplomatically and culturally excluded from the world community, it became notorious as the home of Slobodan Milošević and his followers, and was stereotyped as such. At the same time, Belgrade's hope of strangling Sarajevo from a distance and imposing regional hierarchies on the basis of ethnicity led to the eruption of ethnic violence and classless conflict, which opened the door for the fragmentation and globalization of the Balkans. The city that once seemed destined to become the regional center of economic globalization became instead the ideological center of a global stereotype.

Bure Baruta (based on a play by Dejan Dukovski) is set in Belgrade on the eve of the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords, which ended the Bosnian War. Daniel J. Goulding summarizes the film as offering "a nightmarish, *noir* journey through the dark streets and psyche of a Belgrade peopled with surly young punks, dissatisfied refugees, criminal gangs, decadent cabaret performers, destitute junkies, alcoholics, jealous lovers, and violent rivals—a volatile mix, which erupts into senseless nihilistic violence at the very time the Dayton Peace Accords are being signed. The film thus forges a connection between the corrupt, criminal, and violent prosecution of the war and its profoundly corroding and cancerous effects on the body politic."[15]

None of the characters in *Bure Baruta* is a rabid nationalist hungering for a Greater Serbia. Their concerns have to do with broken-down cars, late buses, jealousy, police brutality, joblessness—common conditions of the global city. Nationalism is, in fact, pointedly absent from the story, appearing only as a fictive cloud hovering over the city as if in someone else's imagination, or as news streaming from a cab's radio or from a television.

The opening shot of the film, in which we see the gaze of the the cab driver (Nebojša Glogovac) at the dividing line on the road, and the closing shot of him gazing at the fiery explosion of the stolen gasoline, draw the viewer into and out of the grid of city traffic as a totality of social relations representing the driver as a global citizen circulating within the grid. It is this grid of the "collective assemblage" that decenters the subject from its ethnic essence, from a personal psychology, from the nationalist and the Hollywood gaze, and presents it as hostage to fellow citizens, to the city itself. Here we have a paradigmatic shift in the representation of the social, from national territory (*Lebensraum*) to time as a global scheme of action. The drivers in the city, released into the global grid, are simultaneously released from their national essence, and (like Albert Einstein's trains) follow a schedule as a real scheme of operational unity. They are expected to maintain the life of this complex by perpetually approaching, passing, and outdistancing each other in time. But the time is not local; it is not Balkan time but global time, introduced in the Balkans along with cars and gasoline. Yet within this global time things happen differently in Belgrade from the way they happen elsewhere: local ways of doing things have been woven into the global grids of time. For example, while Milošević is signing the peace agreement in Dayton, Ohio, a careless punk harassing a girl he sees from the open window of his car (as is common in the city) runs into another car and the complex, face-to-face conflicts of the film are set in motion, with these cars and these people. It is a local event that comes to symbolize the city in microcosm.

Milošević, though *out* of Belgrade on a peace mission, is *in* time with Belgrade's drivers. The traffic flows despite his absence, meaning that power does not reside in him but in the tyranny of the anonymous grid. Michel de Certeau's point about the anonymity of global power ("tyranny without a tyrant") is that it is an empty space that can be "occupied by 'anybody.'"[16] In the same way that anybody can occupy the position of a scientist as long as he follows the anonymous rules of the scientific method, so can anybody occupy the role of a tyrant as long as the rules of the grid are followed. Such a degree of anonymity and the instability of global power based on empty networks becomes open to endless shifts of the "tyrant's impersonators." Individual tyrants come and go, but the anonymous grid remains absolute. This fusion of the global and the local, of empty global networks and local blood, sweat, and tears, revolves around gasoline. Gasoline, in *Bure Baruta*, works as a metaphor of global ideology, a fetish of global capitalism, and a tyrant of the grid. The grid itself is pure energy, and—like the wild Balkan man—is always on the verge of explosion. Watching the massive crash of a huge American-made car in *Amores Perros*, we witness an explosive, demonic release of mechanical energy stored in this manmade object

and in the system that governs its use. As in Milcho Manchevski's *Pred Dozhdot* (*Before the Rain*, 1994), when the Serb's anger explodes and produces the restaurant massacre, this release of energy vividly imprints itself onto disfigured human bodies.

Under the embargo, gasoline was procured illegally and sold by people close to Milosevic's government. The gasoline-stealing incident at the end of the excruciating series of conflicts in *Bure Baruta* underscores the anxiety caused by this situation. The film culminates in a citizen's rage over stolen gasoline; when the young Bosnian refugee wrongly accused of stealing it shouts, "I am not guilty!" we are first surprised; just a minute ago he was terrorizing another citizen for saying the same thing. Then we realize it is gasoline, its global use-value for the grid, that forces the confession, just as the tragic car accident in *Amores Perros* forces the participants to become transparent to each other. It is exactly this global drama, *Bure Baruta* tells us, that conjures up intimate and local psychologies. The massive explosion of the stolen gasoline, the intersection of the personal and global, also foreshadows the bombing of Belgrade by forces from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Baghdad in flames, the stealing of Iraqi oil, the "shock and awe" of the 2003 invasion of Iraq—all aesthetic modalities of global violence.

To live in the city, to be on wheels, moving up and down the Balkan *Koyaanisquatsi*-esque grid,[17] brings on rage when the trajectory is obstructed. The rage relates to the grid and the "political unconscious." Like Martin Heidegger's hammer, only when the grid breaks do we become aware of it, not as we contemplate it in a ready-*for*-hand mode, *vor-handen*, but as we use it in ready-*to*-hand mode, *zu-handen*. The city traffic is a modern technological and instrumentalized network of utensils, of practical projects at hand, a collective assemblage on wheels, whose members show who they really are (as Karl Marx might have put it) as they operate, produce materiality, and work under definite material limits independent of their will, as in Jameson's "political unconscious." Spread out in the grid like utensils on a shelf, drivers have anchored "being there" in the grid of temporal operations in which they use each other as tools in the system—an inhumane and violent system indeed, but still real.[18] But for the most part drivers are not really aware of the grid until a practical malfunction occurs. Only when the grid breaks do its tacit knowledge and patterns of use become transparent to the operator. Conflict then ensues about assumed norms and why they are not being followed: "Why are you driving without a license?" "Why did you leave the scene of the accident?" "Why don't you look where you're going?" The car crash at the beginning of *Bure Baruta*, like Heidegger's broken hammer, introduces us to Belgrade's political unconscious. But the opening shot of a cab driver looking at the road, before the crash, is already situated there—that is,

zu-handen. Through his competent gaze, the norms of driving, the city geography, and the city demography become familiar to us as they are to him by virtue of the grid known to him, and now to us, as a general frame of reference. As the glance of a tacit knower, the opening shot reveals the course of producing and coproducing traffic now and here. Through it we see the city as the shark's eye sees the ocean. Every dark corner is known intimately. Cruising through Belgrade's dark alleys and boulevards, with the predator's eye, we discern the unfolding life of the city, sensing the danger, smelling the blood. We meet victims and learn their unique stories—all this and more in the course of coliving the collective assemblage of the city.

Since Henry Ford's customization of the car, it has become the chief means of social connectedness in industrialized countries. In the modernized Balkan countries and elsewhere the social grid constructed around time and speed has also introduced new forms of conflict—car crashes, drag racing, road rage, and so on. The car crash as a dramatic beginning of the film introduces us to the rage caused by the desecrated ideal of time and its instrument. The cab driver from the opening scene becomes insulted by being suddenly cut off in his white Mercedes by a punk in a yellow Yugo. The makes of the cars instantly establish social and political hierarchy: Mercedes, the West; Yugo, the East. The cab driver follows the punk to the first stoplight and demands aggressively, "Who gave you a driver's license?" This is enough to spark an explosion in the (junior) wild Balkan man: the punk gives him the finger and speeds up, cutting off the cab left and right and forcing it to slow down, taking obvious pleasure in stealing somebody else's time by means of speed, as if to say, "West is the West but we are the best!"

Cutting off is very common in Belgrade traffic, and it is directly related to the global economy of time. It is a form of primitive accumulation of temporal capital—a force that produces relations, personal trajectories, and conflicts as well as synchronicities. Old Belgrade does not have the wide boulevards of some other East European cities, such as Budapest. Most of the streets are narrow, curving, and often hilly. Most of them run only one way; you are in a congested labyrinth. Time passes by, traffic is slow. The Turkish word *vilayet*, for a place where time does not flow, is often used to describe this situation.[19] Getting in and out of these side streets is the experience of moving into the premodern Balkan darkness and out again to the wide and bright boulevards. Once on them, traffic becomes a race to make up for "lost" time.

There are some global rules to this grid that become, in the moment of their violation, an occasion for social interactions. When the wild Balkan punk turns into a side street he is tempted to focus on a beautiful girl rather then on the traffic. "Come on baby, we are going to paradise," he says, and hits a VW beetle. To seal the punk's deal with

the devil, the girl witnesses his humiliation with a vengeful smile, and gives him the finger (as he did to the cab driver) before moving on. Giving the finger is a highly operationalized signifier of the grid and, in an otherwise non-Freudian movie, very Freudian. The finger as a phallus signifier marks who is down (women) and who is up (men) in the grid; the finger is a signifier of social hierarchy and the distribution of momentary power relations. It is always about the grid as a place of getting fucked. To be fucked means here to be cut off by the grid from its own time. The punk can't go home; he is now a hostage of the grid; he is rendered impotent—just as he has rendered impotent the already-impotent cabdriver—and that is the cause of the girl's smile. The sense of castration and the threat of the feminization of the wild Balkan man pervades the city grid at the same time that the global media are reporting mass rapes by the same wild Balkan man. Yet another operation of the grid is the de-essentialization of the European citizen from a fictive identity; the fiction of social unity has been replaced by the reality of sexual oppression.

rane (*wounds*): serb against serb

Fredric Jameson has proposed that films are "supremely equipped" to dramatize Balkan violence. "So movies," he writes, "are preeminently the place in which the Balkans can be shown, not only to have been violent at two crucial moments of their history, but to be the place of violence itself—its home and its heartland."[20] Jameson's point may have another meaning. The Balkan violence urged on by the Serbian electronic media rigged in the service of nationalism is not only good representational material, it is also relevant to film as a tool of violence. Such violence was created, to invoke Jean Baudrillard, "with the screen in mind." If the screen instigates violence in the society of spectacle, violence is then its performative condition. The film industry is the best example of this condition. Jules and Vincent (Samuel L. Jackson and John Travolta), the two Los Angeles gangsters in *Pulp Fiction*, and their powerful boss, Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames), are right in style; they fashion themselves according to the aesthetics of the city's film industry, speaking as if scripted; they commit crime while getting "in character," and their boss gives orders over the cell phone sitting by the swimming pool as if he were a studio executive. They are in a film acting as if they were in a film, suggesting not only that crime has a cinematic structure but also that cinema has an identical structure to crime and violence (as in Robert Altman's *The Player*, 1992). In this context, crime ceases to be moral deviation and becomes an industry of emulation, supplying U.S. senators (as in Warren Beatty's *Bullworth*, (1998) as well as gangsters with performative schemes. Thus, it is produced in the same way as any other commodity in the scheme of global capitalism. Cinema in this era of global aesthetics must acknowledge itself as the

industry of spectacle and critically reflect upon its unique role as cause and as representor of violence, as does the Serbian film *Rane*.

Dragojevic's film, like Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* (1994), is the story of two media artifacts, two television stereotypes who become outlaws precisely because they have turned against their masters. Adrift without a referent, a stereotype becomes, effectively, a vampire, consumed with nostalgia and rage for its loss. Pinki (Dušan Pekić) and Kraut (Milan Marić), the film's main characters, are TV vampires. Through them *Rane* mounts an aesthetic attack on Serbian TV, as does *Natural Born Killers* against American TV. Serbian TV was the chief instigator of ethnic violence in the region. Like Stone, Dragojevic deploys two salient features of TV—stereotypes and violence—to mount his critique of the medium. By pitting the two young male protagonists, disenchanted by their parents' reality, against Serbian television and Hollywood movies, Dragojević melds crime and electronic media into a single amalgam.

For many, this film illustrates urban violence at a time of social anomie. Marko Živković, for instance, suggests that the protagonists are "ciphers, or incarnations of the inchoate misery of Milošević's Serbia. . . . They are pure rage born of a particular Serbian anomie, and that rage is inarticulate, directionless, blind."[21] But Dragojević makes it very clear from the outset that his protagonists do not, in fact, lack order, standards, and guidance; on the contrary, they hold to them very firmly. Their standards are not, however, those once offered by Tito or imposed by the Milošević regime. Rather, they adopt the gangster codes popularized by Hollywood actors such as Humphrey Bogart and James Cagney. Unlike their contemporaries, who become passive victims of power and thus fail to react against the crimes of their government, they have established themselves, in the fashion of Bogart and Cagney, as two sovereigns of the Belgrade streets, emulating not only Hollywood but also reenacting the "sovereign" violence of Milošević's government.

With the opening shot of a crucifix, one assumes that the film will be about the passions of good, some form of *Imitatio Christi* in the midst of hell on earth. When the crucifix reappears at the end of the film, we understand that this was the gospel of the two bandits, often forgotten, who were crucified along with Christ—not with nails, here, but with each other's bullets. Pinki and Kraut leave the classroom and their contemporaries behind as the teacher is lecturing on Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. The sign has come for them to get "in character" as in Raskolnikov's scheme, "to lose a soul as the way to find it," to take their own life and death from the Milosevic regime and into their own hands. Like Raskolnikov, they kill to be free; like Raskolnikov, they never eat; like Raskolnikov, they lead a ghostlike existence: cocaine for breakfast,

and heroin for dinner. Their version of transcendence, however, is urban and cinematic, as opposed to Raskolnikov's Christian Orthodox v ersion. *Rane* takes these two ghosts right into the heart of the empire of the spectacle.

Guy Debord argues that the society of spectacle has transmuted the materiality of capitalist production into the exaltation of an image, a platonic form, a pure desire.[22] Pinki and Kraut are two examples of such transmutation of a substance into the pure desire of an image. Both are lured away from the nationalist party line, from their parents, and from their generation by two seductive elements of the global city: crime and television. They learn about crime from the tacky gangster Uncle Dickie (Dragan Bjelogrlić), a "cool" chetnik, who tells Pinki and Kraut as a way of aestheticizing his trade, "Bogey, Cagney, Clint and I will always be the cowboys." The lure of television comes from Lydia (Vesna Trivalić), the anchor of a wildly popular TV show about the Belgrade crime scene, *Puls Asfalta* (*Pulse of the Asphalt*). The show is "Brought to you by Democracy Light"; and this tagline is in itself a mordant commentary on globalization. Uncle Dickie and Lydia both live in the boys' neighborhood. Uncle Dickie teaches them the trade of crime through the Hollywood aesthetics of personal violence; Lydia teaches them how to become TV legends. Altogether they reproduce the global conditions of the production of the society of spectacle. It is the collusion between the system itself organized around crime and television and the Hollywood emulative schemes à la Bogart and Cagney that send Pinki and Kraut to the very symbolic core of Milošević's power, where they discover the Sadean exuberance of absolute sovereignty in killing without punishment.[23] While Dickie roams through Croatia as a paramilitary, returning in a car filled with looted TVs, VCRs, personal headset stereos, and other global hardware, Pinki and Kraut opt for the software—the image—and never leave Belgrade. Their rebellious strategy of self-empowerment styled after Hollywood cliché becomes a metaphor for the director's own uprising against Milošević's aesthetics of death, which he uses as an aesthetic signifier of the regime to turn it against itself. When Pinki, on the operating table after being shot by Kraut, says, "My name is Bond . . . James Bond," it is as if Dragojević himself is speaking, under the knife of Milošević's regime.

Pinki and Kraut, in their turbospeed trashy aesthetic, are the missionaries of the new geo-aesthetics nurtured by the conflation of trashy crime and patriotism on Milošević's state television.[24] According to Baudrillard, TV makes global war impossible because to have a "real" war one has to have "real news," and TV news is no longer real. In the case of Serbia, the TV news about the war was not real, but was real in its consequences. Internalized ethnic stereotypes promulgated by Serbian

TV became the condition of the production of the war. The chief purveyor of nationalist propaganda was RTS (Radio Televizija Srbije), the government's main TV channel, and the private channels Pink and Palma. The sole dissenting voice was the alternative TV channel, Studio B, but only until the government took control of that, too. Not only did TV images provide a reason for going to war, but also a heaven for dead souls, a pantheon for the ascending nation, which in itself became the cause to die for. Serbian TV, fueled by bad poetry, nationalistic trilogies, and politicians in bad suits, was a simulative device for the "real" killing machine. Against this aesthetic Dragojevic considers an alternative urban killing machine, with its semiotics of death and resurrection. Under the director's orders, Pinki and Kraut steal crime from the politicians' secret system and deploy it against the very conditions of crime. By showing the gun used by urban Serb against urban Serb, not for the sake of Mother Serbia but Mother Television, Pinki and Kraut make this reality more appealing to us, the global audience, and to all those facing Serb guns (and perhaps that is why this was the first Serbian film to be distributed in Croatia). The film allows us to identify with the familiar violence caused by money, drugs and images, conditions of emulation, and familiar conditions of the production of global order.

There is another parallel between Pinki and Kraut and Milosevic's killing machine: both operate on the homoerotic economy of pleasure. In his studies on nationalism and sexuality, George L. Mosse has shown how the political power of Nazism was built around *mannerbunde* (male bonding) and suppressed homosexuality.[25] Branka Arsić attributes the birth of Serbian nationalism to the suppressed homosexuality of Serb men.[26] Pinki and Kraut forge a bond based on strong homoerotic desires; even when they are with women they can't stand being separated from each other. Like Schutzstaffel (SS) troops, they die loving each other, and this suppressed love turns into explosive violence. The oedipal and homoerotic structure that throws them unpredictably into a rage of violence even against each other is carefully nurtured by Lydia, Mother Television. When committing their first inner-city crime by killing Lydia's lover (Fedja Stojanović), a prominent male TV anchor (Father Television), they tease each other while swimming naked in the pool: "Do you want to fuck me?" "Yes, I want to fuck you!" Lydia, witnessing the murder and perhaps masterminding it behind the scene, henceforth takes them under her "pussy," making them the two most lethal guns of the damned city of Belgrade. In their own jargon, she makes them *pičkoklečcima* (pussy whipped), and begins to instruct them how and whom to kill for television—on the order of Max Brackett (Dustin Hoffman) in Costa Gavras's *Mad City* (1997) coaching Sam Bialy (John Travolta) to produce, as Max likes to say,

"good television." But unlike Max, who finds himself and the media responsible for the death of Sam Bialy, Lydia ends up dead, overpowered by her own erotic dolls.

In the context of the political situation in Belgrade, the harsh sexual (and sexist) language used by Pinki and Kraut in the film works as a metaphor for global capitalism. Their motto says it all: "Either you fuck or you are fucked"; it reveals not only the homoerotic and sexist structure of Serbian crime (and of Serbian nationalism) but also a deep Foucauldian belief that sexuality organizes power relations. The logic of late capitalism pulsing in the hearts of these two Belgrade criminals could be summed up by their mantra: in the world of BMWs, films, drugs, nationalism, and wars you can't get something for yourself without screwing somebody else. These two sexist gangsters are the quintessential messengers of truth about a system based on ethnicity and exploitation. The message they bear is that sexism is the ethics of capitalism. Sexism feeds into the structure of the self-regulating tyranny of the grid; it establishes the harsh and necessary logic of polarities, imposes hierarchies, and introduces the unpredictability of power relations.

Actors in such a power grid are like pieces on a chessboard; they are in a strategic relation to another race, sex, or ethnicity, which continually shifts from domination to subordination. When Marsellus Wallace, in *Pulp Fiction*, is entrapped and sodomized by a white racist, we see the "king checked on a black square." When, shortly after, due to a wrong move by his white captors, he gets hold of a loaded shotgun and "moves to a white square," it becomes the "Badass nigger's" turn to get "medieval" on the "hillbilly boy's ass," illustrating the unpredictability of power in the global system of "tyranny without a tyrant." This also illustrates how accurately "Either you fuck or you are fucked" sums up the role of power in a global system. As bell hooks writes concerning Tarantino's cynical view of power, "the real deal is that domination is here to stay—going nowhere, and everybody is in on the act."[27] Applying this axiom to the Serbian situation, Milošević was "fucked" by Zoran Djindjić, the Prime Minister of Serbia who was responsible for sending Milošević to the Hague, and Djindjić by Milošević's gangsters—his assassins; the "musical chairs" power game continues; the grid of tyranny remains. Shooting each other at the end of the film—the only responsibility that they have toward the unsigned contract forged by their homoerotic bond—is Pinki's and Kraut's way of checking out of the system as two tyrants.

Serbian cinema, then, has deployed the stereotype of the wild Balkan man and, in so doing, fully revealed its ideological implications—for Europe, for globalization, and for balkanization. Because Serbia is both in Europe and is the epicenter of ethnic conflicts, because Serbian

cinema has traditionally had a strong ideological element, it focused quite naturally, in its deployment of the wild Balkan man stereotype, on the ideology behind its production. By balkanizing itself through the stereotype of the wild Balkan man, Serbian cinema has helped to transmute balkanization from a regional stereotype into a political problem of Europe. Dina Iordanova criticizes Balkan cinema for its submissive acceptance, and use of, Western stereotypes in order "'to address the current trouble of the region.'" And, she states, "'Balkan film remains uncritical and fails to recognize the controversial effects of the Eurocentric construct.'"[28] Slavoj Žižek, for his part, takes Kusturica to task for employing cultural stereotypes of the wild Balkan man in *Bila Jednom Jedna Zemlja* which, according to him, amounts to supplying "the libidinal economy of the Serb ethnic slaughter in Bosnia."[29] But, to reverse Zizek, Serb ethnic slaughter in Bosnia may have provided libidinal energy for Kusturica's *Bila Jednom Jedna Zemlja* in the same way that Milošević's oppressive regime has for *Rane* and *Bure Baruta* (and that Hollywood stereotypes and violence have for *Natural Born Killers* or *Pulp Fiction*). In other words, balkanization (an oppressive construct), when recontextualized as performative stereotype, may be subversive in revealing the balkanizing secrets of the very system that criminalizes it.

Fredric Jameson and Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli are both cognizant of the new representational strategies in the global system of stereotypical signification. In their view, we can't avoid stereotypes; nobody is saved from objectification by the "external gaze." Given those conditions, the true challenge is not in authenticity but in exaggerating cliché onscreen in order to smoke it out of its reductive hiding-place and expose it for what it is. Serbian cinema, Ravetto-Biagioli writes, "is an attempt to disarm those discourses and images that legitimate a violent sense of truth by exposing the absurdity of such modes of representation."[30] True subversion then occurs outside of the established scheme of resistance precisely because the authentic national cinema already participates in the global system's own invented geo-aesthetic polarities and fake competitions such as those between Hollywood and national cinema—as if between Pepsi and Coke. Thus the manifesto of the Serbian cinema (in Jameson's interpretation) regarding the global production of the wild Balkan man: "We are like this, and in fact, we're even worse than you thought we are, and we love it![31]

notes

1. First published in *Nova revija*, no.13/14, 1983. (A Slovene review for cultural and political issues.) http://www.ljudmila.org/embassy/3a/10.htm
2. Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," *Screen 30*, no. 4 (1989): 37; Ulfe Hedetoft, "Contemporary Cinema: Between Cultural Globalism and National Interpretation," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 278.

3. Fredric Jameson, "Thoughts on Balkan Cinema," in *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film*, ed. Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 233.
4. This essay is my extension of the group discussion held by Fredric Jameson on Balkan cinema at the University of Southern Maine in August 2003 as a part of a summer graduate school course in theory, literature, and culture.
5. Jameson, "Thoughts on Balkan Cinema," 248, notes that "a genuine national cinema will also tend to include its form within itself as content: not as nationalistic themes or some ethnic jingoism, as rather in the presence of collective assemblages-masses of people moving together, groups as agencies rather than individuals, a decentering combined with unusual kinds of multitudes and numerous bodies interlinking."
6. Jameson, "Thoughts on Balkan Cinema," 252, justifies this by claiming that "the norm will have to be in some sense internalized, in order for the style to be able to negate it. There must, in other words, exist an Other to be thus cancelled and negated… that other has been Hollywood."
7. On the system's criminalization of the "black films," see Daniel J. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema: The Yugoslav Experience, 1945–2001*, rev. and expanded ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 78–83.
8. See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas of the Fifties* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
9. Etienne Balibar, "From Class Struggle to Classless Struggle?" in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London: Verso, 1996), 153–84.
10. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* translated by Ben Brewster, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001).
11. Linda Weiss, "Globalization and the Myth of the Powerless State," *New Left Review 225* (1997): 3–27.
12. For the modern image of Belgrade, see David Norris, *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth: Questions of Identity and Modernity* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999); Norris correctly claims that balkanization is a drama of European modernity, and not outside of it. See also Ljiljana Blagojevic, *Modernisma in Serbia: The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture 1919–1941*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).
13. David Bordwell, "Alternative Modes of Film Practice," in *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, ed. David Bordwell et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 385, notes, "The historical and aesthetic importance of the classical Hollywood cinema lies in the fact that to go beyond it we must go through it."
14. George Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group-Affiliations* translated by Reinhard Bendix, (New York: Free Press, 1955), 20.
15. Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 204.
16. Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural*, trans. Luce Giard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 33.
17. This is a reference to Godfrey Reggio's 1983 film *Koyaanisquatsi: Life Out of Balance*.
18. When I was a student in the early 1970s, my friends and I used to go from Belgrade to Milan and hang out in the center of the city for days in order to feel alienated and modern, then return to Belgrade to plot political and aesthetic actions on the basis of this experience.

19. See Nikolai Todorov, *The Balkan City, 1400–1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1983), 34–43.
20. Jameson, "Thoughts on Balkan Cinema," 232.
21. Marko Živković, quoted in Goulding, *Liberated Cinema*, 206.
22. See, e.g., Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: Zone Books, 1995).
23. Giorgio Agamben identifies this kind of sovereignty as the "new nomos of the Earth"; see Giorgio, *Agamben Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press 1998), 38.
24. On the relationship between Milošević's regime and the aesthetic of popular culture, see Eric Gordy, *The Culture of Power in Serbia: Nationalism and the Destruction of Alternatives* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999).
25. George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1997).
26. Branka Arsić, "Queer Serbs," in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*, ed. Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 253-277; about the psychoanalysis of Rane, see Igor Krstić, "Re-thinking Serbia: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Modern Serbian History and Identity through Popular Culture," *Other Voices: The (e)Journal of Cultural Criticism 2*, no. 2 (2002), http://www.othervoices.org/2.2/krstic/index.html.
27. bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 48.
28. Dina Iordanova, quoted in Nevenka Daković, "How to Think About the Balkans," NEXUS/CAS/2003.
29. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 64. For Žižek to claim that the same kind of poetry unifies Radovan Karadžić and Kusturica—that the second helps the first—is a hard sell. To paraphrase Jean Paul Sartre's response to "lazy Marxists" about Paul Valéry being a petit-bourgeois, "Yes, Kusturica, like Karadžić, poeticizes 'the wild Serb man' but not every 'wild Serb' is Kusturica'; yes, Karadžić is a poet, like Kusturica, but can Karadžić make Bila Jednom Jedna Zemlja?"
30. Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli, "Laughing into an Abyss: Cinema and Balkanization," *Screen 44*, no. 4 (2003): 467; See also Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli, "Mythopoetic Cinema: Cinemas of Disappearance," *Third Text 43* (1998): 43–57.
31. Jameson, "Thoughts on Balkan Cinema," 235.

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eight

traumatic memory, jewish identity

remapping the past in hungarian cinema

catherine portuges

In the aftermath of 1989, the horizons of Hungarian cinema broadened to encompass representational styles and subjects that had been avoided, if not altogether suppressed through censorship, during the post–World War II decades. A compelling instance of this altered cinematic landscape is the foregrounding of ethnic, religious, and cultural identities, a practice discernible in films of the early 1990s and one that has continued to be embraced by filmmakers interested in moving beyond the allegorical "Aesopian" narratives of their cinematic predecessors. While questions of identity have always occupied a position of central importance and controversy in Hungarian history and culture, a specific cinematic language had been evolving in film production between 1945 and 1989, conjoining audiences and moving pictures in an unspoken complicity of mutual and reciprocal understanding with regard to politically and historically sensitive subjects. A number of postsocialist feature and documentary films attest to an insistent reframing of spaces of identity, extending and challenging contemporary discourses of Eastern and Central European cinemas as a whole.

An exploration of these tendencies is warranted at a time of sustained national reflection on Hungary's history and future identity. The country's accession to the European Union as one of its first East European members took place in May 2004, during a period when the sixtieth anniversary of the deportation of nearly a half million of the country's Jewish population was also being commemorated. At the same time, a new Holocaust Memorial Center was to be inaugurated in Budapest.[1] These and other related events have been accompanied by an outpouring of historical studies, gallery installations, published memoirs, newly released films, and academic conferences, which suggest an ongoing concern to reconcile individual and collective memory.

It is perhaps worthwhile, then, to revisit selected Hungarian films that, whether semiautobiographical or fictionalized, constitute an indispensable history of the intersections of film, historical trauma, and the Holocaust, in their interrogation of Jewish identity and—perhaps most important—the sources of the memories that are ultimately transmitted visually to subsequent generations.[2] We might well ask, for example, whether, and to what extent, viewers (and readers) born more than two decades after the end of World War II could be said to share a common archive of collective memory inherited or conveyed primarily from mass media representations rather than from more traditional Hungarian art film sources, published historical accounts, or volumes of collected autobiographical essays.[3] While an empirical investigation of this question lies beyond the scope of this inquiry, we do well to incorporate such considerations in any assessment of the intergenerational influence of cinematic transmissions of history.[4]

This consideration inevitably raises the much-discussed psychodynamics of witnessing and testimony, remembering and forgetting, as attested to by the vast literature of spaces of Holocaust memory; for memorials, like films, are fraught with symbolic meaning, and can often become contested terrain, as became evident in debates around modalities of memorializing the trauma of September 11, 2001, in the United States. In order to open further spaces of debate, I will herein discuss films relating to the Holocaust as it was experienced in Hungary, selected in order, among other things, to consider the degree to which there may be differences between films written and directed by those who were firsthand witnesses, victims, or survivors, and those based on memoirs, archival materials, historical accounts, photographic documents or autobiographical novels, adapted or "translated" to another medium by others who may not have experienced these historical events firsthand; witnesses have been some of the most important resources for filmmaking and research in the postwar period.

One of the earliest films of this archive is *Valahol Európában* (*Somewhere in Europe*, directed by Géza Radványi, 1947), in which a group of homeless

children, aged approximately five to eighteen and orphaned by the war or separated from their parents as the Russian Army was poised to overtake the country, band together and roam the countryside, foraging for food in untended farms and fields. The viewer witnesses the children's progressive experience of isolation and their eventual community of fellow beings, culminating in a guardedly optimistic vision of hope for human survival. The screenplay was written in 1945 by one of the earliest and most influential film theorists, Béla Balázs; two other major figures of Hungarian cinema, Károly Makk and Félix Máriássy, also contributed to what was to be one of the last postwar films to be released before the communist takeover of Hungary. In a style that Balázs called "fantastic realism," the opening sequences are set in the ruins of a fortress and wax museum. The camera performs a kind of ritual initiation in a lengthy orgiastic montage at once reminiscent of both Sergey Eisenstein and German expressionism, in which figures of childhood fantasy and horror, culminating in a menacing melting wax figure of Adolf Hitler, seem to come to life. As in many films that portray the consequences of traumatic wartime experience, the point of view is often that of a child or adolescent: here, a young boy trembles in fear as bombs explode just beyond his hiding place; in an earlier sequence, a traumatized girl witnesses firsthand the point-blank murder of her own father, crying out "Apa! (Father!)" Still other children survive the bombing of a home for delinquent children; although references to the possible Jewish origins of the protagonists are inscribed only indirectly, the entire film is dedicated to the "unknown children" who were victims of the war.

Among the earliest East European film cultures to devote substantial attention and industry funding to films about the deportation, ghettoization, and extermination of the region's Jewish populations during the Nazi occupation were those of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. Films produced in those countries are often readable through the lens of socialist and communist ideological preoccupations, with their characteristic antifascist themes of resistance and their celebratory narratives of the values of international solidarity. Yet it is also often characteristic of these films produced, like *Valahol Európában*, immediately following the end of World War II (1947–49), that the complexity of presentation and the range of historical perspectives they embody demonstrate a marked sensitivity toward individual subjectivities. More than a decade later, between 1959 and 1968, a similar intensification of these qualities recurred, in tandem with the rise of student and worker movements of resistance, and, most notably, with the films of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. Finally, toward the end of the 1980s, these qualities were again visible preceding the collapse of the communist regimes in the region.[5]

It might also be argued that for certain filmmakers, in addition to whatever personal motivation they might have experienced as Jews, former concentration camp prisoners, or both, the subject of the Holocaust was at the same time focalized during the 1960s as a means of articulating opposition to the diverse manifestations of totalitarianism in Eastern Europe. Equally pertinent is that fact that representation of the sequelae of the Holocaust and its traumatic history provided an opportunity to interrogate—in ways that might not necessarily be immediately threatened by the censor's stamp—such otherwise marginalized issues as the consequences of compliance with an existing authoritarian regime, and the psychological toll exacted by internal conflicts of conscience between an individual and her ideological world. At the same time, narratives of Holocaust memory enabled filmmakers to foreground the antihero as principal protagonist, a technique that has been taken up more recently, for instance, in the film production of Imre Kertész's semiautobiographical novel *Sorstalanság* (*Fateless*), directed by Lajos Koltai in 2005. The attention given abroad to a number of film productions from the region also enabled their directors to continue to be actively engaged as filmmakers, even when their work was closely monitored by the Communist Party and the board of censors.[6] An instance of such monitoring is Gyula Gazdag's influential film *Társasutazás* (*Package Tour*), a 1984 documentary feature account of a group of Hungarian Jews who revisit the former concentration camps where they had been imprisoned; the film received little critical attention in Hungary following its release. According to the director, this avoidance was an indicator of the depth of resistance to his uncompromising insistence on recovering aspects of the formerly repressed history of Hungarian Jewry.[7] By the end of the 1980s a number of formerly taboo subjects—not least the still fraught topic of the 1956 revolution—were accepted, even embraced by Hungarian audiences, together with such works as Péter Bacsó's satire of Stalinist terror *Ó rongyos élet* (*Oh! Bloody Life!*, 1983) and Ferenc Kósa's *A mérkőzés* (*The Match*, which was made in 1980 but not released until 1982). The latter, set in the spring of 1956, was the first Hungarian film to address everyday life on the streets of Pest during the uprising.

The special, coded language that developed between audiences and films in the mid-1960s managed to elude censors while including spectators, frequently drawing upon genres such as musical comedy and historical parable. New creative forms and personal styles evolved, many of which became classics that are readable today. Yet each successive cinematic generation in Hungary seems to speak a different language, progressively grounded in everyday life, while changing perceptions of Hungarian identity continue to find a place in Hungarian film. One of the most courageous films of this period is *Hideg napok* (*Cold Days*, 1966),

a chilling, complex tale of wartime atrocity, and the most important work by András Kovács, one of the key figures in the new Hungarian cinema of the 1960s. The film is based on one of the darkest incidents in twentieth-century Hungarian history: in the winter of 1942, in the town of Újvidék (now Novi Sad, Serbia), the fascist Hungarian Army massacred over three thousand Jews and Serbs. Based on Tibor Cseres's novel, *Hideg napok* figures four ex-soldiers in prison in 1946, awaiting trial for their role in those horrifying events. Each remembers in a way that minimizes his own culpability; Kovács uses flashbacks and a fragmented narrative to craft meditation on memory and responsibility reminiscent of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (*Hiroshima My Love*, 1959) and *Muriel ou le temps d'un retourl* (1963).

The films of István Szabó—personal, sensitive, and historically inflected—are among the more important and resonant cinematic meditations on the dynamics of intergenerational trauma and Jewish identity. During the 1980s, Szabó's artistic production underwent a gradual yet dramatic change of direction. The Oscar-winning *Mephisto* (1981) is a compelling and convincing depiction of Nazi Germany from the point of view of an ambitious actor, played by the Austrian Klaus Maria Brandauer. A faithful rendition of the allegorical tradition that portrays the artist's relationship to a seductive but forbidding communist regime, the film's interpretation of the compromised yet tragic situation of the resistant or dissident intellectual is also a coded signal to Hungarian viewers, encouraging private readings of the film to a nation of historically aware viewers. *Redl Ezredes* (*Colonel Redl*, 1985) used the same actor in a narrative that chronicles the ascent within the army hierarchy of a part-Jewish officer, dissecting the savage interethnic politics of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A film of renowned visual panache, its dramatic power and intellectual distinction illuminate the insidious gradations of class, religion, and nationalist and ethnic hostility during the Habsburg era.

But perhaps the most powerful and original film of Szabó's career, encompassing as it does the working through of a multigenerational familial traumatic history, is *Apa* (*Father*, 1966). A compelling interlocking set of fantasy, history, and filmic innovation, *Apa* is narrated from the point of view of a boy, Takó (András Bálint), who as an adult became active as a student in the uprising of 1956, to his father, and begins with the inscription, "I confront your failure, you who look human," echoing themes from Radványi's *Valahol Európában*. In one powerful scene, charged with the task of distributing a package of foodstuffs to needy pupils, a teacher asks his class of young boys how many have lost a father; nearly three-fourths of the class stand up in a mute yet evocative testimony to the toll of the war on Hungarian families, more acutely still for those of Jewish heritage. A later sequence addresses the

question of Jewish identity somewhat more directly when Takó, now a university student, takes a role as an extra in a film in which he is to play first a Jew rounded up by the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross and then is made abruptly to switch roles by affixing the insignia of the enemy, in a telling directorial strategy for commenting subtly yet unforgettably on the generational consequences of war. The shooting of the film within a film concluded, Takó and his friends reflect on their parents' silence about the war and their own generation's ignorance of its psychological and cultural consequences. Takó accompanies a fellow student, Anni (they will subsequently become lovers); as they stroll along the Danube banks, Anni (Kati Solyom) assesses the impact of her own unarticulated Jewish identity in a remarkable monologue:

> It's awful, you know. For years I denied that my father died in a concentration camp. I'd make up a story rather than admit I was Jewish. I finally realized the futility of it and I faced reality. I even went to Auschwitz with an excursion group and I took pictures. All I got were pictures of well-dressed tourists milling around. Sometimes I still feel ashamed and pretend not to be Jewish. I am Hungarian, am I not? The forgotten past of my ancestors doesn't count. And I can't overcome it. I want to be proud of that Jewish past for which my parents gave their lives. I simply can't behave normally. I just don't know where I belong, where I want to belong, what I am, or where I should belong. The Pope at last forgave the Jews for their sins. That means that they were guilty of crucifying Christ two thousand years ago. And those who twenty years ago let six million Jews be gassed and burned? How soon will they be absolved? You see how maddening this can be, and how idiotic this Auschwitz thing is! Part of me is there. My parents and relatives perished there. But I can't go on harping on it just to get sympathy. I feel ashamed for belonging to those who were slaughtered like sheep. I always feel as if I had to prove something. . . .

Through the confession of this young female protagonist, Szabó addresses a profoundly conflicted and ambivalent stance toward Jewish identity and assimilation shared, even today, by many Hungarians and particularly characteristic of Budapest's Jewish writers, artists, and intellectuals. It is all the more noteworthy that these wrenching words were produced in 1966, when such questions were far from commonly addressed in Hungarian or, for that matter, East-Central European cinema. Yet, despite the fact that his reputation warranted consistent

financing from international coproducers, thereby traversing the boundaries of traditionally circumscribed Hungarian national cinema, Szabó nonetheless continued to mine the intricacies of a distinctly Hungarian history, perhaps most ambitiously so in *A napfény íze* (*A Taste of Sunshine*, 1999), a multigenerational saga in English, which follows the fortunes of a Jewish family through the Habsburg Empire, the years of fascism, World War II, and the communist regimes, and narrated in modalities that engage a wide spectrum of spectators while addressing the complexities of collective memory. Here as in his earlier work, Szabó observes the impact of historical and political trauma on the identity of four generations of a single family in a story that reworks themes from his iconic mid-1960s film *Apa. A napfény íze*'s protagonist, Iván Sonnenschein (Ralph Fiennes), the family's last descendant, frames the film's narrative in voice-over, inflecting the story with his own individual perspective without disrupting its historical flow. The triptych structure begins in the mid-nineteenth century when, as a young boy, Iván's great-grandfather Emmanuel (David de Keyser) leaves home for the capital when his own father, the local village innkeeper, dies in an explosion in his own distillery. Emmanuel manages to take with him a black notebook containing his father's secret recipe for the herbal tonic Taste of Sunshine (the source of the film's Hungarian title, and a reference to assimilated Jews the Zwack family, makers of the famous digestive tonic Unicum) that eventually underwrites the Sonnenschein family's substantial fortune.

It is, I think, also useful to read *A napfény íze* as a testimonial to other long-repressed stories of Hungarian Jews, including *Apa*. This now-classic black-and-white film foregrounds a twenty-year period from the early 1940s to the early 1960s, following a complex and affecting flashback structure in which fact and imagination appear to commingle. Iván, the narrator of *A napfény íze*, finally has only his name to connect him to his family's past, for he is the baptized son of Jewish parents but has converted to Catholicism. Ultimately, in a gesture of identity reclamation and emotional linkage with the traumatic history of preceding generations of his Jewish ancestors, he takes back the family name, Sonnenschein, which had been officially changed to the more Hungarian-sounding Sors ("fate").[8] The thematics of bearing witness to religious and ethnic oppression and extermination links *A napfény íze* to preceding films and opens new spaces for debate on Jewish identity across generations of Hungarian experience.[9]

A number of films of the 1990s have, whether directly or obliquely, invoked the Holocaust in Hungary: *Eszterkönyv* (*The Book of Esther*, 1990), directed by Krisztina Deák, focuses on Eva Heyman, the Hungarian Anne Frank, a thirteen-year-old Auschwitz victim whose diary was discovered after the war and published. Later, rumors (and some evidence)

suggested that the diary had actually been written by Eva's grief-stricken mother, Esther, to atone for the fact that she had abandoned her child during the Nazi occupation to follow her second husband into exile. This young writer-director's debut feature—named Best First Film at the annual Hungarian Film Week in Budapest in 1990—draws on these events to fashion a harrowing portrait of the obsessive, guilt-ridden Esther, who returns after the war to search for her daughter, gradually comes to the realization that she has been killed, and succumbs to a downward spiral of self-destructiveness and despair.

Another distinguished woman director is Judit Elek, whose *Tutajosok* (*Memoirs of a River*, 1990), the first post-1989 Franco-Hungarian feature coproduction to explicitly denounce Hungarian anti-Semitism and the first to be made from an explicitly Jewish viewpoint, focuses on the infamous Tiszaeszlár trial for "blood-libel" a century ago. It combines documentary sources, personal experience, and archival footage formerly off-limits to researchers but subsequently integrated with a script of her own, joining a substantial group of filmmakers who create a fusion of fiction and documentary from the point of view of protagonists who serve as witnesses.

An instance of this multigenerational approach is Péter Forgács's 1996 film *Az Örvény* (*Free Fall Oratorio*),[10] the tenth segment of his epic multipart series, *Privát Magyarország* (*Private Hungary*), composed entirely of home movie and amateur footage contributed primarily by Hungarian families, some of whose "cameramen" shot continuously from the late 1920s to the early 1940s. Forgács's experimental style, implemented in collaboration with his colleague, the composer Tibor Szemzö, has earned him international acclaim for work screened in prestigious venues, such as a 2002 installation at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles to accompany a multiscreen projection of his film *A dunai exodus* (*Danube Exodus*, 2001).

In a segment from his 1996 work, the spectator witnesses an extraordinary approach to the psychology and esthetics of memory, created by the juxtaposition of text and image, sound and silence. The imposition of the Jewish Laws on the lives of affluent Hungarian citizens of Jewish origin is rendered through an operatic voice reciting the consequences of those laws, which progressively deprived Jews and others of their livelihood and, ultimately, of their lives. Forgács selects a talented amateur motion-picture photographer from an upper-middle-class Jewish family, György Petö (born in Szeged in 1906), the cameraman of this 8-millimeter footage taken in the 1930s, to suggest how deeply and thoroughly most Hungarian Jews, many of them nonobservant of Judaism, were integrated and assimilated into the idea and practice of national identity. Most considered themselves to be proud Hungarian patriots, thus making it all the more inconceivable

that they could be perceived as the other, the enemy, by their own compatriots. This intertextual video archaeology thus functions also as an investigation akin to seeing in color a past we have only seen in black and white, through its seamless interweaving of images and text, letters and diaries, official records and archival documents. Forgács's mesmerizing films are multifaceted texts that surpass what history, biography, and memoir alone can deliver, thanks to a layered documentation designed from diverse angles—rich, detailed, and vivid image narratives, in which artifacts from many sources are uncovered and then crafted into a study of society in its complexities, variations, and gaps of memory, perhaps closer in density to a novelistic project than anything else.

Forgács's works include *A dunai exodus*; *Bibó Breviárium* (*A Bibó Reader*, 2002; a prize-winning Hungarian entry in the 2002 Cannes Film Festival), and *Püspök kertje* (*The Bishop's Garden,* 2003; awarded the prize for best documentary at the Thirty-Fourth Annual Hungarian Film Week). In each case, footage from family-made home movies is combined with archival material discovered on occasion by chance, the final product being the fruit of titanic labor and innovative juxtapositions of diaries, journals, amateur footage, and intertitles. These films juxtapose the body of the individual to that of history, the joyous poses of children and their parents, the boisterous family dinners and motorboat outings, taking the air at an outdoor café, and poetic shots of Forgács's lover, Éva, taking a bath. From today's perspective, the shadow of the Holocaust hovers over every frame, most acutely during the happy times. This daring juxtaposition is at times arduous, often audacious and always fascinating. A cinéaste without a camera, so to speak, Péter Forgács works directly on the body of the film stock itself, which becomes in his hands the body of history, the necessary space of memory of his people, his fellow Hungarians, Jews and Gentiles alike. For these bodies imprinted on the screen continue to challenge and defy official (nationalist) discourse recited by voices off in an incantatory, repetitive function that awakens the spectator to conflicting realities, intergenerational experiences, and interpretations. That the director has been working successfully on this principle for more than a dozen years is evident in that his work—by its very composition and perseverance—manages to resist the ravages of time in ways that few artists have achieved. His narrative is connected to the evaporating memory of the self, the natural loss of memory, the individual's ways of remembering as well as forgetting and self-censoring, and the distance between remembrance and the filmic event, mood, or situation.[11]

In a radically opposite mode, those familiar with Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* may recall controversies and debates following its release in 1993 when, particularly in France, the film was regarded as transgressing

boundaries of decency in Holocaust representations that had been rigorously promoted by filmmakers such as Claude Lanzmann, whose 1985 documentary *Shoah* was a landmark film of the genre, establishing parameters for future cinematic reconsiderations of the Holocaust. Lanzmann and others accused Spielberg of humanizing the Holocaust by deploying Hollywood techniques that "domesticated," by rendering approachable and ordinary what some writers and critics judged to be sacred and therefore unrepresentable.[12]

A similar debate took place when the Hungarian writer Imre Kertész was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002 for his novel *Sorstalanság* (*Fateless*), originally published in 1975, and the first Hungarian-language novel ever to win the Nobel Prize. During the 1970s, after a long period of repression and silence, Holocaust memory returned gradually to the public scene in Hungary, primarily in the form of literary texts produced by a generation of writers who had personally experienced this persecution as adolescents, including Sándor Márai (1996), Elie Wiesel (1960), Magda Dénes (1997), and Ernö Szép (1994). Among them was Imre Kertész; in "Dark Shadow," an essay from his collection *A Holocaust mint kultúra* (1993), he suggests that "nothing would [appear to] be simpler than to collect, name and evaluate those Hungarian literary works that were born under the direct or indirect influence of the Holocaust. . . . However, in my view, that is not the problem. The problem, dear listeners, is the imagination. To be more precise: to what extent is the imagination capable of coping with the fact of the Holocaust? How can the imagination take in, receive the Holocaust, and, because of this receptive imagination, to what extent has the Holocaust become part of our ethical life and ethical culture? . . . This is what we must talk about."[13] According to the Nobel committee, *Sorstalanság* is a novel that "upholds the fragile experience of the individual against the barbaric arbitrariness of history" and that admittedly has drawn upon the "barbaric arbitrariness" of his own tragic experience as a fifteen-year-old Hungarian Jew in Auschwitz.

Director Lajos Koltai's vision invites comparison with the visual strategies of other recent large-scale Holocaust-centered films such as Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002), based on the memoirs of Ladislaw Szpilman, a young musician in the Warsaw Ghetto. That film's star, Adrien Brody, won an Oscar for best actor, as did Polanski himself for best director at the 2003 Academy Awards for a work that also addresses Polanski's own experience as a child of the Holocaust.[14] The case of *Fateless* is complex, involving as it does on the one hand a witness/victim—Kertész, the writer and screenwriter—and a non-witness, Lajos Koltai, the director/translator.[15]

While *Fateless* was praised by the Nobel Academy, the book's "lack of moral indignation" was also considered disturbing, a response that perhaps has more than a little to do with its specifically Central European metalanguage, a style that resists deconstruction and interpretation by readers who might not benefit from the requisite comparative cultural context. Indeed, Kertész might well have been anticipating this aspect of the academy's response in an interview broadcast on Hungarian radio in 1991 when he declared,

> "I was not brought up as an observant Jew and I did not become a believer later on; at the same time, I find that Judaism is an absolutely decisive moment of my life, one I am attached to because, on account of it, I lived through a great moral test. But is it possible to rise above the experiences one lives through in such a way that we don't exclude them and at the same time manage to transpose them to a universal level? . . . My country has yet to face up to the skeleton in the closet, namely awareness of the issue of the Holocaust, which has not yet taken root in Hungarian culture, and those writing about it [still] stand on the sidelines. . . . I think it is a success if my book has made even a slight contribution to this process."[16]

A significant gesture toward the ongoing process of reinscribing Hungarian Holocaust memory after such a long period of repression was made by the Hungarian Motion Picture Foundation's February 2003 decision to provide funding for a film adaptation of *Sorstalanság*—the very foundation that, two years earlier, had allocated the majority of its budget to productions considered by many to be ultranationalist epics, such as Csaba Káel's *Bánk Bán* (*Bánk Bán*, 2003) and Géza Bereményi's *Hídember* (*The Bridgeman*, 2003). The production in fact marks the directorial debut of Lajos Koltai, the renowned cinematographer and veteran of more than seventy features, including such distinguished films as István Szabó's Oscar-winning feature *Mephisto* (1982) as well as his Oscar-nominated *Bizalom* (*Confidence*, 1984), *Redl Ezredes* (*Colonel Redl*), *Hanussen* (1988), *Meeting Venus*, (1991), *Taking Sides* (1999), and *A napfény íze* (*A Taste of Sunshine*, 1999).[17] Although Koltai has no personal connection to the Holocaust, he was selected by his close friend, Imre Kertész, to direct this major production, which narrates a young adolescent's experience as a survivor.

Both documentary and narrative features have proved to be powerful means of enacting memory and mourning, enabling filmmakers and viewers alike to engage in processes of working through trauma. Both

are forms of witnessing and testimony, and both are capable of addressing voyeurism, violence, comedy, and propaganda, as well as historical research. Since 1989, Hungarian cinema has undergone dramatic and traumatic changes in, among many other aspects, filmmakers' sense of obligation with respect to their audiences. The past fifteen years since the fall of the Berlin Wall have witnessed the return of the history of Hungarian Jews to the center of the cinematic stage through ambitious historical frescoes as well as intimate, moving narratives, retrospective mappings onto the topography of cinematic representations that sustain the intergenerational work of memory.

notes

1. Over ten thousand visitors arrived at the Center during the first three days, when it remained open day and night: "This heinous crime was committed against Hungarians by Hungarians," said Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy in his opening remarks, a historical official acceptance of Hungarian responsibility for the death of over a half million Hungarians during the Holocaust. See the official website of the Center: www.hkde.hu.
2. In this category I would include István Szabó's *Apa* (*Father*, 1966), Zoltán Fabri's *Két Félidö a Pokolban* (*Two Half-Times in Hell*, 1961); and András Kovács's *Hideg Napok* (*Cold Days*, 1966).
3. I thank Anikó Imre for her insightful articulation of this aspect of generationally based visual source material.
4. See Catherine Portuges, "Intergenerational Memory: Transmitting the Past in Hungarian Cinema," *Spectator 23*, no. 2 (2003): 44–52.
5. See Hanno Loewy, "The Mother of All Holocaust Films? Wanda Jakubowska's Auschwitz Trilogy," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 24*, no. 2 (2004): p. 200.
6. Ibid.
7. Gyula Gazdag has generously discussed with me his views on this subject and on the evolving state of Hungarian cinema from 1989 to the present. Társasutazás is now in the collection of the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.
8. Szabó's own original family name is said also to have been Sonnenschein.
9. Catherine Portuges, "István Szabó's Sunshine," *Cinéaste 27*, no. 1 (2000): 56–57.
10. Az Örvény premiered at the Old Synagogue in Szeged, Hungary, in 1996, with live music and voice by director/narrator Péter Forgács, composer/conductor Tibor Szemzö, soprano and violinist Ildikó Fodor; tenor László Keringer, and sound engineer Zoltán Regenye. Its U.S. debut took place in 1998 at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.
11. Author's personal conversations, screenings, and dialogues with Péter Forgács, Budapest and Los Angeles, 1998–2004.
12. It is worth noting that the sharp increase in the volume of international production of films pertaining to the Holocaust may in fact be in part attributable to the 1993 release of *Schindler's List*; among other factors, public debate surrounding the film led to the creation of Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, which has since become a major

site of international archival, oral history, film, videotape, and digital research and preservation.

13. Imre Kertész, "Dark Shadow" (1993), reprinted in *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Hungary: An Anthology*, ed. Susan Rubin Suleiman and Éva Forgács (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 171.
14. Polanski first discovered *The Pianist* when it was republished in Polish in 1998 under its new title, two years before the author's death: "'I had searched for decades for a model parallel to my life, which I couldn't film myself. . . . Szpilman's book was the text I was waiting for—a testimony of human endurance in the face of death, a tribute to the power of music and the will to live, and a story told without the desire for revenge.'" Roman Polanski, quoted in Catherine Portuges, "Review of *The Pianist*," *American Historical Review* (2003): 108: 2. Through Szpilman's book, Polanski could finally represent the trauma he, too, had suffered.
15. Joshua Hirsch develops this distinction in his chapter on posttraumatic autobiography in *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004), 112 ff.
16. Imre Kertész, quoted in Alan Riding, "Nobel for Hungarian Writer Who Survived the Death Camps," *New York Times*, October 11, 2002.
17. A documentary film, *Koltai Napló* (*Koltai Diary*), produced in Hungary in February 2004 by András Muhi, contains a montage of these films, for which Koltai was cinematographer.

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nine

the ironies of history

the czech experience

peter hames

Despite the apparently inevitable dominance of Hollywood films in the postcommunist Czech Republic, the success of Czech films with domestic audiences has, by general European standards, been remarkable. A survey of the best attended films since the fall of communism revealed that seven of the top ten over a ten-year period were all Czech. On closer examination, it also becomes clear that they are all united by a confrontation with history—the experiences of the Nazi occupation or the forty years of communist domination (1948–89) that were to follow.

Since 1989, new factors have played a role in the success of films with audiences, including the use of aggressive marketing techniques (employed for the first postcommunist success, Vít Olmer's *Tankový prapor* [*The Tank Battalion*], 1991), the use of popular actors, and an emphasis on "audience-oriented" scripts. While the second two factors cannot be properly described as "new," they have acquired an increased importance in a system affected by U.S. domination and declining audiences. However, I am assuming that the most successful films have also formed part of a genuine interaction, that they echo the experiences of

many, and represent ways in which many view or wish to view the fifty years leading to 1989.

I shall consider five of the titles. Three are scripted by Zdeněk Svěrák and directed by his son Jan Svěrák: *Obecná škola* (*Elementary School*, 1991), *Kolja* (*Kolya*, 1996), and *Tmavomodrý svět* (*Dark Blue World,* 2001); and two are scripted by Petr Jarchovský and directed by Jan Hřebejk: *Pelíšky* (*Cozy Dens*, 1999) and *Pupendo* (2003). To these, I would like to add a further film by Jarchovský and Hřebejk, *Musíme si pomáhat* (*We Must Help Each Other/Divided We Fall*, 2000), which did not land in the top ten of best-attended films but was thirteenth in the list of the Czech box office.

While the critical success of the films is not my primary concern, it is worth noting that *Kolja* won a U.S. Academy Award for Best Foreign Film and that both *Obecná skola* and *Musíme si pomáhat* gained Academy Award nominations in the same category. Most of the films have also won major Czech awards. Continuing the trend, Jarchovský's adaptation of Květa Legátová's Second World War novel *Želary* (2004), directed by Hřebejk's producer, Ondřej Trojan, was nominated for an Academy Award in 2004.

The films are not without their critics, but all have achieved a level of quality, and their screenwriters and directors are among the most talented in the Czech Republic. Unlike, for instance, Petr Zelenka (*Knoflíkáři* [*Buttoners*], 1997), Saša Gedeon (*Návrat idiota* [*The Return of the Idiot*], 1999), Jan Švankmajer (*Otesánek* [*Little Otík*], 2001), Alice Nellis (*Výlet* [*The Journey/Some Secrets*], 2002), and others, who have attracted more festival attention, they have worked within relatively conventional formats and aimed at a wider audience. The films include references to a number of key periods or events in Czech history: the principles and martyrdom of Jan Hus, founder of the pre-Reformation Hussite movement; the democratic traditions of the prewar republic under President Tomáš G. Masaryk; the Anglo-French betrayal at the Munich Conference with Adolf Hitler in 1938; the capitulation of the prewar government to Nazi intimidation in 1938–39; the treatment of the Jewish community under wartime occupation; the contradictions of the postwar period (1945–48); the Prague Spring of 1968; and the years of so-called normalization (1969–89) following the Soviet invasion in 1968. Surprisingly, none of the films really touch on the 1950s (although several Czech New Wave films of the 1960s had already done this), and in the one film set during the Prague Spring (*Pelísky*, there is little reference to the changes and debates of the period. While the years of "normalization" receive more extended attention in *Kolja* and *Pupendo*, there is no reference to the human rights movement Charter 77 and the role of "dissidents" is present only by inference.

The significance of references to Masaryk has to be seen in the light of the three major crises of twentieth-century Czech history: the German

occupation, the communist takeover of 1948, and the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968. On all three occasions, monuments to Masaryk were removed and his books disappeared from libraries. One of the first post-1989 films was Věra Chytilová's documentary *T.G.M. Osvoboditel* (*Tomáš G. Masaryk the Liberator*, 1990) and there are references to him in both *Kolja* and *Pelísky*. It would also be true to say that Masaryk's view of the "meaning" of Czech history is a reference point for both *Obecná skola* and *Kolja*. Briefly, this view of Czech history envisaged it as a continuous evolution, leading to intellectual freedom, equality, justice, brotherhood, and democracy. The Czech national revival of the nineteenth century was linked back to the Hussite Reformation of the fifteenth century. But, as Petr Pithart has suggested, Masaryk's view presented that history as an analogy: "He was not concerned with the factually true assertions *about* this history but with *the truth of that history*, that is, with the challenge, the inspiration . . . he was concerned with 'the continuity of the national ethos'. . . ."[1]

All of the films fall short of dealing with politics directly, and place their emphasis on common experience and the pressures of living under foreign occupation pre-1945 and post-1968. People continue to live, have relationships, and raise families, often responding to the situations in which they find themselves with irony and humor. An explicit or implicit subject in all of them is the attitude of their central male characters. Are they victims or heroes, did they do their best, and could they have behaved differently? In a way, this also mirrors the questions being asked about the role of government in the late 1930s. And these questions, by analogy, relate also to the political capitulations of 1948 and 1968 and, even, according to some, the breakup of Czechoslovakia itself in 1992. When Václav Havel wrote his letter to Alexander Dubček urging him to defend the politics of the Prague Spring, he pointed to the threat that the Munich capitulation had presented to the very existence of the nation and the terrible blow to the moral fiber of the Czech and Slovak nations that might result from accommodation.[2] Thus, in contrast, there is a view of Czech history as an adjustment to dominant power, which also provides a reference point for the films.

The ironic approach of the films relates less than one would expect to the Greek concept of *eirōn*, or the "sedate fools and successful survivors" familiar from the films of the 1960s.[3] Here, irony relates less to the characters' approach to the realities conveyed (although this is often present) than to the fate of characters and the outcome of decisions. Heroic acts or behavior are frequently contingent, heroism can be rewarded by failure, and different strategies can lead to similar or unforeseen results.

While *Obecná skola* is set immediately after the war, it is worth considering first because it is the film that most explicitly situates and

discusses the war experience and was the first of the films to appear after the fall of communism. The Svěráks stated at the time of its release that they regarded it as a "healing film." Based on Zdeněk Svěrák's own childhood memories, it is set on the outskirts of Prague immediately following the Second World War, focusing on two young boys' (Eda and Tonda, played by Václav Jakoubek and Radoslav Budáč) experience of both school and home life. It deals incidentally with attitudes toward the Nazi occupation, the reasons for the post-Munich capitulation to the Germans in 1939, and the political prospects for democracy in the immediate postwar period. The theme of heroism is explicitly addressed in *Obecná škola* through the arrival of a new teacher, Igor Hnízdo (Jan Tříska), a disciplinarian imported to teach an unruly class that has driven his female predecessor to breakdown. He arrives wearing military boots, with a pistol in his belt, and wields his cane with precision. Alongside these accompaniments to charisma come a proficiency in music and expertise as a philanderer.

He soon attracts the support and love of his pupils, regaling them with his tales of the war and references to the glories of Czech history. In one key scene, he tells the story of Jan Hus. Promised a safe passage to the Council of Constance, Hus was betrayed and burnt at the stake. He lived for the truth, says Hnízdo, echoing the Hussite motto *Pravda vítězí* (Truth shall prevail), which was to become that of the independent Czechoslovakia. Man should not be a coward but live for the truth, Hnízdo continues, echoing Václav Havel's later concept of "living in truth." As he tells his story, he passes back and forth in front of a portrait of Josef Stalin. The story encapsulates the Czech concern with self-definition through martyrs and the theme of betrayal.

Questions begin to be asked about the new teacher, however, who claims to have fought in the Slovak resistance. How could he have been a parachutist, a partisan, a political prisoner, and the commander of an armored train all at the same time? A likeable figure, he later admits that his stories were all lies and that he was seeking to provide the boys with an example. When he is later dismissed because of amorous exploits, the pupils demand his reinstatement and democracy triumphs.

If Hnízdo represents myth then, Souček (Zdeněk Svěrák), Eda's father, represents reality. He has worked quietly for the electricity company during the war. When his son asks what he did in the war, his mother (Libuše Šafránková) replies that he listened to the shortwave radio and that they hid a man illegally. Courage is not always overt. At the end of the film, when visiting the frontier defenses, it is Souček who fires the abandoned bazooka while Hnízdo and the children take cover. It is he who risks his life at the power station during a thunderstorm.

Politics are presented through the discussions between adults. At the frontier defenses, we are reminded that the Anglo-French

agreement with Hitler at Munich had forced Czechoslovakia to give up the Sudetenland to Germany and, in the process, the frontier defenses. Could the country have defended itself in the face of this betrayal by its Western allies? Would the Russians have intervened on their behalf? The answers are, perhaps, self-evident.

Yet, if the film refers to betrayal by the Western allies, its audience would also have been aware of the more recent betrayals by its newfound Eastern allies. When the prewar president, Edvard Beneš, returned from exile in 1945, he was convinced of the need to introduce strong elements of socialism. He also harbored an ill-placed trust in his relationship with Stalin and with the Czech communist leader, Klement Gottwald. Souček echoes Beneš's ideas when he speaks of Czechoslovakia as a bridge between the West and the East in which freedom and socialism can coexist and through which the Russians can learn democracy.[4] In one scene, portraits of Beneš and Stalin appear side by side. Souček also reads the Communist Party's (tactical) program from the newspaper—there are no plans to nationalize small businesses.

Souček also speaks of another aspect of Czech national identity —music. He tells his son that the Czechs had conquered the world through their music—Antonín Dvořák, Bedřich Smetana, and Rudolf Friml's "Donkey Serenade." In other words, a small country may have limited influence on the politics of the world, but the cultural sphere may be different. Indeed, there is a strong appeal to these traditions in both *Obecná škola* and *Kolja*. Igor plays Dvořák on the violin; and the second movement of the "New World" symphony (which formed the basis for the song "Goin' Home") is used as the boys' journey home on the back of a train through a lyrical landscape.

The "healing" qualities of the film can be seen in its assertion of the values of truth and democracy, which are presented as a true inheritance (even if embodied imperfectly by the protagonists), combined with a love of the homeland represented through landscape and music. Implied also is the notion that, without positive support from larger powers, there was little alternative to actions rooted in endurance and the smaller heroisms of everyday resistance of which people should be proud.

Moving to a different level, in *Tmavomodrý svět*, the Svěráks represented the wartime years through the story of the Czech units in the Royal Air Force (RAF) and their participation in the Battle of Britain. A forgotten generation, members of the units were condemned under the communists and many spent years in prison for the "crime" of fighting for their country, with their contributions to the war only recognized formally in 1991. The Czechs had constituted the second largest foreign unit in the RAF, with a total of five hundred pilots and three thousand ground staff. There was nothing odd in this because, as

Jan Svěrák has testified, the Czech Air Force had been highly developed before the war under the motto "The air is our sea." The film represents the heroism of Czech pilots when freed from the constraints of geography and foreign occupation.

The film is clearly an attempt to address the wartime experience in a way designed to link its reality to a wider audience, including an international audience and a younger audience for whom it is all "history." Hence, there are young heroes, a simplified love story, exciting aerobatics, and a Czech (Ondřej Vetchý, Kryštof Hádek) and English (Tara Fitzgerald, Charles Dance) cast. The film also juxtaposes the enthusiasm and heroism of the struggle against Nazism with the repression of a communist present. This, of course, was the reality, and the story had previously been told in an extremely effective British television documentary, *The Forgotten Men*, directed by Otto Olejar in 1991.

Again, it is a film that explicitly addresses the subject of heroism. The central character, František (Vetchý), is an officer in the Czech Air Force. The film begins in the mid-1930s when he is shown demonstrating the workings of his plane to his girlfriend. Then they hear a speech by Hitler on the radio while they are in bed together. The scene shifts to 1939, when it is announced that the Germans will begin their occupation. The frontier defenses are surrendered without a fight and the air force is ordered to surrender both the airfield and its aircraft. The German officer who takes over the airfield remarks that a German officer would rather shoot himself than submit to such terms but Czechs, he observes, "are a little different." It is easy to say that the rest of the film is an extended refutation of this charge but, in another irony, the Sudeten German doctor in the communist prison (a former member of the Schutzstaffel, the SS) observes that the brutal treatment meted out by the Czech guards to the former war heroes would never be visited by a German soldier on a fellow German.

The main plot of the film resembles a teenage adventure story, focusing on the friendship of František with the younger Karel, supposedly a nineteen-year-old but actually played by the seventeen-year-old Hádek. It is a reminder of how young the pilots were, but the film is more than willing to draw upon the thematic and formal clichés of World War II films (especially British ones). Although Jan Svěrák encouraged his father to "play down" the heroics in his script, *Tmavomodrý svět* is close to the unambiguous heroics of the American cinema or the British war film. There is no Dvořák or Smetana, but the film is also strong on nostalgia, with extended use of the 1930s songs of Jaroslav Ježek (with Vera Lynn traditionally, and accurately, doing the same for the British in the same film). Although it did not achieve the international success for which it had obviously hoped, it proved

the most successful film of all at the domestic box office and the closest to what might be termed a "heritage film."

The Svěráks have been quite explicit about their objectives: they did not want it to be just an action film, but wanted to pay tribute to patriotism and the unwillingness to feel shame; they wanted it to be inspiring. As film director Jiří Weiss (who filmed the Czech units during the war) said in *The Forgotten Men*, the pilots were heroes who did not know they were heroes. While *Tmavomodrý svět* inevitably recalls such British films as Anthony Asquith's *The Way to the Stars* (1945) and Michael Anderson's *The Dam Busters* (1954), the Svěráks can perhaps be excused for their humanist celebration of a suppressed history some fifty years after the event.

A third film dealing with the wartime experience is Hřebejk's *Musíme si pomáhat*, which takes on the broader focus of the relationship among Czechs, Jews, and Sudeten Germans during the Nazi occupation of the country, then renamed the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The ironies of the situation are constantly reinforced by the German's repeated phrase to his Czech friend, "We must help one another" (the literal translation of the film's title). In a succinctly summarized precredit and credit sequence, we see three friends before the war—the Czech Josef Čížek (Boleslav Polívka), the German Horst Prohaska Jaroslav Dušek), and the Jewish David Wiener (Csongor Kassai), whose father employs them all. The Jewish family is first expelled from their home, then sent to the Terezín transport camp; and the opening credits conclude with the escaped Jew, David, seeking sanctuary among his former friends.

Josef and his wife Marie (Anna Šišková) agree to hide him in a secret room and keep him there until the end of the war. The film's principal plot innovation is that Marie becomes pregnant by David. But this is not the result of a wartime affair. Josef, who is diagnosed by a collaborationist doctor as infertile, needs a child to avoid having to share his flat with a Nazi bureaucrat and comes up with the scheme himself—the child is conceived out of necessity. Horst, who collaborates with the Nazis (he officiates over the inventory when the Wieners are expelled from their mansion), persists in his attempts to maintain his pre-occupation contacts with the Čížeks, plying them with gifts and attempting to encourage their involvement with the new realities. No fool, he soon discovers that they are hiding David but keeps his suspicions to himself. Josef, in turn, accommodates Horst by joining him in his work (at Marie's insistence), and is soon viewed as a collaborator by his neighbors. Horst teaches him the necessity of adopting the dead facial mask that provides "an irreproachable expression of loyalty." In fact, albeit by accident and necessity, he is defending the lives of not only his family and David but those on his

street as well. At the end of the film, he is only saved from punishment and probable death by David's testimony. Josef rescues Horst by identifying him as a "doctor" necessary to assist in his wife's childbirth. Thus, the Czech who appears to be a collaborator is in fact protecting a Jew and the lives of his neighbors, and the collaborator assists in the birth of a part-Jewish child.

There are other ironies. Šimáček, one of the neighbors, who is introduced by Josef earlier in the film as a reliable and helpful man, in fact attempts to denounce David on his first appearance (to protect the street), and later finds himself a member of the resistance, and denouncing Josef. He reacts with shame to the final revelation that Josef has been hiding David. Josef, David, and Horst continue to manifest "human" qualities and seem, as much as anything, victims of circumstance. Horst, however, attempts to force himself on Marie and has no intention of suffering because of the occupation—he tries to draw a distinction between his more tolerant attitudes (he is a Sudeten German) and those of his wife (who is a Reich German).

While there is no attempt to minimize Nazi racism and violence, the Germans are also seen to suffer in the war. Kepke (Martin Huba), the Nazi official who inherits the Wieners's house, comments on a " scientific" study stating that one German life is equal in value to that of twenty Slavs or a hundred Jews. He loses his eldest son on the Eastern front, and his younger school-aged son is shot while deserting. His wife suffers a breakdown and he has a stroke. Although the film walks the tightrope of tragicomedy, with some of the scenes bordering on farce, the treatment of the Germans and collaborators at the end of the film does not disguise the acts of revenge perpetrated during the Prague uprising.

At the end of the film, Josef pushes the pram with the newborn baby against a background of ruined buildings, and imagines that the dog shot by Nazi officers has returned and that the Wiener family did not perish in the camps. Unsurprisingly, given a historical heritage in which the country had been dominated by stronger powers and the example of earlier films such as Jiří Menzel's *Ostře sledované vlaky* (*Closely Observed Trains*, 1966), real heroism is often located in quiet resistance, contributions exercised within the bounds of the possible and the circumstances that present themselves. But while the film closely examines these notions, the characters are not *Švejkian* (Czechs making fun of their masters). They remain human but, like those around them, are potentially capable of horrific deeds. The line between one action and another is often imprecise and circumstantial. In this sense, the film sometimes holds up an uncomfortable mirror.

While a number of films have made crude attacks on the communist system, in *Pelísky*, set during the year of the Prague Spring, Hřebejk and Jarchovský present the times much more in terms of the

everyday experience of fairly ordinary people. The film focuses on family relations rather than individual characters and exerts a more claustrophobic atmosphere than *Musíme si pomáhat*; action tends to go on in closed rooms with the dialogue dominant. As in the more recent *Pupendo*, events are experienced in parallel by communist and noncommunist families who finally end up with a shared reality. The two families of *Pelísky*, communist and noncommunist, live almost side by side in the same apartment block—a rare occurrence, one suspects, in reality. However, the film's viewpoint is essentially that of the teenage children, for whom both fathers are locked within sterile ideologies, while the mothers exhibit a long suffering tolerance. The film was originally given the more abrasive title of *Hovno hoří* (*Shit Burns*), after the collection of stories by Petr Šabach on which it is based.

Šebek (Miroslav Donutil), a military officer and committed communist, is in charge of the army canteen and spends most of his time arranging and typing menus. A believer in the international class struggle, he is incensed when his children put an image of Mick Jagger on his carefully maintained family bulletin board. Other scenes focus on his eulogies of economy-standard goods from Eastern Europe—the "unbreakable" tableware from Poland that his son insists on breaking, the plastic spoons from East Germany that melt in the coffee. At the beginning of the film, Michal (Michael Beran), the film's narrator, makes a comically unsuccessful attempt to kill himself because of thwarted love. At the end of the film, Šebek makes a similar attempt when his illusions about socialism are destroyed by the invasion of the "brotherly armies." The second family is headed by Kraus (Jiří Kodet), a former resistance fighter whose brother fought in the RAF. Years of frustration have locked him into stereotyped viewpoints and rituals, with constant references to his illness, his torturing by the Nazis, the five German planes that his brother shot down, and regular predictions of the fall of Bolshevism.

If a sterile and frozen form of politics preoccupies the parents, it is everyday human values and Western cultural influences that concern the children. Following the death of his wife, Kraus marries Aunt Eva (Eva Holubová). The two families are brought together and the wedding party coincides with the invasion. Kraus has revealed his secret project, a model for the construction of a bomber commemorating the RAF pilots to stand on the plinth that had once supported the largest statue of Stalin in East and Central Europe. As Šebek toasts the Russian soldier Marshal Malinovsky, the sound of Russian aircraft passing overhead prompts the collapse of Kraus's model.

The film is really a collection of anecdotes and stories, mostly humorous, that are based on a kind of popular memory about growing up at that time; it is dedicated to "those whose friends and parents left."

Kraus, who had previously brought out his picture of the "president-liberator" Tomáš Masaryk to show his new stepson, goes on his honeymoon to London and never returns. Notably, apart from provoking the invasion, the Prague Spring seems to have little effect on their lives and there is no reference to the lively discussions, debates, and controversies that occurred. Kraus merely comments on a radio news headline that it is simply "them" changing places at the top again.

The two films that deal with the period of normalization are *Kolja* and *Pupendo*, each of which is marked by the characteristic approach of their makers. Both concentrate on artists unable to practice their profession—in *Kolja*, a professional musician who has been expelled from the Czech Philharmonic; in *Pupendo*, a monumental sculptor who has refused his obligatory obeisance to the regime. Notably, neither is involved in dissident activity and neither stands out because of any radical approach to their work. They are creative people who can also represent everyman.

In *Kolja*, František Louka (Zdeněk Svěrák) is banned from performing, less because of his brother's emigration than the fact that, having traveled abroad, he failed to treat his account of contacts with foreigners or émigrés with the required sobriety. Like Souček in *Obecná skola*, he is neither hero nor villain. He lives in a bachelor apartment and adopts a somewhat lugubrious approach to surviving communism while making a living playing the cello at funerals and restoring the gold leaf on gravestones. To a friend who predicts the end of communism within two years (echoing the predictions of Kraus in *Pelísky*), he replies unenthusiastically that they have already lasted forty. His tiny rebellion is to "forget" to put up flags to celebrate the latest communist anniversary—an error that he is soon persuaded to correct by his landlady, who has no desire to attract attention. The episode is quite possibly a reference to the example recommended by Václav Havel in *The Power of the Powerless* (the greengrocer who stops ingratiating himself with the regime and fails to put up slogans in his window).[5]

The main theme of *Kolja*, of course, relates to Louka's paid marriage of convenience to a Russian woman (Irena Livanovová). He wants the money to buy a Trabant; she wants to acquire Czech nationality in order to escape to her lover in the West (Germany). When she eventually defects, he ends up looking after her five-year-old son, Kolja (Andrej Chalimon). Despite the fact that Louka has no desire for a son—least of all a Russian one—a bond develops between them that is only broken by the fall of communism and the return of Kolja to his mother. Thus, the much-desired return of democracy coincides with a profound sense of loss. Yet there is new life: Louka's girlfriend Klára (Libuše Šafránková) is pregnant—but married to someone else.

While this central theme has been criticized—mainly for its sentimentality, which echoes Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*The Bicycle Thief*, 1948), and for portraying the Russians in "humanist" terms—the film introduces repeated examples of contradiction and irony. It is his involvement with Kolja that leads Louka to his first interview with the security police and the "escape" to the country with Kolja in order to avoid his repatriation. It is his first act of subversion; and they hide out with his friend Houdek (Ladislav Smoljak) at a spa. Houdek observes that he loves all this "illegal activity" and they conclude that it is a pity that they have joined the resistance so late. It is here that they hear of the student demonstrations in Prague and of the fall of communism.

Attitudes to the Russians are centered on the reactions of Louka's mother, (Stella Zázvorková)—according to a Radio Free Europe broadcast, there are 115,000 troops in the country. Supported in her family house through her son's efforts (she still believes he is working in the Philharmonic), the founders of the republic sit on her bookcase—busts of Masaryk and Beneš, and a portrait of the Slovak leader Milan Štefánik. As Russian trucks rumble in the street, the portrait of Štefánik falls. Louková cannot believe that anyone could "do business" with the occupiers, and Louka attempts to pass Kolja off as a "Yugoslav." The dominance of the party, of Russian interests, and of state security are portrayed as aspects of an everyday life with which one has to live. The Russians must be appeased (given his mother's defection, they will wish to reclaim Kolja). And, in a final irony, both the "good cop" and the "bad cop" from state security are shown in the crowd jangling their keys to celebrate the fall of communism. If, as one English critic observed, the film was made for "sentimental Americans,"[6] it was also, in the words of another, a film that was "predictable in content (but) remarkably original in nuance."[7]

While Louka's political comments are few, it is clear that he identifies with the reality presented through Radio Free Europe, feels the same way about the Russians as everyone else, and comes from a background that celebrates the democratic values of the First Republic. As he is a musician, the film, like *Obecná skola*, provides every opportunity to celebrate Czech national identity through music. At the end of the film, Louka is shown back in the Philharmonic, and the scenes are intercut with the real concert conducted by the former exile Rafael Kubelík, playing Smetana's *Ma vlast* (*My Country*) under the statue of Jan Hus in the Old Town Square in Prague. Alongside *Kolja*'s slightly depressing but also droll portrait of the last years of communism, there is a virtual celebration of the romantic and national traditions of Czech music—principally that of Dvořák, but also of Zdeněk Fibich, Smetana, and Josef Suk.

In *Pupendo*, which was top of the box office in 2003, Jarchovský and Hřebejk present a portrait of the 1980s through the life of a discredited and unemployed sculptor, Bedřich Mára (Boleslav Polívka), whose life is contrasted with that of his conformist ex-lover and her husband, a school headmaster, who have decided to remain communists. He is not a dissident or member of any avant-garde school, merely someone who has fallen foul of the regime. To supplement his income, he makes ceramic piggy banks on the side (these are later discontinued in favor of ceramic human backsides) and makes fake insurance claims. One night, he brings home a man he believes to be a tramp and gives him a square meal. But it turns out that the man he found rummaging through a rubbish bin is really an unemployed art historian, Alois Fábera (Jiří Pecha), who was looking for people's throwaway artifacts. Alarmed that such a talented sculptor as Bedřich is unemployed, Alois comes up with a scheme to bring him back into the limelight. First, there will be a symbolic mosaic in a school, eventually to be succeeded by a monumental sculpture of a minor Soviet liberator, Marshal Rybalko. The project brings him into contact with the headmaster of the school, Mila Břečka (Jaroslav Dušek) and his wife, Magda Břečková (Vilma Cibulková), Bedřich's ex-student and ex-lover, who holds a key position in the artists' union. Both are communists. They justify their position by the need to protect their careers and those of their children and argue that they can work for change "from within," a viewpoint never presented in the film as anything other than self-justification.

The film unravels the tragicomic incidents that follow from this path. First, the drunken Bedřich persuades the equally drunken Mila to hide a denunciation of communism signed by both of them—a "message to the future"—under the mosaic he is creating. When the mosaic subsequently has to be removed for other reasons, Mila is cast into panic. The Rybalko sculpture is completed and all seems set fair until the Voice of America broadcasts a reading of an article by Alois published in an émigré art magazine in which he applauds the initiative of Magda in employing a persecuted artist and working to change the regime from the inside. His theory is that Bedřich may achieve fame in "the West" because of the communist need for hard currency. While Bedřich argues that no one listens to reports on art, the Břečkas mysteriously find that they can no longer get passports for their annual holiday in Yugoslavia. But there is a small triumph: Alois's articles result in a West German commission to sculpt a bust of Franz Kafka. So, suddenly, Bedřich is accepted but, as the union boss arranges privately, his profits can be suitably taxed.

Throughout the film, Bedřich has been promising his children a trip to the sea—but, together with the Břečkas, they end up at an Eastern

bloc alternative, Hungary's Lake Balaton, in the off season. They call to each other in the mist and rise from the water; and the credits wind up to the tune "Marx Engels Beatles" by the Czech rock band Vltava. As in *Pelíšky*, the principal characters are brought together, this time by the Voice of America broadcast. Communist and noncommunist endure a shared fate. The film's portrayal of the communists does not extend beyond stereotypes—the featureless, characterless man who heads the union, the "fellow travelers" like the Břečkas, who seek to protect the children and do a little good along the way. Significantly, they do not take any major initiatives themselves.

Bedřich himself is scarcely an exemplary hero. A child of the 1960s (note the posters of Frank Zappa and John Lennon and Yoko Ono on his walls), he listens to the progressive Czech band the Plastic People of the Universe and denounces the communists from time to time, producing his piggy banks on the side. His main response is to live in an alcoholic haze. His hidden talents are largely disguised until the final stages of the film, when Magda provides a guided tour for their West German commissioner. It is only then that we see some impressive busts, including one of the 1984 Nobel Prize–winning poet and original signatory of Charter 77, Jaroslav Seifert. But Bedřich and his wife (Eva Holubová) both refuse to vote in meaningless elections—perhaps another reference to Havel's greengrocer.

None of the films that deal explicitly with the communist period provide opportunities for exemplary action. In *Pelísky*, in a reversal of fate, the embittered and powerless Kraus escapes during the Prague Spring and the naive communist Šebek attempts suicide. In *Kolja*, Louka is drawn despite himself into conflict with the declining state, but its failure marks the end of his relationship with Kolja, the one thing that has given meaning to his life. In *Pupendo*, the "fellow travelers" move unwillingly toward dissent and the dissenters toward accommodation—but both end up in the same boat. The extended period of "normalization" seems to have produced a view in which all actions are somehow stifled or pointless, demonstrating the helplessness of individuals (and states) whose problems are put to one side in the interests of great power priorities. If *Kolja* refers obliquely to the power of the powerless, this leads neither to deliberate action nor to political outcome. The collapse of communism occurs independently of the hero's actions.

In a country where the state no longer supports cinema in any direct or substantive way, it is inevitable that the new films pursue their audience with greater enthusiasm than some of their predecessors. The emphasis on narrative accessibility, popular actors, and plenty of humor are the inevitable ingredients of box office success—but so also is a need to flatter the public. The heroes, whatever their

political allegiance, are small men caught up in impossible situations with alternatives usually presented by slightly hidden ironies and contradictions—thus, the "nuances" detected in *Kolja* are also to be found in *Obecna škola*, *Musíme si pomáhat*, and *Pupendo*. The films do raise issues for interaction and debate but challenge collective mythology only at the margins. The humanitarian and positive objectives of the Svěráks's films are fairly evident—like Masaryk, they want to promote the continuity of the national ethos. Only in *Musíme si pomáhat* do the pleasures of identification become ambiguous.

It is understandable that no feature films have sought to provide direct accounts of the Prague Spring or of Charter 77—after all, most people were not direct participants; and they make up exceptional rather than everyday experience. But the films' emphasis on shared experience seems to suggest that people were all in it together and that there was little that could be done. There is none of the critical angle characterized, for instance, by Jan Němec's *O slavnosti a hostech* (*The Party and the Guests*, 1966) where people are shown to create the dominant system through their own actions and adjustments. Only one postcommunist film, Jan Schmidt's *Vracenky* (*Rounders*, 1990), has made any attempt to portray communism as the failure of an ideal. For substantive and complex accounts of the communist era, one still has to turn to films from the Prague Spring period such as Jaromil Jireš's adaptation of Milan Kundera's novel *Žert* (*The Joke*, 1968), Vojtěch Jasný's *Vsichni dobři rodáci* (*All My Good Countrymen*, 1968), and Karel Kachyňa's *Ucho* (*The Ear*, filmed in 1969 but not released until 1990)—all of which were essentially analyses of the 1950s from the perspective of the late 1960s.

The new films are nostalgic only in the sense that they recapture shared experience, although the intensity of feeling increases with references to the precommunist period (notably in *Obecná škola* and *Tmavomodrý svět*). Jan Svěrák's work clearly owes something to the lyrical traditions of Czech cinema, but his weakness for the romantic image is frequently contradicted. Thus, the trip to the country in *Kolja* makes reference to pollution, and the heroic narrative of *Tmavomodrý svět* is contrasted with the reality of a communist prison. The films of the Svěráks and of Jarchovský and Hřebejk are replete with moral ambiguity, humor, tragedy, and strategies for survival; in this sense, they come close to everyday shared experience. But both Zdeněk Svěrák and Petr Jarchovský seem to begin with the idea of film as entertainment before it is film as an expression of experience (i.e., experience made entertaining). In other words, none of the films provides an analysis of its period that would leave the audience genuinely disturbed. In this connection, the most personal of the films, the Svěráks's *Obecná škola* seems most successful and *Musíme si pomáhat* the most challenging. But there is no direct analysis of the realities of political power; there

are no real villains and certainly no idealists in the Communist Party, and dissidents are scarcely mentioned. One cannot help but feel that the 1960s New Wave would have come up with films on the collective experience that were much more critical and analytical. This analysis can no doubt be found in books and in television documentaries—but the very success and achievement of the feature films suggests the need for imaginative examination going beyond the requirements of the market.

notes

1. Petr Pithart, "Recognising a Prophet in the Czech Lands: T. G. Masaryk and Our Society," *Kosmas: Journal of Czechoslovak and Central European Studies 5*, no. 2 (1986): 47; emphasis in the original.
2. Václav Havel, "Letter to Alexander Dubček" (1969), trans. A.G. Brain, in *Open Letters: Selected Prose 1965–1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (London: Faber, 1991), 40.
3. Yvette Biró, "Pathos and Irony in East European Films," in *Politics, Art and Commitment in the East European Cinema*, ed. David W. Paul (London: Macmillan, 1983): 39.
4. See Zbyněk Zeman with Antonín Klimek, *The Life of Edvard Beneš 1894–1948: Czechoslovakia in Peace and War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
5. Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in Vaclav Havel et al., *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985): 39.
6. Philip French, "She Got the Record Collection, He Got the Kid," *Observer* (London), May 11, 1997.
7. Kevin Jackson, "Giving the Tear-Jerker a Good Name," *Independent on Sunday* (London), May 11, 1997.

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gábor bódy

a precursor of the digital age

andrás bálint kovács

One of the most important and most enigmatic figures of the Hungarian cinema in the 1970s and 1980s was someone whose career was most unusual right from the start and all the way to an end that came both untimely and unexpectedly. This person was Gábor Bódy.

Bódy's position in European art cinema is one of abandoning the modernist paradigm with the awareness and presentiment of the forthcoming digital age. Not only his artistic creation but also his quite significant theoretical writings prove that Bódy was one of the first filmmakers of international significance to realize and foresee the important changes of technology and style caused by the end of modernism and the advent of the new media. I will in this essay present his work in the context of the transition between modernist auteur cinema and the age of the new media mixing various techniques, styles, and mythologies. His works and ideas could be best compared to those of British filmmaker Peter Greenaway, who has had the same overall perspective of filmmaking as Bódy, incorporating various media, and creating an eclectic and heterogeneous form of cinema.

Bódy was born in Budapest in 1946. He studied philosophy and linguistics at Eötvös University in Budapest with long interruptions from 1964 until 1971, when he was admitted to the Hungarian Film Academy to study filmmaking. While he was still a student of Eötvös University, he became highly impressed by the linguistic and semiotic approach in film theory and not only began to write theory but also used the opportunity provided by the state film school to make films; thus he commenced his experimental film career, in which he consistently adapted and tried out his theoretical ideas.

Very soon he became the leader of an experimental film group and, by the mid-1970s, his name became the embodiment of Hungarian avant-garde film of the time. In 1976 he made his first full-length feature film, *Amerikai Anzix* (*American Postcard*), using many of the experimental formal devices he had developed in his short films. However, to the surprise of many, the film's structure and story was conventional enough to be appreciated by mainstream filmmakers and film critics alike, which propelled Bódy immediately from his marginal status into the ranks of the most innovative young talents of mainstream Hungarian cinema. In the meantime, he did not forget his interest in theory. He constantly planned to develop his thesis into a large theoretical work, and attended, in 1977, the Congress of Film Semiology in Paris organized by Christian Metz, whom he desperately wanted to meet. He also planned and held a university course in film theory in 1979–80. In the same period he realized his great project, the 270-minute-long *Nárcisz és Psyché* (*Narcissus and Psyche*, 1980). This film was meant to be the synthesis of all of Bódy's ideas about philosophy and the new forms of the audiovisual medium. This film also became a rallying point for all avant-garde artists of contemporary Hungary: painters, theater artists, and musicians. After this film, Bódy became not only a leading figure of Hungarian experimental film but one of the Hungarian avant-garde as a whole.

In the early 1980s, Bódy was invited to teach at the Berlin Film Academy, and thus spent a considerable amount of time in West Germany. He got involved with the international community of contemporary video artists and organized a network (called Infermental) for publishing and distributing pieces of video art all over the world. He also continued to work in different formats: he finished a second full-length feature film in 1984, *Kutya éji dala* (*The Dog's Night Song*), and prepared a third film while making short experimental video clips and organizing a circle of young Hungarian video artists. On October 24, 1985, at the age of thirty-nine, to all of the Hungarian film and cultural community's greatest consternation, Bódy committed suicide.[1]

the european context

In terms of the context of European art cinema, the debut of Bódy's career by and large coincided with that of such filmmakers as Chantal Akerman,

Peter Greenaway, and Wim Wenders. This was at the beginning of the 1970s, when modernist cinema, so to speak, lost its "sense of reality." In other words, for many filmmakers, it was not only that interior and exterior realities were increasingly hard to distinguish—which was one of the main themes of modernist cinema at the beginning of the 1960s—but their perception was that all guidelines by which to interpret what could be called exterior reality were disappearing entirely, a perception that later became a distinctive standpoint of postmodern art. Filmmakers such as Werner Rainer Fassbinder and Federico Fellini looked for inspiration in the theater; others, like Akerman, tried to grasp reality in documentary style; yet others, like Werner Herzog and Wenders, looked for realities outside of Europe. Some, like Miklós Jancsó, turned reality into abstract symbolism, and some, like Andrei Tarkovsky, replaced the outside reality with the subjective reality of the self. That was the endgame of the highly intellectual and melodramatic attitude of modern cinema.

Soon after the mid-1970s, much of European art cinema turned back to classical narration and emotional storytelling. The best representative of this tendency was one-time French New Wave filmmaker François Truffaut. Formal innovation and experimenting with the medium became rather scarce in the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, some of the latecomers of modernism thought that the innovative process of modernism could be continued, but following different principles; namely, on the premises of the changing audiovisual medium and the new developments and stylistic tendencies in the arts. Bódy was one of those rare filmmakers who were convinced that the end of modernism did not necessarily mean the end of artistic innovation, especially when the audiovisual medium itself appeared to be going through a revolutionary transformation.

bódy's position in hungarian cinema

Bódy came to filmmaking when an important generational shift began to take shape in Hungarian cinema. The 1950s and 1960s brought along Zoltán Fábry, István Gaál, Miklós Jancsó, András Kovács, Károly Makk, and István Szabó—already established filmmakers who mostly enjoyed considerable international reputation. They represented a kind of "engaged" filmmaking, concentrating on topics of great historical and political importance. For them the main question was how to represent historical, moral, or political truth, and by what means they could circumvent censorship in order for truth to surface in their films. Bódy consciously opposed this attitude: "Moralism and lyricism: those are the two constellations under which the entire fictional system of the 1960s developed in Hungary. One thing is clear however: neither of them appeals to the youth of our time. In fact these are the two most repulsive subjects for them."[2]

For the next generation, emerging in the early 1970s, truth was not an absolute category anymore. They regarded truth as a function of the vision one has about reality. They were largely influenced by the leftist ideology of 1968, especially as regarded the central role of imagination and the subjectivity of concepts of reality. In the films of the new generation, the politics of the nation yielded to the politics of individual desires; and communities of tradition and history yielded to communities of individual choices. Most of them started making documentaries of a very special, ironic kind, which resembled the style of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the 1960s. Some of them, Bódy being the most prominent, joined the new experimental and avant-garde wave of the late 1960s and early 1970s, envisioning a completely new start in filmmaking very much in the sense Jean-Luc Godard defined it in his 1968 film, *Le gai savoir* (*Joy of Learning*), in which he claimed to return to isolated sounds and images to rebuild cinematic expression.

Bódy's peculiar style and technique were intimately related to these ideas. Especially at the beginning of his career, he put more emphasis on transforming and manipulating existing images than on the careful elaboration of their creation. His first feature film, *Amerikai Anzix* (*American Postcard*, 1976), was shot rather traditionally and did not use any peculiar props or visual elements such as spectacular camerawork or set design, yet the visual texture of this film was a revelation in Hungarian cinema in the mid-1970s. By various acoustic and visual postproduction techniques, he dissected his images into elements that were each given a different stylistic aspect. On the one hand, Bódy gave his film the appearance of one made in the mid-nineteenth century. On the other hand, he created a particularly rich semantic texture as the visual and acoustic elements of the film represented different meaningful layers, many times contradicting or deconstructing each other. Reusing existing visual material, decontextualizing elements of images or image sequences, manipulation, and transforming stylistic aspects of the visual and acoustic material were his main tools at the beginning in deconstructing narrative, visual, and semantic conventions of modern cinema.

In his later works, from the late 1970s on, he increasingly used on-location manipulation techniques, such as special props; highly artificial set designs; unnatural lighting; extreme camera angles; body tinting; extravagant makeup, costumes, and recording techniques; and he mixed 8- and 16-millimeter with 35-millimeter film stock.

The techniques Bódy used in his experimental and feature films were not simply the result of random choice. Bódy had very articulate theoretical ideas as to cinema's way of making sense. Especially at the beginning of his career, he almost worked like a scientist, using filmmaking to demonstrate his theoretical ideas.

bódy's theory of cinematic meaning

By the end of the 1960s, Bódy, following a mainstream intellectual fashion, became interested in the signifying process of cinema and studied film semiotics. However, his main concern was not a typically structuralist problem; it was instead the question of how to divert the sense of visual and narrative elements from their most trivial and conventional relationships and associations. The concept describing the process of meaning changes to which he referred most often, and which he borrowed from German linguist Herman Paul, was "isolating and new grouping" (*Isolierung and Neue Gruppierung*).[3] This idea foreshadowed his peculiar approach, which focused not on the different structures of paradigms and syntaxes but, rather, on the merging of paradigm and syntax.

Bódy's most elaborate theoretical works use a semantic approach founded on linguistic theory, aiming at the analysis of meaning in the cinema. In the early 1970s he developed his main ideas following his studies in linguistics; his later, less elaborate theoretical works basically repeat and vary his initial ideas.[4] Even though the main points of his theory never changed, the focus of his theorizing shifted from the early 1970s to the early 1980s. While in the beginning he investigated the problem of how we attribute meaning to cinematic images, from the late 1970s on he increasingly used his theoretical ideas to explain his unusual filmmaking practice. This shift of focus is important because it proves that, even when Bódy's activity became predominantly one of a practical filmmaker's, a theoretical awareness was constantly present; he was always attentive to refreshing and developing his theoretical ideas.

Bódy's approach to film semiotics was informed by a sensibility to serial structures. He based his theory of cinematic meaning on the idea that the meaning of individual images is dependent on the overall syntactic structure of the film. Following this approach, meaning is basically a pragmatic category, one that changes according to the actual usage of meaningful elements. The meaning system of cinema follows a strict transformative process, which starts up from what Bódy calls, following Paul's terminology, the "usual" or "trivial" meaning. Later he called this level of meaning the "zero degree of meaning." On this level, the meaning of individual elements is related to the most frequent general usage of the most salient elements in the image. The trivial meaning of an image is well-determined and unlimited at the same time: well-determined because it is trivial; but there are infinitely more meaningful elements in an image than what the most immediate trivial meaning refers to. In the context of a film's structure, the meaningful elements start to transform their meanings according to *series*, in which they are compared to other subsequent elements. The film

isolates various trivial meanings and places them into different series according to given paradigms. As he once noted, "Particular traits of the indeterminate character of the trivial (actual) meaning become salient through repetition and interrelatedness, and create different series. There opens up an imaginary field of meaning . . . it is in this sense that we can speak of *serial meaning*, which suppresses the zero degree of actual meaning even though it is nourished by it.[5]

The main process by which a film creates its meanings is isolating and regrouping. A series of images isolates a certain number of elements and places them into a special semantic group, or paradigm. However, Bódy claimed that those paradigms were created by syntactic structures. He determined three main types of syntactic paradigm, or three main principles of organizing the overall structure of a film: the local and chronological type, the metaphoric type, and the serial type. It is the serial type of meaning that interested him the most.

infinite series of self-reflection and the problem of reality

In the early and mid-1970s, when Bódy was developing his ideas, the theories of poststructuralism were far from being mainstream or fashionable; they were just beginning to take shape. This was ten years before Gilles Deleuze published his two-volume philosophical work on cinema (*Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*), setting forth a conception of the condensation of time into the image. Just like Deleuze, Bódy also founded his conception about the relationship between time and image on the idea of infinite series and repetition:

> According to our secret concept each moment of time contains the previous moments, and this idea can be connected to the principle of the conservation of matter and energy. The moment a picture is created it becomes a part of reality, and thus becomes a canvas of new pictures, and this is how it sinks into time. . . . Long series of images stand behind each image along vast distances. The ancient Greeks explained the act of seeing as follows: little images come off an object and get to our eyes. This interpretation may seem childish but, compared to modern philosophy, it is interesting that unlike most of the theories that have been elaborated since then, it regarded the image in its ontological status, and not only as a virtual phenomenon of consciousness.[6]

Serialism in Bódy's approach was closely linked with the idea of self-reflection:

> In contemporary art, the idea of the ontological status of the image is mostly maintained in the notions of mirror and reflection. . . . My methods were multiple repetitions, freezing the pictures at a couple of points, taking up my place in bending contexts, forcing the picture to develop its meaning completely. . . . I tried to demonstrate that the moment fixed on the real is a limit behind which there are infinite series. In representation these series must converge to a single point in which not only the content of expression but the way of expression also appears.[7]

According to Bódy, images are not generated by a reality that stands outside them; images are generated by an ultimately *infinite* series of other images. Meaning and interpretation from this perspective look like a function of a communication system consisting of images. In other words, images are not reflecting the outside world; they reflect each other and the communication network that relates them to one another. Meaning therefore is not the simple relation of a sign and an idea; it is an endless self-reflecting process, which penetrates through a series of images:

> [T]he pictures submerge into each other in the reflection so that you cannot draw the line between reality and its image. . . . If you stand in the axis of two parallel mirrors, to control the sight, you will cover the picture; but if the axis of the controlling eye does not coincide with the axis of reflection, the infinite sequence will bend and disappear at a certain number of reflections. The picture of an electric mirror system can be conducted, controlled, infinitely microfied or magnified, or even altered. Let us take two cameras; one will watch the monitor of the other and vice versa. The result is also an infinite reflection, only in this case it goes as if between two subjects. If you put your hand between a camera and a monitor, the image of your hand will appear in the whole system. Now you can easily imagine a system consisting of four thousand million members, and each of them can see what any other can without being able to locate through which transmission it received the image and which member has seen the original object. What is more, each member can see in one picture what the others can—for example, what the 15th or the 58,967th member can. But it is not simultaneous even if the time lag is as small as it is necessary for the distance

to be covered at the speed of light and electrons. This way time can be induced in one picture.[8]

The idea that the cinematic image gets its real meaning by juxtaposition is almost as old as cinema itself. But this is not Bódy's point; he goes far beyond montage theory. He does not mean juxtaposed pictures; he means pictures that are *in each other*. He posits a relationship that can be grasped through penetration into the picture. This penetration would work through small semantic distortions that are exercised by the manipulation of the material. But these are not images superimposed on one another. These images are in a constant metamorphosis; they do not include each other, nor do they overlap. Rather, they generate, then submerge and disappear in, each other. The second image invalidates the first, and the third does so with the second. They are mutual transformations of each other and not distinct units. The identity of the image here is no longer determined by its frame. The frame has become only a transient limit relative to a particular meaning, which is also transitory.

The problem of the frame is crucial to Bódy. In the focus of his theoretical and artistic works there are these questions: What are the limits of a conventional meaning? How far can we go in peeling off conventional semantic layers (trivial meaning) from the picture before we destroy it completely? If the meaning of the picture is an infinite reflection that never reaches a fixed point, isn't there still a substantial reality somewhere way beyond the images?

An early experimental study from 1976, *Four Bagatelles*, clearly demonstrates Bódy's views about how the essentialist concept of reality disappears from the image when it is filled by authorial comments. In these four pieces he examines the impact that the constant change of internal frames within the picture has on meaning. The four studies are juxtaposed in a logical order so that they can express the relativity of the image and the arbitrariness of meaning. The first scene depicts a traditional composed dance and a fixed natural background as a frame. Bódy put another artificial frame on the image, which moves independently of the interior movements. In the second, the dance is not a traditional one; it consists of very articulate and expressive, but fragmented, movements. There is no natural frame; the space where the action takes place is indeterminate, and our view is limited by a circular black mask that always changes its size. Here the frame is subjective and abstract. In the third scene we can see the disorganized "dance" of a drunken man, and the frame is twofold. On the one hand, we have the frame of the film material, which is unchanging and completely arbitrary, not even subjective; on the other hand, we have an internal framing within the picture. In the foreground there is a scholar speaking about the social meaning of drugs and drinking, and behind him sits the drunken man with a bottle

in his hands, laughing like an idiot. The two persons are two images, one behind the other, but at the same time they are also images *of each other*. They reflect each other: the first is talking about something the second illustrates, but he is the one who gives sense to the first's presence. So the meaning of the image comes out of its self-reflection, which is created by the medium. The fourth study shows all this on an abstract level with the electronic mirror system in which images are created.

These four studies illustrate the idea that the more traditional conventions are pulled out of the image, the more its arbitrariness and conventionality become salient. Reality in the image is only a certain semantic convention that we are simply accustomed to.

new narration

The importance of this study is that, although it is clearly a modernist experimental project demonstrating the relative and subjective nature of our concept of reality, at the end Bódy comes to a conclusion that goes beyond modernist essentialism. This serial conception of meaning led Bódy to the idea of a new kind of narration. "New narration" would not be based on the linear and causal development of one situation into another, which is the basis of classical narration, nor on the ambiguity, falsity, and reflexivity of narration, as in some modernist films. It would be based on the serial logic of databases and the systematic cataloging of possible elements of various paradigms. This idea of paradigmatic or serial narration was exactly the same as what Greenaway developed further, beginning with his 1982 film *The Draughtsman's Contract*. Bódy set out to realize this idea in his magnum opus, *Psyché*, in 1980.

The film's narrative idea was to tell a story where the passing of time looked like a spatial extension and variation of series of motives rather than a linear and irreversible evolution of a process. Although the film did not cancel the linear development of a given plot, the plot embraced an unrealistic time span—a hundred years, from the early nineteenth century to the 1930s—during which time the main characters did not grow old. The key idea of the film, however, is not "eternal youth" but the problem of how the idea of eternal values conceptualized by classicism is devalued and destroyed by the emergence of modernity. They experience time as the infinite variation of relationships and motives of their environment. Bódy did not multiply only thematic motives in the film but also narrative and visual styles, thereby creating a certain visual and narrative eclecticism. When asked at the time about the eclectic character of his film, this is how he explained it:

> If we think in old stylistic terms, it is just possible that naturalism is present in my film, just as well as eclecticism; but I want to add that all these are present within quotes, within the film's own system of symbols. Our

> selection of styles is dominated by hyperfictionalism and hypernarrativity. This means that the various parts marked by different styles are used as blocks, which have mere hints of styles. . . . Eclecticism arises from the encyclopaedic nature of the film. From the point of view of style, we regard the various cultural symbols as being equal in value. Kitsch and myth, for instance, are equal in value insofar as both carry symbols and bear a universally characteristic feature. I have conceived the entire film to be similar to those vivid, colorful encylopedia-type books that were popular throughout German culture about the turn of the century.[9]

Here one can grasp very clearly the difference in Bódy's thinking from that of Hungarian cinematic traditions. He does not distinguish between truth and myth, or between "true" or "false" mythologies. Nor does he condemn kitsch as something that is opposed to "authentic art." All these distinctions were essential to the tradition of Hungarian modernist cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. For Bódy, "reality" and "truth" have no substantial values; they are all aspects of meaning. Eclecticism and the encyclopedic character of film were only the categories that could be grasped the most easily with conventional categories. Similar to Greenaway's later films, in Bódy's film eclecticism and cataloging were not just arbitrary stylistic and narrative choices; they were means of the serial transformation of meaning. Unusual grouping, visual transformation, and ornamental manipulation of visual elements served as modifiers of the "trivial meaning," isolating elements in their original contexts for the sake of "new groupings" unrelated to essentialist categories like "reality" or "truth." The "new group" is not a closed set determined by the function of a linear narrative; it is an open series, a catalog of objects, persons, aspects, and so on that relates one narrative situation to another by virtue of the heterogeneity of is elements. Serial construction was not the only way narrative situations were linked together. As I have noted, traditional linear narrative construction had its part to play in the construction of the film, so the serial system (the "new grouping") functioned as a different layer of meanings in the narrative of which the transformed elements were "entries" on the superficial or trivial narrative layer. "New narration" is not a narrative structure completely unheard of. It could be best defined as a narrative constructed of parallel interrelated virtual realities, in which narrative and visual elements may play a role on more than one virtual level. That is why Bódy used the terms "hyperfictionalism" and "hypernarrativity." He conceived of his film as a system of fragments in systems in which the important thing was not the consistency and the interconnectibility of the original systems but the consistency of his own "hypersystem,"

through which a wide variety of heterogeneous elements could be arranged in new catalogs.

Bódy's method was absolutely new at the time, especially in the context of commercial art cinema which, at the beginning of the 1980s and leaving behind modernism, was just turning back to conventional narration, playing with kitsch elements of mass culture (see, e.g., Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* [1981], or Francis Ford Coppola's *One from the Heart* [1982]). Bódy's film did not have the success he had expected. It was presented at several international festivals, including the unofficial section of the Cannes Film Festival; but received only one prize, the Ernest Artaria Award at the Locarno International Film Festival; and was not widely distributed outside of Hungary. *Psyché* was viewed as an extravagant and eclectic stylistic exercise rather than as the radical innovation in narrative cinema that it intended to be. Bódy was aware of the film's novelty, as well as the possible lack of a breakthrough, as is evident from a letter to French producer Anatole Dauman at the completion the film in which Bódy wrote, "My fear, if there is to be one, about this film arises out of those NEW elements that emerge from the point of view of understanding and techniques which may become the public property (or clichés) of modern filmmaking. A new attitude comes up as worms after rain, so I am afraid that as a consequence of my special geopolitical situation I may seem to be a self-plagiarist if my film does not get to appear before the world in time."[10]

Bódy asserted several times in private that he was not disappointed with the film's lack of success because he was certain that his film created a language that contemporary cinema was not prepared for. He posited that ten or fifteen years later his film would be viewed in a totally different manner, when elements of a new narration and the new media would be in common use.

new media

Bódy was convinced that new forms of cinema would be largely informed by the technological possibilities provided by the spread of the electronic media such as video and computer animation, together with the Super-8 amateur format very fashionable at the time. New technology for him meant new ways of manipulating the "trivial" or "usual" meaning of the images. Thus, he never abandoned experimenting with available new formats, even after he became an established filmmaker. In his short experimental videotapes—he called them "philo- and mythoclips"—he experimented with visual and narrative structures characteristic of the audiovisual culture of the digital age. Three points are worth mentioning in this respect: the database system, the composite image, and hypertext structure.[11] I have mentioned already the hypertext structure in *Psyché*; I will now briefly deal with the other two aspects.

In the early 1980s Bódy had a utopian vision about what the audiovisual culture of the new age would look like. He spoke of a universal audiovisual "dictionary"—a database of sounds and images from which anybody, anywhere on the earth, would be able to take any item and use it. He envisioned this dictionary to be available via satellite communication. That database would store any image and sound created in the world, isolated from its original context. He had this idea ten years before the World Wide Web appeared, and at a time when the remote connection of computers was known only in some very specialized areas such as the military, aviation, and science. But this idea was remarkable also from the point of view of the aesthetics of the "new media." According to Lev Manovich, one of the new media's particularities is the database logic, which conceives of the world as a deposit of sounds and images that are permanently available and can be used for various purposes in new constructions. This database logic is contrary to linear narrative thinking, and creates intimate links among the paradigm, data, and the way data is reached or organized—in other words, the *syntax* of the media. Bódy's notion of "new narration" and his experiments with different formats are very similar to this conception; but instead of *database* he used the word *encyclopedia*. He worked on a project to establish an official experimental workshop within MAFILM, the state-sponsored Hungarian film studio, to find ways of extending various alternative technologies such as Super 8 and videotape.[12] In his last feature film, *A kutya éji dala* (*The Dog's Night Song*, 1984), he systematically mixed various media, including 16-millimeter, 35-millimeter, and Super 8 film and videotape. The different media were meant to convey different meaning levels, constantly comparing visual and narrative elements to one another. Thus, not only the visual elements but also forms of representation created a certain paradigm. The syntax became paradigmatic, as Manovich put it twenty years later.

The idea of the composite image resides in the representation of a seamless reality or various virtual realities composed of heterogeneous elements. The composite is the opposite of the idea of montage, which is based on the juxtaposition of homogeneous elements. In the composite image the elements are not disjunctive; its stylistic equivalent is eclecticism. However, the essence of the composite is not only different styles, but also different materials, each molded into the others. Essential to this idea is the fluid transformation of images instead of clear-cut borders or edges inherent in the idea of montage. Many examples of this way of thinking can be found in *Psyché,* as well as in Bódy's short experimental videos, naturally within the limits of the computer and video technology of the early 1980s. The term Bódy used to designate his conception of the composite image was *multimedia*, which he considered as the great potential of cinema: "That is precisely

the magnificent possibility of the motion picture, that the mutual correlation of various media may produce a complex balanced unity of diverse philosophical systems."[13]

Bódy made his films and videos with the presentiment that important changes were to occur in the audiovisual medium. He was convinced that within ten or fifteen years his profession would be considerably altered. In 1984 he wrote, "I am a film director, but perhaps ten years from now my profession will be called video director. . . . I may say that to me video is the promise that the potential of cinema will be realized—namely, that filmmaking is actually a language that can communicate thoughts in all kinds of ways."[14] The commercial sector of cinema was aware of the fact that the entertainment industry could extensively use computer technology to enhance its effects. New forms of narration and the mixing of various media were spreading in the art-film industry. But very few filmmakers at the time were thinking about digital technology—or as it was called then, video and computer—as something that would considerably alter cinema to the point that a completely new audiovisual language would come into being. Gábor Bódy and Peter Greenaway were two of the few filmmakers who made films with the consciousness that they were speaking a particular, new language that only future audiences would really be able to appreciate and understand.[15]

conclusion

Bódy's international recognition has remained limited. The explanation of this relative lack of success would need a more meticulous and critical analysis of his work, which exceeds the limits of this essay. One could, nevertheless, formulate some hypotheses.

First, he worked in a period when international attention went for such Hungarian films that in one way or another dealt with some contemporary political issues. It was precisely this tradition that Bódy contested. Second, all of his works prior to *Psyché* qualify more as experimental films than as accomplished works of art likely to reach a wide range of audiences. Third, in *Psyché* he did not create a sufficiently consistent aesthetic framework that could hold together a highly eclectic stylistic texture throughout the lengthy running time of the film (more than three hours); so even this film was viewed as a rather extravagant stylistic exercise. Fourth, his next film, *A kutya éji dala*, did not contribute to a stylistic or conceptual coherence in his style; it instead seemed rather chaotic and undisciplined. And fifth, the sudden and tragic end of his life did not allow enough time for any consistency to unfold in later works. Bódy's main role in Hungarian cinema was that of radically deconstructing old cinematic conventions and of forcefully

introducing a new artistic vision and new concepts about the future of the audiovisual medium, well ahead of his time. In this he became an important inspiration for young filmmakers of the time.

notes

1. There is no definite explanation for Bódy's suicide. One likely motive may have been a fact that no one in his professional and personal environment was aware of: he was an informer for the Hungarian Secret Police, providing regular information about his colleagues' political ideas and activities. According to the available documents, he continued this activity from 1973 through at least 1981. The documents of his activity as a police informer are available at the Történeti Hivatal (History Bureau), Budapest, file number H-59552.
2. Gábor Bódy, *A végtelen kép* [*The Infinite Image*] (Budapest: Pesti Szalon, 1996), 50; translations herein are my own.
3. Ibid., 16.
4. Bódy's semantic approach was largely influenced by that of Hungarian linguist János Zsilka who, in his theory of the "organic linguistic system," basically followed early-twentieth-century German linguists' theories supposing a close relationship between semantic changes and the functioning of the syntactic system. Bódy used Zsilka's theory to show how different syntactic structures determine the meaning of individual elements in a film.
5. Bódy, *A végtelen kép*, 16–17.
6. Gábor Bódy, "Series, Repetition, Meaning," in *Bódy Gábor*, ed. László Beke and Peternák Miklós (Budapest: Műcsarnok, 1987), 281; translations herein are my own.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Bódy, *A végtelen kép*, 132.
10. Gábor Bódy to Anatole Dauman, in Bódy, *A végtelen kép*, 128.
11. For charateristics of the "new media," see Lev Manovich, *The Language of the New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).
12. Bódy predicted in 1982 that the Super-8 format would last no more than three to five years—the time it would take for videotape technology to be perfected and become inexpensive enough to use; see Bódy, *A végtelen kép*, 315.
13. Gábor Bódy, "From Film Language experiment to New Narrativity," in Beke and Miklós, eds., *Bódy Gábor*, 132.
14. Bódy, *A végtelen kép*, 340.
15. In some respects Greenaway is even more radical inasmuch as he considers true cinema as something that has not yet been created; he expressed this idea in an interview I made with him for Hungarian television in 1995. See Peter Greenaway, interview by András Bálint Kovács, (Magyar Televízió, 1996).

eleven

chaos, intermediality, allegory

the cinema of mircea daneliuc

ágnes pethö

late communism and a *glissando* into the symbolic

It is a rather uncanny coincidence that Mircea Daneliuc's film *Glissando* appeared in cinemas around Romania exactly in the ominous year of 1984, considering the fact that, at that time, Nikolae Ceausescu's Romania was the East European country that came closest to fulfilling George Orwell's dark prophecies. The accidental timing of the release of this film added to its impact on an intellectual audience who received it enthusiastically,[1] while official criticism tried to dismiss it by labeling it as too "confusing." At a time when fiction films in Romania were mainly used for the ideological propaganda of the communist party, this film not only appeared as a rare example of art film but also shocked its spectators as a message that came out of chaos: it managed to capture the general disgust of a people fed up with a life of seemingly endless humiliation, and to express at the same time a nostalgia for artistic beauty. What was remarkable from an aesthetic point of view was how it managed to set its story elements into a wider intertextual and intermedial context, creating a unique allegory.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that, in times of dictatorship and a general ban on individual and artistic freedom, a work of art deploys techniques that raise the concrete elements of the story into the realm of the symbolic and tries to convey a message to its audience through the language of parables or allegories. What made this feature intriguing was that it transcended its own age[2]; it survived the fall of the Ceausescu regime and the fall of communism, and resurfaced in only a slightly changed form in the films Daneliuc made after 1990. A possible explanation of this can be found in two aspects of Romanian cultural heritage, which *Glissando* exemplifies eloquently. On the one hand, there is an ambivalent relationship between Romanian art and its Western models, a relationship that becomes apparent in Romanian literature repeatedly, and that has not disappeared with the fall of the communist regime. On the other hand, a deeply rooted tradition of Balkanic grotesque black humor mixed with a spirit of ruthless self-criticism also defines Daneliuc's style. This latter tradition links Daneliuc's films not only with the works of the Romanian playwright Ion Luca Caragiale, who wrote plays that ridiculed petty provincialism and bourgeois political demagogy at the turn of the twentieth century,[3] but also with those of another Balkan filmmaker, Emir Kusturica.

Glissando is an almost three-hour-long, complicated, and nightmarish vision, which offers the parallel representation of (1) the monstrous world of the Ceausescu regime and (2) a virtual world consisting of elements of a more universal cultural heritage. Both are the result of a high degree of stylization, which is mainly due to restrictions imposed by censorship. Allegorical representation means in this case, as it always does, a systematic multiplication of meanings on different levels of the cinematic text. The first and perhaps most obvious duplication of meaning occurs on the level of the story's temporal and spatial setting, and can be interpreted as a defensive attempt on the part of the filmmaker first to erase from the film any direct links with the present (by setting the story in a known historical past) and at the same time—indirectly, through hints hidden in the dialogues, gestures, settings, costumes, and different visual motifs—to produce connotations that turn this past (the Romania of the 1930s) into a disguise of the present (the Romania of the 1980s). In this way we have only a seemingly historical setting, which consists of mostly symbolic elements (a health resort, a hospital, a painter's studio, a country estate, etc.) that in themselves can become not only signs of the torments of a diseased present but can also serve as timeless symbols of a universal human condition. This universal symbolism facilitates the appearance of another layer of symbolic meanings, which contrasts with the allegorical world of the *present presented as past*—a world viewed with disgust and bitterness, a world of aesthetic decadence that is created by imitations of style and

explicit or implicit intertextual references and quotations, presented nostalgically. All these heterogeneous elements are linked together by a nonlinear and self-reflexive,[4] or metapoetic, textual strategy that reminds us of high modernist, flow-of-consciousness cinema techniques similar to those of Alain Resnais in *Last Year in Marienbad* (1960) or in Federico Fellini's later baroque visions (*Satyricon*, 1969; *Roma*, 1972).

Yet, as Michael C. Finke's theory of literary metapoesis explains, metapoetry should never be understood as merely a narcissistic game but, rather, a discourse "pitched at a particular addressee."[5] The significance of metapoetic discourse cannot be understood in isolation from other communicative functions at play in the creation and reception of any kind of text, be it literary or cinematic, "without a general and historic understanding of the role of metapoesis in the broader arena of discourse to which it belongs." Metapoesis in cases like Daneliuc's film can offer "a way out of the 'double mirror' effect of the infinite regression of meaning—*mise en abyme*—celebrated in so many deconstructive treatments of textual self-reflexion."[6] If we take into consideration the possibility of interpreting intertextuality and self-reference in the sense that Finke describes, then we can also explain how *Glissando* was able to divide its audience into two "sides": those who understood its esoteric film language and intertextual play—ultimately, its allegoric message—and those who did not, and therefore considered it merely confusing but not alien to the ruling-party ideology. In this essay I propose to show how Daneliuc's film offers a perfect example of such a communicative function of metapoesis by looking at some concrete aspects of the film's intertextuality and self-referentiality, which functioned not as postmodern *grammatica jocosa* at the time but as a powerful message conveyed to an audience who in times of ideological clichés was starved for complex aesthetic experiences resulting from deciphering complex texts.

the referential and self-referential role of the title

Glissando is a musical term referring to a way of interpretation: it means a glissade of sounds, where two sounds are connected by a rapid scale passage of the intermediate sounds. Within the film it has manifold connotations. As a musical term whose meaning was presumably grasped only by music connoisseurs at the time the film was released in Romania, first of all it suggested a text of fine artistic care (something "musical") and anticipated an adequately cultured reception. Besides music, we find two other motifs that bring into the complex intermedial play of the text two other forms of art: the appearance of books everywhere and the mysterious painting that the protagonist possesses in many variations. It is as if all these arts (music, literature, and painting) were concentrated symbolically around the central character of the film. He is a bookbinder; books are

burned and torn at a certain point in the plot; and people repeatedly read aloud from books or recite texts. A particular painting is a central element of the opening image of the film: the woman portrayed in it will appear later, along with other paintings from supposedly the same painter. In one scene, we see a huge black canvas with the lady of the original painting sitting in front of it with a brush in her hand. The protagonist refuses to sell the paintings. (Music has a minor role in the film compared to these other motifs. The nondiegetic music we hear is barely noticeable; it is used in the conventional way of emphasizing the atmosphere of the different scenes.) It seems that the choice of title allows a more general expansibility of the connotations of music, or musical structure, over the whole filmic text. It suggests a musical type of textual organization in the film and its reception. Throughout the film, the original sense of the term *glissade* comes to be dissociated from music as a specific art form (although occasionally we do hear glissading sounds in the background) and is increasingly associated with a more general meaning of a downward slide—a fall—and decadence. This is true in the literal sense of a gradual decay in existential and ethical values: we are told in the film that things are continually getting worse; we see bleak settings of decaying buildings and old people with sick and withered bodies; the protagonist himself is a pale, melancholic man; some characters steal, others are insane; and so on. It is true in the aesthetic sense of "decadence" (meaning decadent art in general and, more closely, French literary decadence and Symbolism), which appears in the artistic attitude and style evoked in the film through intertextual and intermedial techniques.

intertextuality and intermediality: modeling two types of decadence

The protagonist of the film, Teodorescu, is invited by a friend to spend a few days at his estate in the country. In the first scenes that take place there we see the following: Teodorescu gets up in the morning after a good night's sleep, looks out of the window, and then has breakfast with his friend on the veranda overlooking the garden. He meets the friend's ten-year-old daughter, the governess, and later on his wife. The friend demands that the child recite a poem in French, but she is too shy. They have a game of cards in the garden. Teodorescu and the governess talk about Charles Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine. The wife is holding their younger child in her lap while the girl is watching them. The friend cheats at cards; when the wife scolds him, he turns to the child and repeatedly yells at her, threatening to beat her with his belt if she doesn't recite the poem. Husband and wife begin to quarrel; the baby cries. Teodorescu stands up and runs off in the direction of some ruins, where everything becomes like a nightmare. The girl starts to shout the French poem and nobody can stop her; the friend also recites a poem, but in Romanian, while he is smashing plates

and begins to undress. The wife speaks about dreams; so does Teodorescu. The governess reads a fragment from a critique about Baudelaire, in which he is called immoral and decadent. At the end of these scenes, we see a long take that can be interpreted as a subtle filmic paraphrase of one of Verlaine's most famous poems. All these scenes are in fact centered around two literary texts: the preface to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*) and Verlaine's *Chanson d'automne* (*Autumn Chant*). These are what the characters speak about, what they quote, and what the images imitate in both atmosphere and visual elements. The scenes described above are significant for weaving together in a continuous flow of diegetic events that take place in a contained location—everything happens in the large garden of the friend's country house—different layers of signification that can relate to the key notion of decadence: first we see the examples of decadence in an ethical sense (the rude behavior of the friend), then gradually the images glissade through the quotations from French decadent literature toward the transformation of the screen into a palimpsest-like canvas overwritten with images and words of decadent literature and the colors and forms of art nouveau.

The governess mixes French sentences in her speech; Teodorescu's friend insists that his children learn French and recite French poetry; he has given his child a French name, Amelie; and he is proud that Teodorescu has been to Paris "at least a hundred times." All these elements construct a certain frame of reference, which reveals close connections to a cultural ideal: France. The relationship is ambivalent to say the least, because the reverence of the ideal that appears in the film is not based on understanding or assimilation of essential cultural elements. The connection is superficial: to imitate all things that are French is a snobbish mannerism that signifies a certain social prestige. In this aspect the film presents a characteristic attitude in Romania before the Second World War, an attitude that surreptitiously survived the years of communism—an ideology that could not tolerate a direct admiration of a Western culture—only to be overtly revived after 1989 and the fall of the Ceausescu regime.[7] The governess has never been to Paris; she finds Baudelaire "disgusting" and "immoral." The girl has a strong accent; it is obvious that she does not understand a word of the poem she is reciting—as, indeed, the lines from Baudelaire's preface are not suitable for a child. Teodorescu's friend, the provincial landlord, speaks in a dialect and does not understand French. These linguistic references are complemented by other gestures and acts of the characters, which cannot in the least be considered "cultured" behavior but instead suggest provincialism and moral decadence.

The quotations themselves also reveal the characters' lack of understanding of poetic texts. This is a sort of "parodic trans-contextualization," in which the irony is not directed against the

quoted texts.[8] First we are shown an open book lying on the veranda table. The typographic image of the page indicates that it is a volume of poems. Next to it we see a few cards scattered on the table. The parallel (or, better, the contrast) between a book of poetry and a deck of playing cards is borne out by the fact that Romanian uses the same word (*carte*) to denote both "book" and "card." Playing cards is a symbolic activity that appears many times in the film. Here, the cards put beside the book represent the world in which these characters are really at home, in contrast to the realm of poetry. It also shows that for the proprietors of the mansion the text of the poems is not considered a possible source of aesthetic experience; but just as the book is present in the image as an object, the text remains no more than an object for them. Reciting poems in this household is important only as a gesture, as a speech act legitimizing the social position of the family. So it is not surprising that we can only hear bits and pieces of poems and texts, which are torn out of their context by people who do not understand them.

Connoisseurs, however, can place the texts quoted in the film in the larger context of a literary style that the film also imitates: literary symbolism mixed with art nouveau. All the manifestations of this imitation fall beyond the linguistic layer of the film; the dialogues we hear are not in the least poetic. Literary symbolism is imitated and intermedially transcribed into the acoustic and visual components of the image. What are the characteristics of the images that can be considered as imitations? First of all, there is the way in which they appeal to the complexity of perception. Although film is unable to convey the sense of taste or smell, it can be effective in producing the illusion of being able to do so by employing different techniques. The protagonist finds pleasure in smelling the fruit on the breakfast table or sipping the hot coffee. The sparkling golden honey dripping from the spoon can almost be tasted as we see it in a close-up. We hear the crunching of crisp toast between teeth. Together with the sound effects, the synesthetic quality of the picture is increased. Each scene constructs atmosphere and expresses a feeling, a state of mind rather than a narrative sequence. The film's symbolism resists a purely conceptual decoding.

Symbolism's and art nouveau's preference for the ornate is evident in the carefully chosen settings: the pictures on the veranda are framed by the ornamental iron railing of the veranda; the garden features leafless trees with long, artistically winding branches; and at the end of the scenes described above we are enthralled by enigmatic *l'art pour l'art* views of the castle in ruin. It is autumn, but the camera avoids conventionally striking, bright colors: the whole picture (including costumes, furniture, and various other objects) appears in the fading colors of late October or early November. As a summary of these

elements, at the end of the scenes that take place in the friend's garden, Verlaine's famous opening lines of the *Chanson d'automne* are translated into pictorial language: a thicket of gray branches appears; the protagonist is seen tensely concentrating on the image; then the soft, mournful sound of violins is heard, in sharp contrast with the vulgar noise of a country farm and the quarrel of people heard thus far.

A sort of glissando also characterizes the structure of time and space in the film. The filmic space is continuously expanded in time. Within a single take this is achieved by deep-focus photography, which enlarges the field of vision and consecutively actualizes a foreground, middle ground, and background within the same frame. This also alerts the viewer to the fact that there are hidden meanings to be discovered. Successive scenes exhibit a similar tendency toward spatial expansion: in the scenes mentioned earlier, the camera starts out from an enclosed room; it then takes us to the veranda, which offers a larger view over the surroundings; and the game of cards is set in the garden. The movement continues among some ruins, where the boundaries between human habitation and natural setting fuse. We can see a process in which the concrete, identifiable setting is diffused into a symbolic space that lacks clear dimensions. As in Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, "everything moves towards the unlimited immensity of a unique symbolic universe" and annihilation of time in the form of "dissolutive degradation."[9] In Daneliuc's film we find the same nocturnal type of spatialization as in the trans-contextualized Baudelaire. Through the evolution of the spatial structure, the clear, diurnal orientation is gradually dissolved into the oneiric setting of a chaotic universe. Typical settings, which we can initially identify through costumes and objects as those of a health resort in the Romania of the 1930s, disappear or alternate in a confusing manner. The strangest spatial formation, which appears repeatedly and also marks the film's conclusion, is a combination of a casino, a hospital, and a madhouse—spaces that, in turn, have several possible intertextual connections of their own far beyond the terms of modernist visionary cinema.

Corresponding to the spatial structure of the film, the linearity of the narration is interrupted by memories, dreams, and imaginary scenes to the extent that they become undistinguishable. The digestive nature of the nocturnal scheme is mirrored by the nightmarish image in which intestines are suddenly thrown up by a dark street canal. The film (just like the sequence described earlier) begins in the morning, with the awakening to a new day, but continues with a fantastic vision and ends with death. In between, instead of witnessing the formation of a character, we witness the deconstruction of the protagonist into symbols: he has two alter egos, old man and boy. The dominance of half-subjective shots that present not only a subjective view but also the

character who sees the things shown to us constitute a subjective vision and, eventually, pictures of pure fantasy. However, this technique does not individualize the character but instead demonstrates what Edward Branigan characterizes as the potential of subjective photography to reduce the character to a mere "point of view" as an observer who "stands in for the viewer of a painting or a movie."[10] In this film, the point of view that the protagonist embodies is reduced to a general intellectual attitude with an ethical resonance. It could be defined as the essential human dignity of reflection, the attitude of *cogito ergo sum* expressed in an age that tolerated nothing but blindfolded submissiveness. At the same time, this is why this movie could be received not as a particular story but as a recording of a collective experience.

While contemporary Western European filmmakers such as Peter Greenaway searched for vehicles of artistic self-reflexivity in the aesthetic of the baroque or of popular media, Daneliuc constructed, at one extreme, a reference base out of French decadent literature and modernist filmmaking techniques. At the other extreme, he proceeded systematically to deconstruct and overwrite a textual world all too well known to contemporary viewers. This rewritten or erased "text" of official genre movies and ideological clichés lies as a hidden canvas behind Daneliuc's own cinematic images and is responsible for the film's exceptional emotional-intellectual impact. Ultimately, referentiality (the film's "transparence" in the direction of contemporary reality) and self-reflexivity become intermingled in a unique way in this film. (Reflexivity means the aspect of the film that sends us in the cognitive process of deciphering meanings toward other parts of the film where similar elements appear, and also toward other texts—in this case, other films and literary works. This aspect is reinforced by choosing a central character whose main activity is to observe things throughout the film.) How can these two seemingly opposite tendencies be united? Metaphorically speaking, how can we see through a window (refer to reality) by being focused all the time on the texture of the windowpane (reflect on the medium itself)?

In a certain historic context (the darkest years of Ceausescu's Romania), though, this is exactly what happened; and this is what proves Finke to be right about positing a communicational function of reflexivity: the expression of the need for reflection and the repeated thematization of the act of reflection itself, the imprints of certain explicit, hidden, or erased intertexts have the power of becoming authentic traces of reality, of a certain period. In the 1980s people were alert to hidden messages in artistic texts, and the complexity of Daneliuc's allegory stood out as a huge contrast to easily accessible films of party propaganda. The entire film could be interpreted as a

giant, metaphorical wipe-cut, which cleaned the cinema screen of all the lies that filled it earlier. What it referred to on a concrete level was far from people's everyday reality; still, the more the film glissaded into symbolic and intertextual/intermedial dimensions the closer it got to becoming an accurate portrayal of not what Romania looked like at the time, but what Romanians felt and what they thought about.

the world of an "original democracy" and a glissando into the grotesque

In the films that Daneliuc made after 1989, the allegorical representation persists, but some of its cryptic characteristics have disappeared. Perhaps his most representative work from this period is *Patul conjugal* (*The Conjugal Bed*, 1991), a black comedy with shockingly grotesque elements. The main theme is the same as in *Glissando*: the decadence of human values, the panorama of a moral and cultural junkyard. The conclusion is also similar: one can only gamble, go insane, or commit suicide in such a world. The title is symbolic: what should be the emblem of human tenderness, love, and communication becomes a rented place for shooting amateur porn films, pornography becoming the underlying metaphor of the film. Just as the more vulgar concept of pornography replaces the sophisticated allusion of the musical term *glissando*, the allusions to artistic experiences also disappear. The film abounds in representations of concrete places and lively everyday situations of a Romania in transition from communism to capitalism. The only book that we see in the film is *The Future of Romania*, one that appeared in Ceausescu's times to honor the communist dictator, only to become a much-valued marketable asset in the years following the fall of the communist regime. Self-referential elements are still present, however, mainly around the motif of a movie theater, where the protagonist, Potop Vasile (Vasile "Deluge," played by Gheorghe Dinica) works, but which soon becomes the headquarters of a new party called the Party of Original Democracy.

While in *Glissando* the official Communist Party propaganda films formed an "erased" textual surface over which the film projected its haunting images, here it is exactly the opposite: the new ideological texts (the demagogy of obscure little parties that appear like mushrooms after a summer rain) are out in the open, parodied in all their absurdity. The absence of artistic texts, such as those seen in *Glissando* (those of Baudelaire and Verlaine), forms a new background against which an even more sinister human comedy, a macabre allegory of ethical and artistic prostitution, is played out.

The characters of *Patul conjugal* and of later films such as *Aceasta lemahite* (*Fed Up*, 1994) or *Senatorul melcilor* (*The Senator of Snails*, 1995) are not interested in Europe as a cultural concept. All they care about is European

currencies—while their business ambitions continue to drive them toward Turkey. "What child can be born in such a brave new world?" Daneliuc seems repeatedly to ask in these films; or, implicitly, "What can the future hold for a country that is burdened with such a past and cursed with such a present?" In *Patul conjugal* we have a mentally defective child who survived his mother's desperate attempts at abortion and his father's attempt to cut up the mother's womb with a knife. In *Aceasta lemahite* we have a pregnant mother who lies half dead in a coma throughout the film but sees everything that goes on around her. So instead of an Orwellian modeling of abstract ideas, we witness a renewal of Caragiale's spirit of vitriolic comedy, only with even darker and more grotesque tones. It is not merely human dignity and decency that is absent from the world that Daneliuc's films denounce, but beauty itself: reality is continually working against aesthetic experience,[11] and art remains outside the limits of the space in which these characters are set in to struggle for survival.

Daneliuc himself was an outsider in the Ceausescu era; although, paradoxically, he had a privileged position among intellectuals: beside Lucian Pintilie, he was the topmost auteur of the time. Today, while those who were shamelessly subservient to Ceausescu's regime are now busily forging themselves new political careers,[12] Daneliuc is still an outsider. Given a context in which filmmaking in Romania is becoming increasingly commercial,[13] he continues to address the most painful issues and ridicule them in an uncompromising way. On the one hand, he can be considered as a pioneer, whose footsteps have been followed by a number of young filmmakers who make satires of contemporary life, though in a slightly lighter tone. On the other hand, however, his relentless criticism has also sidetracked him in a cinematic world that is steered more and more toward popular forms of entertainment. Not surprisingly, although he still continues to make films, we find him searching for new forms of expression not in film, but in the medium that he always admired: literature. The title of one of his latest novels, *Strigoi fara tara* (*Homeless Ghosts*, or *Ghosts without a Country*), is revealing in this sense. As an artist, no matter whether he makes his film complex as a palimpsest or writes with the keen eye of a filmmaker, Daneliuc is still concerned with the universal and eternal ghosts of Romanian existence—ghosts that have not disappeared with the changes in political forms but are here to stay and haunt us. His art is still in essence based on themes of moral decadence and a style dominated by bitter self-criticism mixed with genuine cultural nostalgia for art forms that are as complex and cathartic as those quoted in *Glissando*; for, according to Daneliuc, despite all the visible changes, the unique forms of Romanian decadence persist: the glissando, which he loves and hates, continues.

notes

1. The film was shot earlier, but censorship delayed its release until 1984.
2. Daneliuc's filmography includes many films with allegorical titles: *Cursa* (*The Race*, 1975), *Editie speciala* (*Special Edition*, 1977), *Proba de microfon* (*Microphone Test*, 1980; an unusually realistic representation of the making of communist television reportage), *Vanatoarea de lupi* (*Foxhunting*, 1980), *Croaziera* (*The Cruise*, 1981), *Glissando* (1984), *Iacob* (*Jacob*, 1988), *A 11-a porunca* (*The Eleventh Commandment*, 1991), *Tusea si junghiul* (*The Toothless War*, 1992), *Patul conjugal* (*The Conjugal Bed*, 1993), *Aceasta lemahite* (*Fed Up*, 1994), *Senatorul melcilor* (*The Senator of Snails*, 1995), and *Ambasadori, cautam patrie* (*Ambassadors Seek Country*, 2003). The director's current project is titled *Sistemul nervos* (*The Nervous System*).
3. Not surprisingly, another great film made in the last years of the Causescu era, Lucian Pintilie's adaptation of one of Caragiale's plays (*Why Are They Sounding the Bells, Mitica?*), could not even be seen by the general public before 1989.
4. The stylistic techniques of intertextuality have a delinearizing effect, as the reception must always switch from the present text to a "memorial metatext"; see Michael Riffaterre, *Essais du stilistique structurale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), 170. Or, in the case of direct (marked) quotations, the switch is from the text to the implanted fragment, and back again.
5. Michael C. Finke, *Metapoesis: The Russian Tradition from Pushkin to Chekhov* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 168.
6. Ibid., xii.
7. Several of Daneliuc's later films examine this aspect of Romanian culture, only this time through the techniques of satire. For instance, *Patul conjugal* (*The Conjugal Bed*, 1991) ends with a bitter prophecy: by the turn of the millennium, French will be spoken on national television and people will live in great misery and moral decay.
8. Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 8.
9. Antonio Garcia-Berrio, *A Theory of the Literary Text* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), 400.
10. Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), 6.
11. It is not an artistic film but a porn movie that they are shooting in Potop Vasile's small bedroom.
12. For instance, they become senators, as did Sergiu Nicolaescu, the chief propaganda filmmaker for communist Romania.
13. Film studios outside Bucharest offer cheap labor and breathtaking Carpathian locations nearby for American superproductions that are increasingly shot here. Film magazines in Romania nowadays are filled with day-to-day reports about Hollywood megastars working in Romanian studios.

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part three

regional visions

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twelve

reframing europe's double border

kriss ravetto-biagioli

Over time, the maps of Europe have borne their own marks of anxiety—shifts in power imprinted in expanding and contracting lines, metamorphoses in contour and border, sudden appearances and erasures of named space. But the figure of Europa seems to stand, irrespective of the map's vicissitudes. What it stands for is far less graspable than these ruined maps make it out to be. The figure itself harks back to Greek mythology. According to some, she is one of Zeus's many lovers; for others, she is one of his many rape victims, abducted from Tyro and transported west across the Mediterranean to Crete. But the origin or reason for the modern appellation is murky: it is unclear when and who named the continent of Europe after Europa, or whether this Europa originally referred to the Phoenician princess or the river nymph (the daughter of Oceanus and the sister of Asia and Libya). Herodotus calls attention to the ambiguity behind this act of naming: in *Histories* (4.45) he asks why the Ancient world is divided into three equal yet uncharted continents each named after a mythological woman—Europe, Asia and

Figure 12.1
The Greek two-Euro coin depicting Europa riding the bull.

Libya (Africa?). Just as the political, social, and cultural reasons for dividing these continents from each other are uncertain, so are the territorial and cultural boundaries of Europe. Herodotus continues, noting that Europa "evidently belongs to Asia and did not come to this land which is now called by the Hellenes Europe."

How did the Asian (Oriental) woman who was rapt, enraptured, or just raped by the Greek father of the gods come to symbolize not only his exclusive homeland and civilization as identified in opposition to her own, but also to define the history, culture, and identity of all those post-1800 Philhellenes who claim to be the progeny of the Ancient Greeks? While over time the figure has become more identified with the concept of civilization than territorial or sexual politics, it becomes less clear whether Europa has domesticated the bull or whether it has domesticated her—it is not clear just who is riding whom. At the same time, the myth seems to lose its own internal ethnic antagonism, and stands united (Europa and the bull) against growing identity threats: Islam and Europe's others (mainly colonial and internal minority populations). Federico Chabod and Denys Hay contend that the modern idea of Europe seems to have been initiated in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, precisely in opposition to Islam. They argue that the myth of Europe as a unified political entity emerged as the hopes of a universal Christendom had to be abandoned.[1] The "modern" configuration of Europe marks a shift in the means of self-definition as set on the negation of its (non-European) borders. This division between what is European and non-European recalls the dilemma presented by Herodotus: How are these borders drawn when the very

definition of the border requires the other (non-European) to negate itself as other and stand in for what is European?

The rise of the image of Europe as a political entity coincided with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 to the Ottoman Turks, and their suzerainty over Asia Minor (the birthplace of Europa), Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Dalmatia, Wallachia, the Khanate Crimea and, later, a large part of Hungary. Larry Wolff points out that "Eastern Europe appeared as a sea where shifting borders moved with the raising and ebbing tides. These were lands that ultimately evaded the competing claims of Europe and the Orient, lands that neither encyclopedist nor geographer could locate with fixed certainty."[2] Although the territories that comprise(d) the Balkans also have fluctuated in accordance with numerous military actions and interventions, they came to represent the military front between the territories of the Western and Eastern empires. The exclusion of the Baltic Republics, the Czech Republic, Poland, Russia, and sometimes even the German states could not be determined on a territorial basis alone: "Eastern Europe" was invented by Western Europeans as an abstract concept (as a negative image of the West) in order to separate the barbarous East from the civilized West. According to Enlightenment thought, the West was divided from the East on the basis of reason, democracy, civilization, and good manners. It was this modern incarnation of Europe that exported itself via colonialism, wars, and various regional interventions, promoting where it could nation-states (and nationalism) to those spaces just off the map (but not out of its sphere of influence) that were and are in "need" of development and capital investment. At the same time that the Cold War put a halt to Europe's eastward expansion (with the exception of that in Greece) it gave credence to a new division between the "evil empire" (including its "captive nations") and the Western "free world."

Yet the demise of the second world order, "the revolutions of 1989–91," and the recent expansion of the European Union (EU) to include Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia have resulted not only in the reshaping of Europe's borders but in the rebirth of multiple contradictory ideas about the cultural identity of Europe itself. There have been many debates over what caused the demise of the Soviet-styled second world order of controlled economies and state-owned means of production, but Eastern politicians, journalists, and scholars—like their Western counterparts—have been quick to declare the "revolutions of 1989" as an ideological victory for "democracy," and of course an economic victory for capitalism. At the same time that this revelry of speculations on future economic prosperity, political pluralism, open borders, and felled idols, walls, and iron curtains produced a flood of

neoutopian discourses on globalism, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism, this triumphal rhetoric has become the dominant discourse behind all the world's power relations. The triumph of neoliberal "democratic" over socialist collective values amounted to the conflation of capitalistic values with those of politics and morality.

This "revolution" was not manifested as a demand for a new social order—the "third way" or "Eurocommunism," as articulated by dissent groups such as the Workers Defense Committee in Poland, or Chapter 77 in Czechoslovakia—but as the resurgence of nation-states and the reintegration of this "other Europe" into the democratic (capitalist) world of private property, free elections, freedom of religion, and a constitutional government. The collapse of state socialism generated an enormous amount of historical revisionism; images of democracy and nationalism lying dormant through the Cold War have resulted in the collective forgetting of history, which not only erases the accommodation and collaboration with the former Soviet regime but also, as in the Soviet regime's practices of the past, revises current national identity by removing monuments, names, and events from public space and official history. As Barbara Einhorn argues, nationalist self-identification offers a convenient legitimization for this collective erasure and forgetting because "it defines the former Soviet Union as the quintessential Other, and state socialism as a foreign system imposed from outside."[3]

Since the fall of Soviet-styled socialism there has been an explosion of discourses about nationalism and nostalgia. Many critics have pointed out that nostalgia signifies a longing (*algia*) to "return" home (*nostos*). The construction of a homeland, driven by longing, in turn can conveniently be used as a means of legitimizing the "emerging" nation-state after the age of (Ottoman, Russian, Austro-Hungarian) empire and the Cold World order. This "return" to the nation-state, however, as Benedict Anderson and Stathis Gourgouris argue, is more a product of imagination and dreams than an historical fact, since it involves more forgetting the recent past (and even present) than recollecting a more distant history.

The resurfacing of such terms as *Eastern Europe*, *Central Europe*, *Mitteleuropa*, and *the Balkans* to demarcate the economic, ideological, and physical borders of Europe attests to what Etienne Balibar calls "the hierarchal vision of European history."[4] Balibar sees the identification of what Donald Rumsfeld has called the "New Europe" as a double exclusion: on the one hand, the identification with this "phantom or illusory Europe" requires that new European states push the border of Europe farther east, to exclude the likes of Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Albania, and on the other hand it requires that these states ask to be "Europeanized" (candidates for the EU), to recognize themselves as "emerging democracies," which requires that they (re)turn to the historical form

and political practice of the nation-state. By placing themselves within the hierarchy of European history, fifteen years after the revolutions of 1989, these states have regressed over a hundred years. This slide down the scale of history returns "Central and Eastern Europe" to the position of the other Europe that must police its own borders and stand as the limit, both inside (of the borders) and outside of what it means to be European. These new European states are called on to contain those lands to the east that are not only less European—more "tribal" or "barbaric"—but also "powder kegs" and "hotbeds" of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and extreme masculinism, which threaten to spill over or seep through what are considered to be porous borders.

In this essay I examine the complex relationship of Europe to what Balibar calls its double borders. For Balibar this double border is not only the revised division of East and West—which constitutes an East within the West—but also the border of citizenship in these newly formed states as well as Europe itself. Accordingly, I will examine the division of external and internal borders of Europe by focusing on two films, Theodoros Angelopoulos's *O Megalexandros* (1980) and Aleksandr Sokurov's *Russkij kovcheg* (*Russian Ark,* 2003), from countries on the border of Europe. I argue that these films challenge the logic by which Russia is placed as external and Greece as internal to Europe, and the logic by which Greeks and Russians come to identify themselves as European. The process of imposed Europeanization serves to further divide the all-too-visible Russian aristocracy from the invisible Russian people, the "modern" Greeks from the ancient Greeks (who belong less to Greece than to Western Europe), but also from the Turks, Slavs, and Vlachs.

O Megalexandros and *Russkij kovcheg* examine the identity and national politics that emerge from such desirous orientations toward Europe. Yet, rather than represent this unrequited adulation of the figure of Europe on the part of the liminal or non-Europeans, these films reveal the instability of geographic, historical, and cultural points of reference. This does not mean that they place the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Greece, and Russia in the proverbial backwater, at the crossroads between Europe and Asia (or the Orient); instead, by looking toward Europe they examine the (self-)placement of the "East" in Europe's master narratives wherein "Easterners" must struggle for national and ethnic identities that conform to notions of European statehood and culture. A central issue in both films is the questioning of the construction of a homeland. Yet, both of these films demonstrate how nostalgia for an imaginary past often produces various forms of erasure at the same time that it configures national myths of origin. They represent history not as fact but as a poetic construction, which has drifted in and out of Europe via metaphor, allusion, and myth. I treat these films

as examples of poetic thinking; that is, they are able to "unthink" the logic of positionality that gives voice to institutions such as the EU, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the nation-state, conventions such as national or ethnic identities, and self-righteous discourses—whether Enlightenment thought about the Kantian universal civilized man (or the "raw man") or the crude moralism of the "new world order." These films offer an example such of "unthinking."

performing russia in the museum of europe

Russkij kovcheg begins with complete darkness. Then, suddenly, a voice (Sokurov's own) emerges out of the darkness and, almost as if in an internal monologue, it seeks to orient itself: "I open my eyes and I see nothing, I remember only that there was some calamity . . . but I just can't remember what happened to me." This lost soul seems to have strayed from the course of time. There is no beginning or ending to this film; only an unexpected immersion in what appears to be the simultaneous presence of various layers of the past. The images that suddenly appear out of nowhere before this offscreen persona are fleeting and sporadic "re-collections" of historical scenes, interactions, and performances that are anachronistically joined into one spectacular, continuous (unedited) shot. Though time is certainly out of joint, this persona will remain estranged from the "action" of the film.

As the voice (and the camera) follows a group of eighteenth-century officers and ladies in through the back entrance of the Hermitage, it remarks, "Can it be that I am invisible, or have simply gone unnoticed?" The fact that there is no identifying shot leaves the identity behind the persona of the voice ambiguous; it could be the voice of the museum itself that witnesses history and the various Russian figures that float through its halls; the gaze of the camera that records and frames its own image of history, architecture, and artifacts; or the specter of an uncertain and indeterminate Russian present that haunts the halls of its monumental past. Yet this past is exclusive, limited not only to the space of the Hermitage and the Winter Palace (the main residence of the czars), but also to the epoch of Petrine reforms—from the time of Peter the Great to Czar Nicholas II.

The deliberate omission of references to the Bolshevik Revolution replicates not only the long history of forced forgetting conducted by the Soviet state, but also draws attention to the current erasure of names; the Soviet Union has disintegrated into various nation-states and Leningrad has become Saint Petersburg once again. The replacement of names with exclusively nationalist ones turns the memory of lived experience into the politics of memory. Although construed as a "national liberation," as Anatoly Khazanov argues, the break with the Soviet past has produced not one debate but many different ideologized

interpretations of history, many of which have been accompanied by the desire to associate with the Russian imperial past.[5] The obsession in the 1990s with finding the remains of Czar Nicholas II and his family, their interment in a proper site of resting, and the possible canonization of the murdered Romanovs by the Russian Orthodox Church represents the impossible dream of returning Russia to its past greatness under the Czars. But this discourse also establishes the Romanovs as the martyred victims of the Red Terror, cleansing them of their own terrible acts. As Gourgouris argues, nostalgia for the patria or the lost nation is always utopian and always impossible: "The Nation is both museum site and ground of oblivion . . . where repression and the return of the repressed take place simultaneously."[6]

Russkij kovcheg recycles these self-constructed (and re-collected) dream images of the Czars who fancied themselves reformers, modernizers, and Westernizers, who transformed Russia into one of the great (European) powers. While *Russkij kovcheg* treats the past (costumes, gestures, music, historical reenactments, etc.) with meticulous detail, it mimics the historically revised image of Imperial Russia, never once following those serfs who paid the high price of the czars' "enlightened" lifestyle. As Stanley Kauffman writes, "except for the few modern visitors everyone in the film is in the social range from gentry up to royalty." If this is really a *Russian* ark, he asks, "Where is there even a hint of Russia's entirety?"[7] Maybe this is why the offscreen voice—which represents and defends Russia—is invisible.

As *Russkij kovcheg* participates in mass amnesia—treating the Bolshevik Revolution as both a rupture with and an interruption of Russian history—it draws attention to the problems caused by such erasures and desperate attempts to scour the national archives (or treasures) in order to salvage or reinvent some form of legitimacy. Yet, just what type of continuity does this single uninterrupted gaze establish? If this continuity is just a dream, to whom does this dream belong? Although the ark is called *Russkij* (of the people), Sokurov's film demonstrates how the contents of the ark (both the priceless objects and the live pageantry) belong to another ark, that of the *Rossiikij* (the name of the great empire), which orients itself toward Europe.[8] Dragan Kujundzic points out that "the dramatic tension of the film pertains to the question of identification (and the Russian national identity) that lies in the fact that the space of commemoration relies also on artifacts that have nothing to do with Russia, but are entirely imported from the West, and thus, structurally from outside of this site of memory."[9]

In fact, the film reminds us that Saint Petersburg itself was built as a Russian dream of Europe: Peter the Great moved the capital of Russia from Moscow to Saint Petersburg, built a European-style city on a swamp, and collected artifacts, ideas, institutions, intellectuals and

Figure 12.2

The figure of Europe (or Custine) comments on how the Russians are such marvelous copiers of European art.

artisans from Europe so as to aggressively Westernize Russia. While Saint Petersburg (particularly the Hermitage) in its naissance was already a museum of the "old European masters," it was (as Sokurov suggests) an imagined city, the czars' untimely dream of Italy or Europe, which was not designed to copy Europe as much as it was to extend the borders of the map of Europe from the Elbe and the Julian Alps to the Ural Mountains. As the narrator tells us, "the Czars were mostly Russophiles, but sometimes they dreamed of Italy."

It is not until the invisible speaker encounters a kindred spirit who appears to be just as lost and disoriented that he seems to establish a point of reference. But this anchoring comes in the form of a tenuous, if not antagonistic, dialogue between the invisible persona and the onscreen stranger, whom this persona calls "Europe." He is later identified as the Marquis Astolphe de Custine—a French diplomat to Russia, who wrote a critical travelogue, *La Russie en 1839* (*Russia in 1839*). Although the figure of Custine (played by Sergei Donstav) bears certain resemblances to the historical figure—he is both awestruck at the opulence and beauty of the czars' possessions, but still offers acerbic criticism of them—he is more a composite (Russian) figure of Europe than an accurate depiction of Custine.[10]

It is in contrast to Europe (i.e., Custine) that the persona becomes identified as Russian. While the character "Europe" calls the invisible speaker his "Russian cicerone," it is "Europe" who will "guide" Russia

through the theater or dream of the imperial past, constructing his own version of history. Wolff demonstrates how the construction of "Eastern Europe" as a category by representatives of the "Western Enlightenment" (in this case a French monarchist) secured both Europe's own myth of Europe as the paradigm of progress and humanity and the myth of the non-European as backward and boorish. For Custine, Russia is the other against which Europe will define itself. Not only are Russians reduced to "talented copyists, because they don't have ideas of their own," but Russia (like the Balkans and Greece) are placed off Europe's map. Custine responds to the Russian narrator's awe at seeing Peter the Great by remarking, "In Asia tyrants are adored. The more terrible the tyrant the more cherished is his memory; Alexander the Great, Timur, and your Peter the Great."

The invisible persona is put in a position of defending Russians and Russian culture, but he also repeats Custine's statements, almost like an echo resounding from the walls of these huge rooms. Instead of simply confronting European criticisms of the "East," the film shows how Russians' mimicking and collecting the various artwork of Europe is read by "Europe" as a slavish act of deference. By allowing the European stranger to assume a superior position, the Russian speaker subtly undermines it, showing that Europe's identity is also an imaginary construction that is contingent on its others. Ironically, it is the Hermitage that houses and preserves the various dreams, memories, and histories of Europe.

The film seems to relegate Russia to a series of live performances (history, theater, music, and court rituals) and Europe to a collection of artifacts (paintings, sculptures, architecture, and artistic styles). The dialogue between the figures of Europe and Russia—and their journey through the time and space of the Hermitage—question such clear divisions, making the European's insistence on superiority look ridiculous (especially in contrast to the post-Soviet visitors whom the European encounters). Sokurov pokes fun at Custine, who seems to see his reflection everywhere—"Empire style everywhere"—and whose keen sense of smell does not go beyond the paint of the various European "Old Masters" he sniffs, and the odors that his own body exudes. Yet here he mistakes, or projects, his own stench (formaldehyde) onto (living) others. The film, however, does not clarify who is right: is it the present that stinks of death (merely preserving itself on past glory) as the historical figure of the past thinks, or is it the burden of history that reeks of death and oppresses the modern patrons? The film constantly reminds us that Custine bridges this "live" performance of an untimely history to this haunting presence of those outside of time and geopolitical space.

After observing Czar Nicholas II having an intimate meal with his family, the invisible speaker loses sight of his European accomplice,

who has become increasingly more embroiled in the spectacle of the past and less engaged in the antagonistic dialogue with the invisible Russian speaker. As he approaches Europe for the last time he remarks, "I lost you," and then, "I have lost you?" as if to indicate that not only is he lost, but so is this era of opulence, splendor, and power. When he suggests to Europe, "Let's go . . . forward," his European companion, visibly saddened, responds by asking, "What will we find there?" The future, to which the Russian speaker refers, is not the Russian Revolution, but an unknown future beyond the Soviet era.

Rather than remaining with Europe like an artifact fixed within a historical frame, he follows the moving spectacle down the stairs; but he flows between and beyond them, pouring out a window onto the desolate waters of the River Neva. It is here, over the water, that he reflects, "Too bad you are not here with me; you would understand everything; look, the sea is all around and we are destined to sail forever . . . to live forever." While the film closes with another nebulous image—the darkened winter sky of Petersburg over the frozen waters of the Neva, which appears to be breathing—it recalls these anonymous "eternal people" who seem to sail undetected between the borders of Asia and Europe, including "old" and "new" Europe, the latter of which has expanded into what used to be the Soviet sphere of influence, within the borders of someone else's dreams of an unforeseeable future and an impossible past, between the secularism of Enlightenment thought and the (re)turn of religion, lost somewhere in the exchange of ideology for international currency. Sokurov seems to be unwilling to identify these floating people as much as to anchor them on one bank or the other. What he does emphasize is the rift between the aesthetics of Russia's monumental idols, history, and politics of empire and the murky, imageless (if not invisible), eternal people upon whom all these spectacular images drift.

mythologies falling in and out of the dream

Like *Russkij kovcheg*, *O Megalexandros* breaks cinematic conventions. Both Sokurov and Angelopoulos are masters of the long take, seamlessly joining various time periods, myths, and historical and current events within single shots. The pacing of *O Megalexandros* is slow, circular, and distanced, forcing the audience to direct its own gaze and contemplate a series of long-take shots. It opens with a shot of an anonymous Greek speaker in an unidentifiable location, who turns to look at, walk toward, and directly address the camera. He begins an oral narrative about the epic hero Megalexandros—a composite of various historical and mythic figures—that serves as a frame for the film: "In the years of old when they came to conquer our lands, Alexandros, who came from 'Ellous,' a race of warriors who governed the mountains, assembled his Macedonians

and chased the foreigners out. Afterward he moved to the heart of Asia vanquishing and liberating nations and languages. One evening as he watched the sun setting on the great river, sadness overtook him. That night he left his companions and set out, alone, searching for the end of the world."

While the narration orients the film within a familiar narrative trope—a conquest by a foreign power that leads to the heroic resistance, and the defeat of that power—it does not identify who these ancestors are. They could be Ancient Hellenes, Byzantines, Orthodox Christians within the Ottoman Empire, or the Greek Diaspora populations of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor. Nor does this narration specify to which conquest it refers; it could be the conquest of the Hellenes by the Persians or the Romans, the medieval Eastern (Roman) Empire by the Serbian czars or Bulgarian kings, the conquering of the people of the "Balkan" peninsula and Asia Minor by the Byzantine Empire or by the Ottoman Turks, the imposition of foreign kings (Bavarian and Danish) on the Greek throne newly invented by the Great Powers (Britain, France, and Russia), the invasion of Greece by Italian fascists or German Nazis, the "liberation" of Greece by the Allies, and the continued "presence" of the Americans in order to "contain communism" under the Marshall Plan.

The framing of the film within this epic mode of narration, as told by a contemporary speaker not in classical but in demotic Greek, only serves further to confound the boundaries between myth and current history. The film that follows is about the fifteenth-century mythic figure Megalexandros, who is claimed to be a political prisoner who escapes incarceration to mastermind the so-called Dilessi Affair—the kidnapping of a group of British nobles touring Greece for a ransom and political immunity—in 1870. The handling of this event by Greek officials is botched, as was the actual event, leading to the death of the British nobles and the collapse of the (British-supported) Greek government. In the film, however, this event has been rewritten in terms of revolutionary politics (antiinterventionism, anticapitalism, and anarchocommunism).

Although the legend of Megalexandros originated sometime shortly after the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, Angelopoulos intersects it with that of Megas Alexandros (Alexander the Great), Digenes Akrites (a legendary figure from the ninth to eleventh centuries, who fought Eastern invaders but who was himself of double genos Greek and Arab), of the Klefts (bands of thieves who defied Ottoman rule in the Balkans, and who comprised the irregular forces in the 1821–29 Greek war of Independence), and of the partisans (who fought first against Italians and then Nazis in World War II, and then the British and Americans in the Greek civil war of 1944–49).

Figure 12.3

Megalexandros and his men posing as St. George and the troubadours before a crowd of tourists.

Megalexandros is also a visually composite figure. He first appears in a setting reminiscent of a romantic painting or a romanticized performance of an ancient drama: he walks into the center of a spotlighted circle wearing an ancient headdress and traditional folk dress, donning a sword, mounting a white horse (like St. George and troubadours in Christian iconography), and carrying a rifle as would a brigand, Kleft, or a partisan. As Michael Herzfeld argues, the interconnections of figures like Megas Alexandros, Digenes Akrites, Megalexandros, and the Klefts provided nineteenth- and twentieth-century neo-Hellenists with an allegorical historical continuity stretching from the ancient Hellenic to the Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern Greek world. These various figures comprise what neo-Hellenists read as a "national epic," allowing them to argue for the continuity of Hellenic national consciousness as a resistance to the imposition of various forms of non-Hellenic culture—Byzantine, Christian, Ottoman, Saracen, or Slavic.[11] Yet this continuity was designed not only to tie the modern Greeks to the Ancient Hellenes, but also to link the modern Greeks to the Europeans who claimed the Ancient Greeks as their forefathers.

The irony of choosing these figures as the crux of a chronologically and ethnically contained entity—whether a Greek ethnos, or a Greek national consciousness—is that they are all border figures of

mixed genesis. They embody ambiguities, contradictions, and a certain lawlessness, as well as multiple cultural, genealogical, and linguistic contaminations. Instead, Angelopoulos asks us to think about how such volatile figures could be made to represent any form of continuity. This is not only a question of "bringing the border to the center" of European national identity (as Balibar argues), but of challenging the exclusive logic that configures neo-Hellenic (Greek), Eastern European, Balkan, and European identities.

The abrupt cut from the establishing shot of the Greek speaker to the exterior shot of the old parliament building in Athens visualizes this bringing the border to the center—the bringing of Athens (reduced to a village under the Byzantines and the Ottomans) to the center of the Hellenes by making it the capital of Greece. But it also reflects the bringing of "Europe" to the center of Greece. The building is a monument of (and to) the strange relationship that Greece has to Europe. Neoclassical in style, it was commissioned by King Ludwig of Bavaria to the German architect Friedrich von Gärtner as the royal palace for his son, Otto, installed on the recently established "Greek" throne by the "Three Protecting Powers." While the building embodies European dreams about classical Hellenes through its neoclassical aesthetics and the importation of these dreams (back) to Athens, it reveals the contradictions between the (re)importing of dreams of democracy and heroic splendor and the practice of remaking Greece into what Gourgouris calls a European dream nation, one that is decidedly less modern (civilized) and ethnically homogeneous than Europe's idea of itself.

Angelopoulos uses the image of this palace as a facade for the internal politics of the nation-state. In the subsequent shots of a New Year's Eve ball inside the palace we see the representatives of the Europeanized Greek government and the "protectorate powers" dancing to the "Blue Danube." Yet, the first exchange between the Greek officials and the British nobles attests to the awkward relationship between Philhellenic "Europe" and Neo-Hellenist "Greece." As a greeting to the Greek officials, Lord Lancaster recites the opening lines of Plato's *Crito* in ancient Greek. Confronted by the puzzled response of the two Greek officials the people in the entourage laugh, "they don't understand a word he said." If the ancient Hellenic world is seen as the cradle of European civilization, then who are its rightful inheritors—those who are ethnically Greek, or those who preserve the knowledge and culture of the Ancient Hellenes? The British nobles who speak ancient Greek consider themselves Philhellenes preserving the classical tradition (in which they were educated up until the reforms of 1870 in Britain). They dream of reexperiencing not only ancient Greece but also Lord Byron's romanticized dreams of Greece. On the other hand, the

Greek government—which imported neo-Hellenism back to Greece via diaspora Greeks educated in Europe—appears as inauthentic and collaborationist, limiting the role of modern Greeks to tour guides of the ruins of "their" ancient culture. In *Megalexandros* both European Philhellenism and Greek neo-Hellenism are presented as equally inauthentic attempts to secondhandedly recapture and reexperience ancient glories, as well as foster notions of national and ethnic purity.

As Lord Lancaster's recital of the *Crito* is a gesture of reverence for the Hellenes (suggesting that he is opening up a dialogue between Europe and Greece), it is also an expression of self-empowerment. By assuming the role of Socrates, Lancaster takes the position of knowing superiority to expose the falseness of his interlocutors' preconceived ideas in order to realize the truth of Socrates's (or Lancaster's or Britain's) ideological worldview. While a geopolitical reading of this scene would suggest that Lancaster has seized the superior position of the educator who degrades the Greeks' preconceived truths so as to affirm his own ideological truths, Angelopoulos presents alternative readings by recalling the dialogue's Socratic irony. The invocation to the *Crito*—a dialogue about Crito's misunderstanding of the nature of freedom and the imprisonment of the soul—draws attention to the themes of misunderstanding and the ramifications of freedom. By intercutting this encounter at the New Year's Eve ball with Megalexandros's escape from a political prison, Angelopoulos points to a double misunderstanding. On the one hand, the Greeks do not understand the very language and culture that they claim to represent; on the other, the British do not understand the implications of the dialogue they have chosen to engage in. Not only will the British become actual prisoners of Megalexandros and his men; they are also already metaphysically imprisoned in the dream of Ancient Greece—a dream in which Megalexandros is one of their heroes.

It is at Cape Sounion that Megalexandros literally emerges from the ragged cliffs below the temple of Poseidon. He arrives on cue, entering on a white horse just as Lord Lancaster who, sticking to his Philhellenic performance, recites the first straemon of the chorus to Sophocles's *Antigone*:

Speeding upon their headlong homeward course
Far quicker than they came the Argive force;
Putting to flight. . . ."

This reference opens up another set of themes: the foreshadowing of the death of Megalexandros, who comes to the aid of rebels robbed of their land by the Greek government on behalf of European investors; the struggle between local and state authority (between traditional

and modern allegiances); the struggle of brother against brother; and the betrayal of Greeks by Greeks. Although it is Megalexandros who appears to be on a "homeward course" (heading back to the mountains where he is from), "putting to flight" the European robber barons and defending the border lands against "the proud invaders," he also appears as himself an invader who takes as hostage not just the British nobles but his own people.

Megalexandros and his men clearly stand in opposition to the people of the village to which he belongs. While he was in jail, the village had become a revolutionary commune forbidding private property, advocating communal labor and equal rights for women. This egalitarian society now embraces a group of Italian anarchists seeking asylum, just as it accepts Megalexandros and his men. Although a revolutionary, Megalexandros represents patriarchal rule. His men lament the fact that they have to "beg for their women, their food and their land." They demand the return to individual property and to their "rightful" superiority over women and foreigners. In contrast to the villagers who celebrate the arrival of the Italian anarchists, Megalexandros's men enter the celebration dressed in black robes and carrying rifles. The joyous music and dance of the Italians—which brings together man and woman, Greek, Macedonian (possibly Slav, Vlach) and Italian—is juxtaposed to the sullen (almost dirgelike) music and warrior dance of Megalexandros's men. They dance only with each other to the rhythm of stomping feet, which crescendos in their insolent raising of rifles over their heads. These alleged defenders of men seem to be less concerned with securing and defending the laws of the community than with imposing their own draconian laws of honor, order, and an authority that is politically, sexually, and ethnically exclusive.

As Dan Georgakas notes, *O Megalexandros* was unpopular with both the Right and the Left. The right attacked it because of its radical political implications, while the left reacted to the fact that "at the very moment when the Greek people had finally won the right to honor the Resistance fighters of WWII as heroes, Angelopoulos seemed to be resurrecting charges of leftist cruelty."[12] Instead, Georgakas points out, the film proposes both a far more radical form of governance (utopian anarchy) and a relentless critique that draws attention to the shortcomings of popular Greek movements that have maintained an aspect of hero worship that carries with it the "cultural heritage that is capable of crushing the most noble dreams."[13]

Yet Angelopoulos does not simply demonize Megalexandros and his men or idealize the people of the commune. Both groups are responsible for the failure of their dreams. Megalexandros not only divides the people of the commune and orders the execution of its leaders (including his own adopted sister) but also makes secret

alliances with the royalists—who are politically invested in seeing the Greek government fail, even if it means the certain death of the British nobles. At the same time, the people of the commune submit to Megalexandros's authority. It is only when they realize that they have all been tricked—they will lose all of their power to the royalist forces and their land to the capitalist landowners—that they turn on Megalexandros and his men.

The ending scenes of the film visualize a poem by Yorgos Seferis, which begins with the lines, "I woke to find this marble head in my hands . . . / it was falling into the dream as I was falling out of the dream." Megalexandros's character recites these lines after it is clear that the Greek royalists have deceived him, and that he will have to keep his word and order the death of the captives and of the commune's political leaders. While he has become one with the dream he is also burdened by the dream that brings with it all the mute and visionless monuments (greatness or traditional laws) of the past. Yet, this mutilated dream that Megalexandros embodies falls into the hands of the villagers. The last scene of the film recalls the circle from which Megalexandros emerges, but this time it enacts the negation of Megalexandros. Rather than appearing alone in a circle of white light, the villagers dressed in black close in on Megalexandros, presumably to beat him to death. Although his body mysteriously disappears, a marble head appears in its place in a pool of blood. In this act of communal violence, Megalexandros is absorbed into the villagers—he falls into their nightmares, becoming one with them. Like the people who live in the space of what is now called Greece, the villagers are left in the ruins of the dream.

The film closes with the line, "and that is how Alexandros entered the cities." Accompanying the voice-over of this line is the image of a young Alexander entering Athens. Rather than resurrecting this figure of Megalexandros, Angelopoulos explains this figure of the boy Alexandros is the "heir to a revolutionary tradition, who has to rid himself of the tragedies of the past in order to face the present."[14] Yet this is a present devoid of all hope of a political solution to the problem of the unequal distribution of wealth and power—the two unfinished lessons that the young Alexander is given before he enters the cities. Already in 1980, two years before Greece entered the European Community, and nine years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, *Megalexandros* anticipated the shift in geopolitics from a Cold World order to a new world order. Rather than presenting the failure of experimental socialism as a triumph of freedom, cosmopolitanism or enlightenment thinking, however, Angelopoulos presents this as the failure of democracy to overcome the tyranny of power and wealth.

conclusion

In both *Russkij kovcheg* and *O Megalexandros* the "return to Europe" marks a series of contradictions. This figure (Europe), which sometimes stands for the beautiful ideas of the Enlightenment that divorce logos from ethnos, also stands as a site of exchange—of people, commerce, armies, empires, cultures, and ideas—and therefore carries with it both the marks of division (demarcating boundaries, natural borders, frontiers, and chasms) and the marks of ambivalence (a history of mixed genesis, of fluid boundaries collapsing the East into the West, of male violence that is eroticized and female sexuality that is violated). By exposing the complexity of this figure—its uncertain boundaries, ethnic erasures, and dubious sexual relations—these films counternarrate hegemonic-imperial narratives as well as patriarchal national-ethnocentric histories.

notes

1. See Federico Chabod, *Storia dell'idea d'Europa* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1962); and Denys Hay, *Europe: The Emergence of an Idea* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1968). For a longer reading of *Ruskijj kovcheg* see my "Russian Ark: Floating on Europe's Borders " *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 59, no. 2, Winter 2005.
2. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 189.
3. Barbara Einhorn, *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993), 8.
4. Étienne Balibar, *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. James Swenson (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 169.
5. Anatoly M. Khazanov, "Ethnic Nationalism in the Russian Federation," *Daedalus 126*, no. 3 (1997): 130–38.
6. Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1996), 45.
7. Stanley Kauffman, "Remembrances," *New Republic*, December 16, 2002, 26.
8. Svetlana Boym, "From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia," *Representations 49* (1995): 145.
9. Dragan Kujundzic, "After 'After': The Arkive Fever of Alexander Sokurov," *Art Margins*, Spring 2003, online at www.artmargins.com/content/cineview/kujundzic/html; this essay was also republished in *Quarterly Review of Film and Video 21*, no. 3 (2004): 219–39. Although the film has been widely reviewed, there has been little serious analysis. Kujundzic's piece not only stands out among the literature, but also sets a high tone for further examination of the film.
10. William Johnson, "Russian Ark," *Film Quarterly 57*, no. 2 (2003): 48.
11. See Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).
12. Dan Georgakas, "A Reconsideration of Theodoros Angelopoulos's Alexander the Great," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies 18* (2000): 177.
13. Ibid., 178.

14. Theodoros Angelopoulos, interview by Michel Grodent, in *Theo Angelopoulos: Interviews*, ed. Dan Fainaru (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2001), 46–47.

thirteen

reliving the past in recent east european cinemas

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Fifteen years after the demise of totalitarianism, the former Eastern Bloc has both emerged as a vibrant discipline of cultural studies and become a choronotope of theoretical controversy whose designation is still as equivocal as is the nascent postcommunist identity of its inhabitants. The cultural repositioning is the starting point of a new geopolitical redistribution of the European periphery. With the Soviet center of power gone, the gravitation is unidirectionally oriented toward the West, leading to an expected actualization of the Eastern Europe–Central Europe dichotomy. A variety of linguistic variations have appeared, all offering different degrees of justification: Central Europe, Southeast Europe, Eastern Europe, *Mitteleuropa*, the legacy of the Hapsburgs—the list goes on and on. This onomastic versatility essentially suggests the painful efforts of an emerging region's intellectual elite at circumscribing an identity that has yet to crystallize. Alternatively, it may be postulated, we are witnessing a process of identity formation, reflected in East European cinematic developments of the past fifteen years, which is more homogeneous than the ideologists of exclusionary nationalism would like to think.

One of the main paradigms that reflect the process of identity formation deals with the dichotomy of present and past, and the crucial oppositions between reality and history, between experience and myth. Granting that the region of the former Eastern block has undergone a differentiated economic and political development, culminating in the acceptance of the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia into the European Union on May 1, 2004, and granting that there may be justification for a new binarism along the Central-versus-Eastern axis based as much on common historical and cultural processes as on current economic factors, I want to examine the cinematic production of the ex-Soviet satellites from the perspective of the collective experience that brings these films together. Thus, my methodology is intentionally one of inclusiveness rather than distinctiveness. In this context, I will consciously omit the film production from the former Yugoslavia. The decade-long civil war that accompanied the disintegration of the Yugoslavian federation represents a microcosm of myths, ideas, and stylistics that merits a discussion in its own right.[1]

In an article written five years ago, I attempted to identify some of the distinctive features defining East European cinema in the early postcommunist period, using specific Bulgarian films as examples.[2] My conclusion was that from the vantage point of the post-1989 transitional phase in Bulgarian political culture, the recent past was not reevaluated from a perspective that was qualitatively different from the dominant ideologemes of the pre-1989 communist cultural doctrines. On the contrary, the filmmakers who came out with cinematic works immediately after 1989 imposed a new hegemonic discourse, which carried the external label of "democratic" yet refused to engage in a dialogic relation with the past. Instead, it promoted a new kind of monologism aimed at silencing the voices of the past forty-five years while constructing a new grand narrative, equally epic and autocratic, writing itself on an illusory tabula rasa.

In the years immediately following the fall of communism (1989–94), filmmakers directed their focus and cameras on the exploration of the political taboos of totalitarianism—such as the forced nationalization of property, the secret service and the recruitment of informers, the gulags, in which thousands were interned—and struggled to deliver answers to these painful questions. Potentially, delving into this forbidden subject matter could have presented a much-needed arena for understanding and coming to terms with the essence of the socialist era. Unfortunately, the majority of directors adopted a poetics of sordid naturalism and simplistic two-dimensional characterization to re-create and relive the abuses of the communist regime, using sensationalist styles and lurid sequences of violence, rape, and bestiality,

which failed to address the painful historical realities, instead favoring cheap thrills that did not even translate into box office hits.

Docho Bodzhakov's *Kladenetsut* (*The Well*, 1991) and Evgueni Mikhailov's *Sezonut na kanarchetata* (*The Canary Season*, 1993) illustrate the trend. Following personal tragedies on the surface, both films depict a mythical clash between good and evil, in which sexual politics is superimposed on the political dimension. Thus, the conflict is not only an ideological one between omnipotent communists and a toothless collectivity, but also an exercise in gender subjugation and humiliation, where women are helpless pawns abused by a male-dominated regime of aberrantly sadistic sexual deviants. The films provide little psychological or social motivation to account for the rapist tendencies of the male protagonists apart from the fact that they are communists. A similar political function can be traced in the films of Croatian director Jakov Sedlar. His controversial *Četverored* (*In Four Rows*, 1999) uses naturalistic devices in the director's presumably genuine attempt at portraying the unadulterated suffering of Croat patriots in Bleiburg in 1945 as they are massacred by Tito's partisans.

Another group of films examines the moral decay and sacrifices, often unpremeditated and involuntary, incurred by those living in the totalitarian system. These works focus on the personal sins and betrayals individuals were forced to commit in order to survive in an absurd political regime. Géza Bereményi's *Eldorádó* (*The Midas Touch*, 1989); Ivan Andonov's *Vampiri, talasumi* (*Vampires and Spooks*, 1992); Radoslav Spassov's *Sirna nedelja* (*Shrove Sunday, a Day of Forgiveness*, 1993); and Radu Mihaileanu's *Trahir* (*Betrayal*, 1993), which was awarded the 1993 Grand Prix of the Americas for best feature film at the Montreal Film Festival—all attempt to expose the malaise of the totalitarian structure that destroyed people's lives by undermining their moral fabric and depriving them of ideals. The ultimate questions that these directors pose are: Can those who served the system be forgiven for their crimes and misdemeanors? Do they have the right to absolution? The main problem with these films is that while they attempt to achieve greater psychological insight, they fail to provide a convincing answer that addresses personal responsibility at times of political turmoil and ideological repression.

The pervasive atmosphere of violence and doom that predominates in these films is validated on two levels: first, by the requirements of the transitional period, and second, by the need for personal expiation. Whether the commercial aim of exploiting the possibilities of taboo as a box-office attraction was achieved is questionable; however, these early films essentially expanded the thematic arsenal of Eastern European cinema. Visually, the past in these films is rendered in bleak colors, with back and white tonalities and concentrated sequences of

gray, which match the somber atmosphere of the plotlines and reinforce the black and white visions of their creators. The second, perhaps more important implication that these early films carry is that they offer a kind of repentance for the passivity of the intellectual in the years of totalitarianism.[3] By offering a highly naturalistic, almost grotesque, image of the past and an accompanying absolute negation of the entire era, the directors are also dealing with their own guilty consciences of conformism. Having achieved some kind of closure with the past, most of these filmmakers have since turned toward the present in their exploration of the social problems in the post-1989 period, often preserving and transposing the monochrome poetics into the new realities.

The vision of Eastern Europe's past as an abyss where people are divided into the good and weak and the bad and strong, with very little in between, is rejected by a second group of films, which return to the same choronotope from a distinctly opposing perspective. These films look at the forty-five years of totalitarianism with bittersweet nostalgia for a bygone era that in hindsight does not seem all that bad. Such sentiments predominate in Jan Svěrák's Oscar-nominated *Obecna skola* (*Elementary School*, 1991) and Oscar-winning *Kolja* (*Kolya*, 1996), Petr Nikolaev's *Bajecna leta pod psa* (*The Wonderful Years of Lousy Living*, 1997), Jan Hřebejk's *Pelisky* (*Cozy Dens*, 1999) and *Pupendo* (2003), Jerzy Stuhr's *Duże zwierzę* (*The Big Animal*, 2000), and Péter Tímár's *Csinibaba* (*Dollybirds*, 1997). Wistfulness and sweet reminiscences also strike through Nicolae Caranfil's *È pericoloso sporgersi* (*Don't Lean Out of the Window*, 1993) and Ivan Nichev's *Sled kraia na sveta* (*After the End of the World*, 1998).

The romantic views of the communist years vis-à-vis the prosaic insipidness of the postcommunist transition reflect the directors' ironic stance with respect to past and present. On the one hand, the pain from the traumatic years of communism is numbed through a glossy and stylized rendition further enhanced by a layer of comic distancing. On the other hand, through the mediation of a whole decade, the previous years of ideological indoctrination are mythologized to represent a sweet collage of an idyllic past when people's lives had a higher meaning on a purely existential plane. In his analysis of *Kolja*, Andrew Horton refers to the film's portrayal as a manipulative "comforting vision of the past" achieved through stunning cinematography of a mythical Prague, which serves as the backdrop of an invented world where the grand political conflicts of the era are resolved as verbal disputes and passive resistance:

> [The film's] warmth is extended by its sentimental theme, a wide-eyed five-year-old boy in the title role . . . and picture-postcard shots of Prague's finest buildings bathed in a glorious light. The central character's predicament is as overly romanticised as the cinematography.

> Frantisek lives at the top of a medieval tower in the center of Prague with a stunning view of the castle, a far cry from the Communist *panelaky* . . . which are the more standard form of accommodation for Czechs. Although Frantisek is the object of the idiotic brutality of the regime, the film softens the effects of this on him. Fear isn't fear, but a mock fear, full of its superficial features but having none of its true consequences.[4]

Undoubtedly, the disillusionment with the postcommunist years, the economic hardships, and the dramatic polarization of what once had been a uniform society of the poor but equal naturally evokes a mitigated reevaluation of the recent past coupled with the question whether anything was achieved in 1989. As a defunct period that will never again be recaptured in its previous form, its romantic aura becomes all the more attractive.

In a similar mood and tonality, Petr Nikolaev's *Bajecna leta pod psa* captures the dark humor of Michal Viewegh's chronicle of life after the Velvet Revolution by following three decades in the life of a family in the pastoral environment of Central Bohemia. The film refuses to offer a one-sided assessment of the period: the director sees it neither as a time when Czech society flowered nor as an era of moral degeneration. The underlying message is that even these lousy years should not be denied or wiped out. Despite the hardships and the political pressures that characters incur, happiness, love, and human connection are the sentiments that bond them together and give meaning to their lives. Péter Timár's musical comedy *Csinibaba* is a charming and insightful satire of 1960s Kádárist communism. Its portrait of youth intoxicated with popular music is accomplished with a cinematic creativity and style that broke box office records in Hungary. The film also provides a vision that contradicts the traditionally bleak depiction of the times. As the director himself explains the phenomenal success of his film, "[H]ere is a relatively watchable Hungarian film . . . plus a hysterical longing to laugh, instead. What I mean by watchable is that it is entertaining; it does not keep bombarding the audience with social evils and the depths of philosophy, yet it has as much social message infused in it as the audience needs."[5]

While re-creating the flavor of Hungary in the 1960s, Timár also manages to bring to light the tragic conflict underlying the period when life was as stagnant as it was comfortable. In this atmosphere, youthful dreams are nothing but futile musings. Instead of merely focusing on the political absurdities of the communist system, the director subtly uncovers the personal follies of his characters, who are as absurd in their reveries and blindness to reality as is the external environment that surrounds them. A similar conscious distancing from the political aspects

of communism is found in Jerzy Stuhr's *Duże zwierzę*. The implausible plot of a couple dealing with the local bureaucracy to adopt a pet camel turns the film into a slightly absurdist drama that may happen to anyone anywhere anytime. The political dimension—the film's setting is Poland in the 1960s—gives precedence to such universal foibles as conformism, fear, and opportunism and establishes subtle parallels with contemporary Eastern European posttotalitarian societies.

The ambivalent juxtaposition of past and present in the Bulgarian Nichev's *Sled kraia na sveta* is reflected through the mellow depiction of multicultural coexistence in the Balkans following the end of World War II when Armenians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Gypsies, Jews, and Turks lived together peacefully. The idyllic communal coexistence is methodically and inexorably destroyed by the advent of Stalinism, which demolishes ethnic traditions in the ruthless pursuit of state goals. Turks and Gypsies are forcibly relocated and the Jews are allowed to leave for Israel, while the female protagonist's Armenian family is tragically detained en route to Paris. The film moves between past and present against the background of the immutable Plovdiv, which, like Svěrák's Prague and Timár's Budapest, acquires mythical dimensions as the symbolic bearer of continuity. The extended peaceful flashbacks are in stark contrast to the lawlessness of posttotalitarian Bulgaria. The constant intercutting between the chaotic political events that marked the loss of innocence in the protagonist's childhood and the contemporary turmoil following the fall of the old regime is an ironic commentary on the cyclicity of suffering and the ephemeral nature of happiness. Despite the title's apocalyptic subtext, the film is more melancholic than angry.

The nostalgic reassessment of the communist past finds its quintessential treatment in Wolfgang Becker's multi-award-winning blockbuster *Good-Bye Lenin* (2003), which addresses the new type of romanticism based on "emotions recollected in disillusionment," to paraphrase William Wordsworth, and is expressed as *Ostalgie*. According to Nora Fitzgerald, "Ostalgie is a phenomenon of memory, a desire to collect and obsess on things that vanished following the reunification of Germany. . . . The artifacts are many: Rotkäppchen, the one sparkling wine made in East Germany, perfect for every anniversary; the Trabant, the car East Germans aged waiting for; Berlin Cosmetics, the only lipstick for your first date."[6] *Good-Bye Lenin* is a bittersweet German comedy about a son who conceals the fall of the Berlin Wall from his ailing mother for fear the shock might kill her. The film's opening sequences show communism crumbling everywhere except in the heart of Christiane Kerner (Katrin Sass), a mother of two, whose husband has abandoned her and defected to the West. We learn about this prehistory from a fast-paced pastiche of German life under socialism,

sarcastically narrated by the son, Alex (Daniel Brühl), who has little use for ideology and yearns for the material goods and personal freedoms of the West. Alex masterminds a ludicrous charade to fool Christiane and re-creates an artificial environment in her bedroom to sustain the illusion of socialism. He goes to great lengths to prolong the fantasy, desperately searching for consumer goods that appeal to his mother and other elderly Berliners who feel swamped by Western products alien to their culture. As Alex ventures into the brave new world of capitalism, he begins to question the changes. A climactic scene in his personal reevaluation of the past takes place at the bank, where he tries to have his mother's East German savings converted into Deutschemarks but is told that he has missed the deadline and the money is worthless. The final sequences of the film represent an optimistic attempt at a compromise between the new realities and older values.

Good-bye Lenin (2003), like *Kolja*, *Pupendo*, *Bajecna leta pod psa,* and *Csinibaba,* is not just about nostalgia for chintzy objects that might be regarded as the East European version of "camp." It is also about a growing disenchantment with the new capitalist world that people had assumed would be a kind of utopia. The real driving force of this common nostalgia is the memory that the old system guaranteed cheap rents, a job, medical care, and a low crime rate. It wraps notions of communist solidarity in the cloak of certainty and familiarity; and while most former East Europeans would not really want to return to those days, they can certainly empathize with a fleeting, affectionate remembrance of times past. Beyond that, however, the films emphasize a new sense of East Europeans' awareness that their lives' validation need not be mediated via Western cultural and social markers. Unlike the times of acute political repression, when the Western cultural center was activated as a politically subversive mechanism and every instance of appropriation—music, literature, pop culture—acquired a symbolic significance beyond its merely decorative function to legitimate the "European-ness" of the countries behind the Iron Curtain, the current tacit rejection of the neatly packaged, glitzy Western commodities suggests a new level of awareness that acceptance by others must be preceded by acceptance by oneself.[7] Cinematically, the nostalgia is rendered by a palette of warm golden hues that permeates the shots. The bleak and barren backgrounds of the early posttotalitarian films are replaced by majestic shots of landscapes, architectural landmarks, and historical monuments that intentionally highlight the tangible achievements of the protagonists and, by extension, of all the inhabitants of these spaces.

The newfound sense of pride in the local and the regional geography naturally leads to a rediscovery of its history, which finds expression in

the cinematic rendition of the distant past as a source of grandeur, glory, and moral inspiration. The glorious past serves an ideological function as a pivotal element in the construction of both a national and a regional identity. In essence, screening the past in the post-1989 context acquires the characteristics of the ultimate emancipatory gesture, which reinforces a collective belonging to a particular chronotope.[8]

Depending on the purposes they serve, the films dealing with the distant past can be categorized into several groups. One group belongs to the war genre, actualized to a certain degree by the fifty-fifth anniversary of World War II, and attempts to revisit the painful questions of anti-Semitism and collaborationism that still haunt the artistic universe of many directors in Eastern Europe. The war films vary in tone and poetics and range from the subdued *Musíme si pomáhat* (*Divided We Fall*, 2001) by Jan Hřebejk and the thematically similar *Daleko od okna* (*Keep Away from the Window*, 2000) by Jan Jakub Kolski, to the epic dimensions of Jan Svěrák's *Tmavomodrý svet* (*Dark Blue World*, 2001) and the idyllic overtones of Ondrej Trojan's *Želary* (2003). Ivan Nichev's *Putuvane kam Jerusalem* (*Journey to Jerusalem*, 2003) uses as its premise the rescue of two Jewish children from Nazi persecution with the help of artists from a traveling circus.

The purifying power of the past as a source of aesthetic inspiration and ethical aspirations represents another direction in Eastern European directors' search for new subject matter, which transcends the sordidness of contemporary reality and foregrounds the moral superiority of a long-gone era. F. A. Brabec's *Kytice* (*Wildflowers*, 2000) is a series of seven thematically linked short films based on a series of popular ballads written by the Czech poet Karel Jaromír Erben two hundred years ago. Superbly filmed, the episodes portray witches, wicked stepmothers, and princes looking for brides with the right mix of magic and horror, making use of striking imagery and impeccable compositions. The director gives each episode its own carefully choreographed feel and color scheme. The Bulgarian-Macedonian co-production *Podgriavaneto na vcherashnia obiad* (*Warming Yesterday's Lunch*, 2002), directed by Kostadin Bonev, intermingles past and present to highlight the intimate aspects of history. The film interweaves reality with magic and mysticism as countless miracles happen in the course of the narrative. Again, the focus is on individual integrity in a social context where the boundaries between good and evil have been eroded.

In contrast to the lyrical styles above, history receives an epic treatment in Jerzy Hoffman's *Ogniem i mieczem* (*With Fire and Sword*, 1999) and Andrzej Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz* (1999). Both films are cinematic adaptations of classical literary sources written with the aim to uphold the patriotic spirit of the Poles at a time of disorder and disenchantment. Based on the first part of Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz's historical trilogy,[9]

Ogniem i mieczem deals with what is considered the golden age of Polish history—the period from 1648 to the time of King John III at the end of the seventeenth century—when the country sprawled from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. The narrative combines exciting adventure with patriotic message as it describes the war between Poland and Ukraine. There are invincible heroes, spectacular duels, everlasting friendships, and heroic deaths. *Ogniem i mieczem* tells about the nation's past glories and defeats in such manner that people can identify with the heroes and believe in the resurrection of Poland.[10] Wajda unambiguously positions the films as vehicles of historical continuity and identity contextualization: "Today more than ever, we need a sense of identity to know where we come from and where we are going."[11]

Hoffman had already made films of *Pan Wolodyjowski* and *Potop*, the third and second books of Sienkiewicz's trilogy, in 1969 and 1976, respectively. Neither book's subject matter poses as great a political sensitivity for the postcommunist relations between Poland and Ukraine as *Ogniem i mieczem*, with its depiction of a powerful Polish state and the use of a strongly nationalistic romantic literary source. As a Polish Jew, Hoffman takes great care in casting and text to assuage Ukrainian sensitivities. Ukrainian actor Bohdan Stupka plays Khmelnytsky, and Ruslana Pysanka appears as Horpyna. Ukrainian is spoken in the film, Ukrainian music pervades the score, and the violence of the Poles is not ignored. Moreover, the director stresses that the Poland of *Ogniem i mieczem* was a tolerant, multiethnic country. "'The period that Sienkiewicz describes is actually the time of the end of a great country,'" he notes. "'It was the most tolerant country in Europe at the time. With King Zygmund I, the Counter-Reformation came and this signalled the end of tolerance in the country. . . . I knew what kind of film it would be and what it would discuss and there would be no better or worse and both nations would be equal, each a mirror image of the same heroism and, on the other side, the same cruelty.'"[12]

The focus of the film in that sense deviates from Sienkiewicz's anti-Ukrainian attitudes and highlights the sad realization that Ukrainians and Poles could not come to terms at the time, resulting in Russia's subsequent conquest of Ukraine. Several ideas interplay in the film. On one level, Hoffmann turns to a beloved literary source known to all and undertakes the difficult task of its cinematic adaptation, adopting a position of subtle subversion. He relies on stable stereotypes and stark oppositions. Thus, the Poles take the field wearing luxurious suits of armor and aristocratic clothes; the Ukrainians, by contrast, are clad in loose trousers and naked from the waist up. While, historically, this may be an inaccurate detail,[13] the stereotypical portrayal can paradoxically be traced directly to Nikolay Gogol's description of the great Ukrainian hero Taras Bulba and his portrayal of the Cossacks.[14] Beyond

the idea of representing the Ukrainians following preconceived Polish romantic views of Ukraine as an exotic land from which Cossackdom emanated an enigmatic, mysterious and powerful energy, Hoffmann focuses on the representation of Bohdan Khmelnytsky as a clever politician and gifted military leader.

What is most curious, however, is the unexpected reception of the film in Ukraine. Contrary to the reservations of politicians and intellectuals, the film was a tremendous success in that country, despite the Ukrainians' portrayal as the enemy. This surprising reception goes beyond the general sentiment that there is a part of history with its heroism and suffering, triumphs and defeats that can be shared by all countries, irrespective of nationality or specific experience. Given the historical tensions among Poland, Ukraine, and Russia, *Ogniem i mieczem* could be read as a testament to the sustained vilification of Ukraine perpetrated by its more powerful neighbor in pursuit of nationalistic purposes. Instead, Hoffman's adaptation transgresses this one-dimensional interpretation. Rather than pitching one nation against another in conformity with the good-against-evil romantic paradigm of the literary source, the director opts for greater complexity of representation and psychological motivation. The film highlights the ambiguity of history and implicitly promotes the idea that each nation is solely responsible for its own fate. The inability of Poles and Ukrainians to overcome their differences and reach a consensus is as crucial to these countries' subsequent future as are Russia's expansionist intentions. This greater all-encompassing vision of choice, responsibility, and missed opportunities explains the paradoxical blockbuster status of *Ogniem i miecezm* in both Poland and Ukraine. Furthermore, the current Ukrainian cultural vacuum and the need to feel at least a degree of national pride is made up for by *Ogniem i mieczem's* narrative about national self-respect. An interesting symbiosis is created in which self-legitimation is achieved on top of a superficially marginalizing discourse.

The idea of personal responsibility and its artistic conceptualization through imagery, mood, and dialogue is at the center of Andrzej Wajda's *Pan Tadeusz*. Based on Adam Mickiewicz's 1834 poem, it is a spectacular, sometimes humorous, sometimes sarcastic illustration of the nineteenth-century Polish gentry, concentrating on the feud between a Polish and a Lithuanian family and on how their escalating dispute affects the community. Wajda focuses on people's mundane lives until the time comes for them to put the petty squabbles aside and face a bigger ordeal in helping Napoleon Bonaparte bring freedom to their country. The director spares neither often-ridiculed fiery Polish patriotism nor the philistine complacency that frequently ends up gaining the upper hand over bigger matters. The film highlights another, metaphysical dimension, which is emphasized in Mickiewicz's poem and juxtaposes the life of the past with the present chaos. The

portrayal of a natural harmony in which the rhythmic alternation of births and deaths, subsequent seasons, and daily chores all contribute to an archetypal simplicity and peace of mind vis-à-vis the disruptiveness of human foibles blends into an imposing paradigmatic image of continuity.

Wajda manages to synthesize a variety of genres in his strife to construct a composite, multilayered myth in which the epic nature of the film emerges through grand canvasses depicting the "big history," while the "little history" of Soblicowo and its petty gentry is rendered as a snapshot from a family album. The connection is cinematically emphasized by the charged contrast of the colors of the countryside in Polish-speaking Lithuania with the darkness and noisiness of Paris streets and the sadness of Polish émigré life in France. The intimate side is not less significant than the public one for the overall effect of the film: the two perspectives act together to create the film's comprehensive artistic vision. While the outcome of "big history" ultimately predetermines Poland's future social and political path, the "little history" plays a unifying role in establishing the needed continuity and legitimization of the Central European *post* identity formation.[15] In this context, the horizontal and rather considerable stratum of the Polish *szlachta* is viewed as the predecessor of the nouveau riche,[16] that first echelon of opportunists who, whether by legal or unorthodox means, began the long and still incomplete process of creating the Eastern European middle class.[17]

Peter Finn describes *Pan Tadeusz* as a combination of *Gone with the Wind* (Victor Fleming, 1939) and the poetry of Walt Whitman[18]; and Jerzy Hoffman has defined *Ogniem i mieczem* as the "Polish-Ukrainian version of *Gone with the Wind*, a story of great passions, of human fates thrown into the tragic whirlpool of a civil war."[19] These comparisons with *Gone with the Wind* additionally foreground the complexity of the films' exploration of the past. They are not so much mobilizing pageants against the external aggressor as introspective parables into the specificities and contradictions of the characters at a crucial point of historical upheaval. This artistic decision on the filmmakers' part promotes the idea that in approaching the past contemporary Eastern European directors posit personal responsibility as a governing artistic gesture.

In summary, the historical epics of the post-1989 period manifest a quality that sets them apart from the former communist productions. In the new conditions, the introspection into the glorious past transcends the expected function of going back to common traditional foundations to reaffirm permanence and interconnectedness. More importantly, delving into the past engages collective identities and individual psychologies in a complex interplay. The result is multidirectional: first, continuity is established on the level of social

hierarchy between the old feudal nobility and the new class of entrepreneurs as the new "gentry"; second, an integration is achieved that does not require legitimating from the Western center; finally, while this is history at its most romantic, rendered in Technicolor with spectacular costumes and breathtaking sequences, it is also an exposure of the follies of political factions and personal hubris. Contrary to the easy formula of finding a scapegoat on whom to blame the miseries of the people, the filmmakers refuse to exonerate their characters for the fate they suffer. Rather, they strongly promote the idea that we are all responsible for the choices we make.

In projecting an elite vision of the national past, the historical epics play the important function of cultural drivers toward the Western center. The return to the glorious past, whether real or imagined, becomes an expression of the ideologeme, "We, too, have contributed something valuable to the world." It is a past molded by heroes and marked out in canonical history, with great turning points, victories, and finest hours. This time is presented as worthy of acceptance and emulation just by the sheer awe of its grandeur and the splendor of the monolithic identities that are depicted.

In the years of socialism, the publications on the cinema of Eastern Europe were almost entirely mediated either by ideological considerations in the East or Cold War considerations in the West. The posttotalitarian period offers the opportunity for a dialogue rather than a monologue. This dialogical approach is needed not only to prevent a biased, monopolized dispensation of the "truth about Eastern Europe" on the level of theoretical exchange; it is needed even more as a reference point for Western artists who choose to examine the interactions of these two worlds. The depiction of the "Easterner" in contemporary Western art needs to transgress the stereotypical structures of stock characters that still define it: the Romanian Gypsy beggar, the Polish conman, the Slovenian petty crook, the violent macho man from the Balkans, or the East European femme fatale turned prostitute.[20]

The reasons for this rift in perception between East and West merit an investigation in its own right. On the one hand, the persistent Western discourse that wishes to interpret Eastern European events from the "correct" perspective frequently proves to be out of tune with the sensibilities of the actual representatives from the region; it is what Slavoj Žižek calls "the West's misperception."[21] On the other hand, however, the same myths and misperceptions are perpetuated by the Eastern European artists themselves when constructing a collective image of the Eastern European. While succumbing to a stereotype may range from innocently misleading to blatantly manipulative, it also reinforces the dangerous theme of the victim as poor, illiterate,

downtrodden, and ultimately marginalized. The natural consequence of this attitude is the victim's archetypal passivity expressed in the leitmotivic "Nobody wants us; what can we do?" This stance establishes a paradoxical continuity with the temporal excuse offered by those who committed crimes in the name of the old totalitarian regimes: "Such were the times; what could we do?"

History is inseparable from memory; memory is inseparable from identity. Weaving together personal and collective memories, Eastern European filmmakers peek into the heart of the region's always-shifting, volatile past. These cinematic narratives depict how historical memory invariably mixes nostalgia and political insight to explore what constitutes the past, to illustrate how the region uses, selects, and interprets history and reinvents the past in the process of its self-definition. History is not represented as a fixed psychological or sociocultural concept, but rather as a dynamic process of identity formation. The cinematic works from the directors from Eastern Europe ask viewers to recognize the always-changing nature of the past—of history and identity, as these depend upon interpretations of that past. Yet the history they offer is not merely one of oppressor and oppressed; while recognizing the forces of corrupt power, they celebrate the mobility of identity in all its contradictions and ambiguities. For all that is mythical and magical in these films, the protagonists' experiences and worlds are not sentimentalized; the harsh conditions are not sepia-tinged. While nostalgia and sentiment are certainly present in them, they are foregrounded exactly as such, without illusions as to their viability.

Concentrating on the internal mechanisms of identity and history in their films, the directors bear a responsibility for their public part in this process. The ambiguity of the results highlights their creators' self-conscious awareness of this responsibility. In detailing and juxtaposing multiple reconstructions of the past, the films question the validity of particular cultural representations of historical understanding and, at the same time, take account of the role memory plays in constituting meaningful cultural and historical paradigms. In the dialogue between past and present that takes place in memory, history always has to answer to the intimate and the particular.

notes

1. Some recent publications, such as Andrew James Horton, ed., *The Celluloid Tinderbox* (Central Europe Review, 2000), and Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), offer analyses of the various tendencies in post-Yugoslav cinema.
2. See Roumiana Deltcheva, "Eastern Europe as a Politically Correct Scapegoat: The Case of Bulgaria," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture: A WWWeb Journal 1*, no. 2 (1999); online at http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb99-2/deltcheva99-1.html.

3. It is not by chance that the majority of these films are from countries without a 1956 uprising or a Prague Spring.
4. Andrew Horton, "Making History: Comforting Visions of the Past in Czech Oscar-Winners," *Central Europe Review 1*, no. 15 (1999); online at http://www.ce-review.org/99/15/kinoeye15_horton.html.
5. Péter Tímár, "An Interview with Péter Tímár" by Erzsi Báthory, March 11, 1997; online at http://www.filmkultura.iif.hu:8080/articles/profiles/timpet.textonly.en.html; translation herein is mine.
6. "Artifacts of Überkitsch Evoke Old East Germany: High and Low Culture Offer Powerful Reminders," *New York Times*, October 1, 2003. See also Richard Bernstein, "Warm, Fuzzy Feelings for East Germany's Gray Old Days," *New York Times*, January 13, 2004.
7. See Roumiana Deltcheva, "Western Mediations in Reevaluating the Communist Past: A Comparative Analysis of Gothár's Time Stands Still and Andonov's Yesterday," online at http://clcwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb99-2/deltcheva99.html, for a comparative analysis of Peter Gothár's *Megáll az idő* (*Time Stands Still*, 1981) and Ivan Andonov's *Vchera* (*Yesterday*, 1987) and how these highly acclaimed films of the 1980s deal with the communist past.
8. The use of chronotope in this context, while borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin, is used more generally to refer to the time-space continuum of post-1989 Eastern Europe.
9. Inspired by Walter Scott and French historical novels, Sienkiewicz produced his own trilogy of historical novels. *Ogniem i mieczem* (*With Fire and Sword*, 1884) was followed by the sequels *Potop* (*The Deluge*, 1886) and *Pan Wolodojowski* (*Colonel Wolodojowski*, 1888).
10. During World War II many freedom fighters chose pseudonyms from the trilogy.
11. See the materials from the 2000 Berlin Film Festival, online at http://www.filmfestivals.com/berlin_2000.
12. Jerzy Hoffman, quoted in Andrew Horton, "Tales of Hoffman: Jerzy Hoffman and Ogniem i mieczem," *Central Europe Review 3*, no. 14 (2001): http://www.ce-review.org/01/14/kinoeye14_horton.html
13. See, for instance, M. A. Grousko, *Cossack: Warrior Riders of the Steppes* (New York: Sterling, 1992).
14. The cliché of the runaway freebooter was the foundation for the myth of the wild Cossack: "Here were those about whose neck a rope had already been wound, and who, instead of pale death, had seen life, and life in all its intensity"; see Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol, *Taras Bulba*, trans. Peter Konstantine (Toronto: Random House, 2003), 26.
15. *Post-* here has several referents: postcommunist, posttotalitarian, postcolonial, post-Soviet.
16. Compared to its Western European counterparts, as a social class, Polish nobility was quite unique, both in its structure and prerogatives. In Poland, apart from dozens of families who held the title prince, there existed only one class of nobility—the szlachta.
17. Polish director Krzysztof Zanussi corroborates the tendency of identity formation in both Hoffman's and Wajda's films. In addition to being seen by record numbers, Zanussi reports that the epic started a new architectural fad among the contemporary viewers. To solidify their identification with the portrayed characters, the contemporary pani (gentry) all started erecting two pillars—the architectural marker of nobility—at

their house entrances. See Krzysztof Zanussi, "Kak da ne proigraem zhivota si: Razgovor s Krzysztof Zanussi," *Kultura 44* (2000): 1.

18. Peter Finn, "An Epic Return for Polish Filmmaking," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 25, 1999.
19. Jerzy Hoffman, quoted in Yuri Shevchuk, "With Fire and Sword Depicts Kozak War against Poland," *Ukrainian Weekly 67*, no. 21 (1999): http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/1999/219918.shtml; don't have another page no.
20. The image of the East European woman, in particular, is highly negative in terms of both actual positioning and potential integration. The negative portrayal of female characters from Eastern Europe in contemporary West European films is the topic of Roumiana Deltcheva, "Eastern Women in Western Chronotopes: The Representation of East European Women in Western Films after 1989," in *Vampirettes, Wretches, and Amazons: Western Representations of East European Women*, eds. Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004): 161–185.
21. See Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the Mis(use) of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2001), 234.

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fourteen

fragmented discourses

young cinema from central and eastern europe

christina stojanova

> *To be moral does not mean "to be good," but to exercise one's freedom of authorship and/or actorship as a choice between good and evil.*
>
> **—Zygmunt Bauman,** *Life in Fragments*[1]

These days, films from postcommunist Eastern Europe do not unequivocally take center stage at international film festivals: even Alexander Sokurov at his best usually competes with a myriad of new works by "hot" directors from the trendy national cinemas of Denmark, Iran, or Korea. Long gone (and forgotten) are the days when Eastern European films—at least those that had miraculously jumped over the censorship fence—were a rare and precious festival commodity in a world divided along stern ideological lines. A new generation of filmmakers, born in the 1960s and 1970s, has quietly taken the stage, filling in the vacuum left as a result of the prolonged creative crisis of the middle generation of filmmakers, a crisis wrestled much more successfully by such veteran

trademark Eastern European directors as—to name but a few—the octogenarian Miklós Jancsó, the septuagenarians Márta Mészáros and Věra Chytilová and, most notably, István Szabó, who, despite his Academy Award–winning *Mephisto* (1982), has joined the Hollywood hall of fame only now that he is well into his sixties. Unlike their predecessors, however, young filmmakers perform miracles on shoestring budgets allotted by their financially constrained local film industries, and even succeed in breaking into prestigious international festival networks. As recent Cold War history drifts into oblivion along with concepts like terror and propaganda, dissent and compliance, Eastern European countries draw closer to a pan-European unity.

In the process, they eventually would, in the name of so-much-cherished stability and prosperity, patch up the scars left from the systematic abuse and betrayal wrought by the "Great Powers." They would also disregard their past as Europe's internal colonies and poor relatives in favor of a collective pan-European identity, steeped, however, not so much in Western pride and opulent decadence but in a growing awareness of the First World's colonial, consumerist, and environmental guilt and the price tag that comes with it. This paradox reminds me of a friend who, after emigrating to the West in 1989, remarked sardonically that he had come too late for the party of capitalism; there was nothing left but a heavy hangover! The paradoxical nature of the revamped East/West European relations rhymes with yet another incongruous phenomenon: that of Eastern Europe's expedited extrication from the regimented modern world of totalitarian Communism and its brutal transition to the chaotic postmodernity of postcommunism. There, in a truly surreal fashion, the rules of the economic game and its ideological myths are reversed, but the principal actors are still fiercely holding onto their roles. Thus, the once vehemently castigated market liberalism comfortably replaced the now demonized centralized economy of yore allowing the elites to "privatize" what their parents once "nationalized."

The ultimate irony (or tragedy) of this truly postmodern moment, where everything goes, nothing matters, and opportunism runs supreme, has not escaped the attention of young Eastern European directors; it lies at the heart of their most original works. Following Sigmund Freud's discussion of the uncanny, which attributes terror to the collapse of the psychic boundaries of self and other, life and death, reality and unreality, the peculiarities of the films under scrutiny can be attributed to unbearable and uncanny friction between the strictly regulated, essentially modern communist experience, and the postmodern postcommunist one, defined by infinite choices and deferred responsibilities.

These concerns also permeate the works of the Polish-born and raised social philosopher Zygmunt Bauman. The films under scrutiny in this

essay are discussed in light of his musings on the idiosyncrasies of postmodern life in an increasingly globalized world as well as in the light of post-Freudian theories. In so doing, this essay concentrates on issues of form and style, arguing that the representation of the postcommunist "fragmentariness of the social context and the episodicity of life pursuits" warrants equally fragmented artistic discourses—allegories, postmodern collages, and pastiches—displaying cross-cultural affinity that is much stronger than the vertical bonds, tying these works to their respective national cinematic traditions.[2]

The similarities manifest themselves mostly in the prevailing structure of the "road movie," in the characters of the young protagonists—a compelling bunch of antiheroes, drifters, and losers—and in the directors' awareness of the need to think in global aesthetic terms while telling local stories. The inescapable scrutiny of the foreign "other," the distributor, viewer, or simply "the world out there," translates into intertextual, (self-) reflexive and defamiliarizing discursive techniques of including this other—exotic or hostile, imagined or real—in the body of the filmic text. And while the narrative often flaunts various hilarious twists and witty turns, it most often than not abstains from the moral message endemic to the structure of archetypal formative quests such as the premodern picaresque and the classical bildungsroman—antecedents of the road movie. The principal characters embark on their serendipitous quests not to learn about themselves and the world but to flee from the responsibility that comes with such knowledge, deliberately avoiding situations which would eventually force them into making definitive moral choices.

This essay therefore attempts to explain the specificity of the postmodern postcommunist condition in terms of the existential fear of commitment and responsibility (reflected in about a dozen films from four countries) in three major parts: divided communities, dysfunctional families, and split personalities. The representation of this peculiar kind of ethical uncanniness is discussed in terms of two stylistic modes: that of metaphorical representation of gruesome violations, challenging the very core of any ethical code, and of the irony, sarcasm and tragicomedy that go with the "unbearable lightness" of the episodic postmodern being. A third mode, that of magical realism, is also discussed as a most suitable hybrid between realism and fantasy, irony and drama, the local and the global.

divided communities

"Moral life," writes Bauman, is "a life of continuous uncertainty . . . loneliness and ambivalence," predicated on the agony of responsibility over making the right choice. Premodern times provided a religious "*ex post facto* cure . . . in the form of redemption and repentance" for the sin of choosing

evil over good, "guaranteeing freedom from worry in exchange for obedience" (3). The modern project proudly promised to "prevent evil from being done . . . eliminating sin (now called guilt) from choice . . . simplified to the straightforward dilemma of obedience and disobedience to the rule," prescribed and proscribed by supra-individual agencies "endowed with exclusive moral authority" (4). In postmodern times, however, with the "state ethical monopoly in abeyance . . . the supply of ethical rules is abandoned to the care of the marketplace." Thus, the "agony of choices . . . is alleviated by a "life lived in a succession of episodes . . . free from the worry about consequences" (5). If the "savings book was the epitome of modern life," commending the postponement of gratification, the "credit-card is the paradigm of the post-modern era . . . preaching instant gratification and delay of payment" (5).

In such a world, community, traditionally based on emotional commitment and reciprocal responsibility, is all but impossible and, if marginally present, is either hostile or ironically distant or just plain indifferent. This explains young directors' penchant for tight claustrophobic shots, disengaging the world of the protagonists from community and environment, whose inconsequentiality is reflected in casual details and a scarce number of extras. As a way of exception, the two Bulgarian female directors Iglika Trifonova (*Pismo do Amerika* [*Letter to America*], 2001) and Zornitsa-Sophia (*Mila ot Marsh* [*Mila from Mars*], 2004), have chosen the magic realist mode, which allows them to blend such an incongruous set of opposites as the American and the indigenous ways of life, the urban and the rural; and to involve "issues of borders, mixing, and change, revealing the crucial purpose of magical realism: a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would illustrate."[3] Taking their cues from internationally successful documentaries about the loneliness and hardships of the aging population in Bulgaria's depleted rural areas,[4] both films showcase what is left of once closely knit and vibrant Bulgarian communities. The chorus of picturesque old men and women, featuring real-life peasants in *Letter to America* and a superb sample of retired actors in *Mila from Mars,* form an effective setting for the young protagonists' flight from reality. In tune with the magic realist tradition, both films borrow heavily from the archetypal pool of local fairy tales, where old people are seen as wise helpers offering much-needed miraculous resolutions only to the ones who are pure at heart and capable of true devotion.

One adjustment should be mentioned, however: both Ivan (Phillip Avramov) in *Letter to America* and Mila (Vesela Kazakova) in *Mila from Mars* are passive recipients of the grace, and just happen to be in the right place, at the right time, and of the right age without having to face any archetypal trials to prove their merit. In *Letter to America* for example, the magical solution comes straight from the depths of the collective

unconscious, taking the form of an ancient healing song, which Ivan easily stumbles upon, tape-records, and sends off as a wondrous cure to his ailing émigré friend Kamen in far-off America. After this is done he picks up his life exactly where he left it, without even a hint that his wondrous journey through a gorgeous countryside among people of extraordinary generosity has in any way changed him. It thus becomes fairly obvious that Ivan and his quest are only passively serving a larger message. According to premodern Balkan beliefs, a grave illness could be cured through the magical powers of waters, herbs or soil from one's native land, or, as is the case with Kamen, of an ancient song. As Bauman notes, it is traditionally believed that "to find oneself in a 'far-away' space is an unnerving experience . . . beyond one's ken, out of place and out of one's element, inviting trouble and . . . harm."[5] The film has grasped exactly this traumatic side of the emigrant experience as perceived from "here," from the "old" country, thus tapping into a collective consciousness traumatised by emigration, which has reached epic proportions in Bulgaria.[6] The film should therefore be interpreted as a beautiful poetic lament coming from a land bled white by emigration.

In *Mila from Mars*, the forsaken elderly inhabitants of a border village—the proverbial no-man's-land, where the paradoxical opposites of life and death, premodern and postmodern, fantasy and reality are likely to meet—are once again cast as a canny symbol of the certainty and comfort of the "here" and "near," where the heroine finds a hiding place and emotional refuge for herself and her unborn baby from a rich but abusive boyfriend, whom she leaves behind "out there." The fact that "out there" could not be that far in such a small country is irrelevant, as distance is no more "an objective, impersonal, physical 'given,' 'distance' is a social product; its length varies depending on the speed with which it could be overcome" (12).

The social distance separating these hospitable villagers—all but forgotten by the outside world and surviving on sheer willpower, resourcefulness, and solidarity—from their extravagant visitor, whose expensive accouterments speak eloquently of her (literally) "outworldly" status, could only be measured in light years. Mila's accidental journey ends predictably in the arms of another handsome and fashionably groomed man, living in scenic seclusion in the vicinity of the village. As soon as the elderly characters disappear from the screen, however, the film's energy drastically falls and the magical search for home gives way to a surreal melodrama that could come straight from an MTV music video. What has actually kept it together to this point is "imagination spurred by homesickness," resulting not from real "manifest togetherness" but from a "postulated" one "of the brotherhoods and sisterhoods of nations . . . and other shadowy and abstruse dream-communities" (47).

The fading memory of a once-spirited indigenous culture whose last stand are the old people inspires "an urge to feel at home, to recognize one's surroundings and belong here" (47), a message driven powerfully home by the self-reflexive casting of almost-forgotten popular Bulgarian actors and actresses from the recent past. And along with this memory, the filmmakers succeed in resuscitating this vague sense of mutual belonging across the generational divide, which explains the success of both films in a country where the rapidly widening gap between the "new rich" and the "new poor" pushes the impoverished old further into oblivion, along with everything they stand for on the imaginary/archetypal and symbolic/ethical levels. The escapist artistic mode, born of the nexus of fairytale magic and harsh social realism, actually remains the only viable option for coping with a reality that is too painful to comprehend and impossible to deal with.

dysfunctional families

By contrast, another recent and successful film by a young Eastern European director featuring the elderly, Bohdan Slama's *Divoké vcely* (*Wild Bees*, 2001), deconstructs sarcastically whatever is left from the premodern myth of the "wise old people," further defying the fossilized rustic idyll by showing a collective of working Czech grandmothers as a bunch of foul-mouthed sex-crazed alcoholics. The film is a hilarious chronicle of life in a Moravian village, told in the style of the ultimate cinematic metaphor of disorder, Miloš Forman's *The Firemen's Ball* (1967). The film marshals around about a dozen "stock" Czech characters: the cynical forewoman of the women's brigade; Kaya, the dreamer; his brother, a failed student in engineering and an aspiring filmmaker; their frustrated father and slot-machine-addicted grandmother; their girlfriends; Kaya's rival, a Michael Jackson impersonator; a widowed local femme fatale, and many others. And although everyone seems to be on the move to somewhere exciting, nothing really ever happens, gets accomplished, or is resolved. In the end, nobody really leaves—a superb metaphor for the stream of life, caught unawares.

The intertextual roots of Slama's characters and style could certainly be traced to the Czech classics of satirical literature (those of Bohumil Hrabal or Jaroslav Hašek) or the Czech New Wave cinema from the 1960s, but his debut truly belongs to another group of films, made by his peers: David Ondriček (*Samotári* [*Loners*], 2000 and *Jedna ruka netleská* [*One Hand Can't Clap*], 2003); Jan Hřebejk (*Horem pádem* [*Up and Down*], 2004); and Petr Zelenka (*Knoflíkáři* [*Buttoners*], 1997), who is also the screenwriter for Ondriček's *Samotári*, who take a sardonic shot at the newly found joys of consumerism in the parvenu world of the "new rich," contrasting it with the guilty passions of the not-so-rich and even those of the "new poor," basking in a delightful mixture of documentary observation and surreal interpretation born of the

almost incestuous proximity of the sinister and the sublime. To quote the famous Czech master of the absurd, Jan Švankmajer, "Surrealism is not an artistic style, but a means of investigating and exploring reality."[7]

Yet the Czechs and the Moravians, favoring modern reason and technological advancement, have long abandoned their mythical premodern cocoon, replacing it with their own version of modern gothic horror, comfortably domesticated in the family home or the local pub. And although from time to time a young Czech director finds solace from current postmodern pressures in the confines of a dysfunctional family—Alice Nellis's films *Ene bene* (*Eeny Meeny*, 1999) and *Vylet* (*Some Secrets*, 2002) are superb examples—the majority scoffs at it. What is more, Zelenka's, Ondriček's and Hřebejk's favorite mosaic narratives, engrossing at least half a dozen characters each, evolve like a family mystery revealing at the end that all of them have actually been a part of the plot.

Zelenka's *Knoflíkáři* started it all back in 1997 by brewing an impossible but extremely entertaining concoction of black-and-white remakes of the last seconds before the dropping of the atomic bomb over Japan in August 1945 with staged episodes in color from present-day Prague. The film opens with a cross-cut episode, where black-and-white shots from the pilots' cabin alternate with black-and-white shots on the ground, featuring a group of Japanese who, frustrated with the never-ending rainy weather, are learning to swear in English since the Japanese language lacks rude words, which, according to one "world savvy" character, seem to bring so much relief to the Americans. The episode culminates in an uproarious collective chanting of "fucking weather," while the viewer is informed that because of said weather the plane was diverted from Kokura to Hiroshima, and ever since the Japanese have been using the expression "Kokura lucky."

This episode could be read as a whimsical mise-en-abyme mirroring the meaning and style of *Knoflíkáři* and of the subsequent films, made in this mosaic mode, where, while all characters are engaged in a tragicomic pursuit of instant gratification (Kokura's citizens' desire for sunny weather; the U.S. forces' determination to drop the A-bomb), chances, coincidences and even miracles are at work on another narrative level, proving that nothing is what it seems, and that, in the grand scheme of things, the unpredictable chain of events ultimately sets straight ethical and existential scores. While Quentin Tarantino's postmodern circular narratives in *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994) point to the mode's Hollywood intertextual pedigree, the episodic circular structure and fatalistic mood of *Immortality* (1990), one of the last Milan Kundera books (published in exile), represent a lesser-known, indigenous inspiration. The Czech episodes, for example, are

structured like mini-quests on various planes of the human condition—anecdotal, moral, and philosophical. A trip through Prague by night in a taxi driven by a cabbie on tranquilizers reveals a sex-crazed world in a hilarious sequence of coincidences. In one shift, the cabbie has to chauffeur a married woman with her young lover, who can only "do it" in taxis; later on, her jealous husband is in hot pursuit, and then comes a middle-aged couple of intellectuals who politely offer to pay extra for the buttons they have yanked off the backseat upholstery. The cabbie's moral superiority, however, is premature, as we already know that his own wife is also cheating on him and that he is spared that bitter revelation only by chance.

A glimpse into the moral idiosyncrasies of postmodern life reveals fear of responsibility as the fundamental form of postmodern angst: a psychiatrist (Vladimír Dlouhý) refuses to recognize his involvement in a car accident that kills a young couple. The couple's parents, on the other hand, happen to sport the weirdest perversions, including the above-mentioned uncontrollable obsession with pulling off upholstery buttons. The tragic end of their children comes through as a moral for the lack of genuine parental concern. In another seemingly unrelated episode, a sexually frustrated, unemployed railroad switch operator (Rudolf Hruśnský, Jr.) finds relief from his wife's constant nagging by lying between the tracks and spitting at the locomotives passing over him, oblivious of the effect his compulsive histrionics has on the young couple accidentally present at the scene. Presuming him dead, the distraught boy, blinded by the psychiatrist's car lights, loses control and crashes the car, killing his girlfriend and himself, thus bringing the narrative all the way back to the previous episode. There is always a surplus of knowledge that allows the viewer to move ahead of the characters and decipher the puzzle of the circular narrative, where all episodes create a mosaic in time, whose meaning is revealed in full only at the end of the film. The musings of the radio talk-show host (Pavel Zajicek), who compels the conjured ghost of the American soldier (David Charap) to apologize for the A-bomb—"even if the victims were only Japs"—provide the philosophical framework for this almost hysterical search for effortless gratification. The references to the consequentiality of chances, miracles, and coincidences seem more than relevant to the Hiroshima tragedy, to *Knoflíkáři* and its cinematic mode, to postcommunist life in general, and last, but not least, to the fact that in a way we all could consider ourselves "Kokura lucky."

In his second film, *Rok dábla* (*The Year of the Devil*, 2002) Zelenka remains loyal to the mosaic style he initiated, which allows him to immerse his otherwise very simple local stories in layers of globally consequential political and cultural references, creating a delightful palimpsest of meanings. Once again mixing hard-nosed critical realist observations

with metaphysical romanticism, he endeavors to make his trademark Czech (or, shall we say, "Eastern European") humor more accessible for outsiders through the style of a surreal "mocudrama," introducing Jan Holman, a Dutch documentary maker, as a Virgilian character guiding the viewers through the bizarre revelations of a recovering alcoholic, played by Jaromír Nohavica, the famous lead musician of the extremely popular Czech ethno-rock group Cechomor. While the success of this artistic strategy remains questionable globally, it became a smash hit locally, making *Rok dábla* one of the most watched Czech films of all time. In *Jedna ruka netleská*, another very popular film, Ondriček takes the leitmotifs from *Samotári*, his debut film, in the mosaic mode bringing forth his own obsession with the hilariously surreal (and virulently politically incorrect) juxtaposition of local losers and drifters and the global, foreign ways such as careers, healthy lifestyles, feminism, "Far Eastern" cuisine, and psychoanalysis. Along with the initiation of Jirí Machácek as a fetish actor of the mosaic movement and impersonator of the perennially stoned archetypal loser, Ondriček's most precious contributions to this decadent version of the mosaic mode include the ubiquitous Japanese tourists who return his disrespectful look as the exotic and sinister other flaunting unabashed ethnological curiosity about the "typically" Czech ways of life.

While Zelenka's and Ondriček's works show signs of artistic fatigue, Hřebejk's *Horem pádem* foregrounds the serious ethical and existential potential of the mode. The international and domestic success of Jan Hřebejk's historical trilogy—*Pelísky* (*Cozy Dens*, 1999), *Musíme si pomáhat* (*Divided We Fall*, 2000), and *Pupendo* (2003)—put his name next to that of the Academy Award–-winning Jan Svěrák (*Kolja* [*Kolya*], 1997) as the best Czech director from the young generation. In his first three features he commented on major, tragic events shaping the modern history of the Czech lands (the Soviet invasion in 1968, the Nazi occupation and its immediate aftermath, and the communist persecution of artists and intellectuals) and on the resilience of the Czechs, who succeeded in warding off the most disastrous effects of these events thanks to the insular protection of family and friends. And while the sense of "paradise lost" elevates his trilogy to a (very Czech) tribute to family and home as sublime refuge in a world of political perils, *Horem pádem* is a compendium of the existential loneliness and shared fears of the Velvet Generation,[8] dragged into the global village from the incubator nestled behind the Iron Curtain.

The characters are confronted with painstakingly cataloged "Western" problems—illegal refugees, organized crime, crude careerism, broken families, selfish friends, and low-paid jobs—and are desperately searching for ways to feel at home, to recognize one's surroundings and belong. Some, like the softhearted and naive bodyguard František

(Jirí Machácek) resort to xenophobia and racism, preferring the "manifest togetherness" of a football fan club to the "postulated" one of the new pan-European home. Others, like František's childless wife Miluška (Natasa Burge) or the retired translator Vera (Emília Vásáryová) are clinging desperately to the sacred symbol of home and family, ready to go to any length to preserve at least the illusion of it. To her racist husband's horror, Miluška adopts an Indian boy stolen by refugee smugglers, while Vera stubbornly refuses to give her sick and almost senile husband Otakar (Jan Triska) his much-desired divorce, to the dismay of their son Martin (Petr Forman), paying his first visit after illegally emigrating to Australia a couple of decades earlier. It turns out that Otakar's partner Hana (Ingrid Timková), a refugee councilor, was once Martin's great love but failed to join him in emigration as she fell in love with his father, the renowned sociology professor.

Unlike Zelenka's and Ondriček's experimental, open endings, implicitly exonerating their characters from the tyranny of choices through the metaphysical vagueness of postmodern morality, the quests of Hřebejk's protagonists move steadily to a closure, forcing them to pay "in cash" for their choices. Ultimately this tragicomic Brownian movement of intertwined loves and lives, told with visual elegance and tongue-in-cheek humor, coalesces into a philosophical metaphor about the courage to find and offer forgiveness, reconciliation and one's own private way home and out of the chaos. Thus Martin returns to his beloved black wife and son in Brisbane, Hana stays with her refugees, ailing husband, and teenage daughter, and Vera goes back to the only family she has left—her beer-drinking intellectual friends. František and Miluška remain ambiguous about their choices and therefore suspended at the mercy of fate: she resumes stalking other people's babies, and he reverts to his old semicriminal ways.

Emigration and immigration emerge as the paradigm of the post-communist "fragmentariness of the social context and the episodicity of life pursuits," affecting the last strongholds of premodern tradition, miraculously preserved in the communist deep freezer. Christian Mungiu's *Occident* (*West*, 2002) is yet another delightful contribution to the mosaic mode, this time from Romania. It displays all the trappings of the mode, but does so maybe too meticulously, as the film has been accused of being "too Western."[9] On the anecdotal level, the film is an unobtrusively simple love story, where Luci (Alexandru Papadopol) loves the school teacher Sorina (Anca Androne) but is poor and impractical. Sorina loves Luci but prefers a comfortable life in the West and therefore leaves Luci for the Belgian Jerome (Samuel Tastet). The poet Mihaela (Tania Popa) falls in love with Luci soon after being abandoned by her drunk bridegroom on their wedding day, while her well-off and doting parents prefer to see her married in the West, where "she could

go to McDonald's every Saturday and be a soccer mom." The story is divided into three parts, named "Luci and Sorina," "Mihaela and Her Mother," "Nae Zigfrid and the Colonel." The ironic tone is enhanced by a couple of surreal "McGuffins,"[10] keeping the three parts loosely together: a bottle, accidentally thrown by Mihaela's groom and hitting Luci on the head, and the arrival of Nae Zigfrid (Valeriu Andriuta) from West Germany with the sad news of a certain Nicu's death and the suitcase of the diseased, full of junk.

The metaphor of the quest—that is, of emigration as the only way to prosperity—is the focus of each part, making all too evident the clash of the expectations and prejudices nurtured "over here" with the (limited) possibilities offered "out there" in the "faraway" places. Emigration is seen as a miraculous formative experience not unlike the medieval pilgrimage, aimed at shortening the social distance, whose length depends on the speed with which the distance is overcome. The speed, on the other hand, is determined by the ability of the protagonists to bridge the emotional and geographical space separating "here" from "there" and also to deal with the moral burden this choice entails.

In this light, Sorina's quest seems the most successful as she suffers no pangs of conscience and, in spite of her genuine feelings for Luci, is led by her pragmatism straight to the man most likely to help her out of her material and financial predicament. Conversely, Nicu's quest is the least successful as he had wasted twenty-some years in a drunken stupor in Germany only increasing the social distance separating him from his Romanian peers. Furthermore, Mihaela's quest never materializes, as her motives are projected as sympathetic but incongruously romantic. She seems to have found the man of her dreams through a mail-order agency but stays behind, as she loves Luci. The latter is the only one who seems indifferent to the emigration quest. And although he does look and behave like a drifter—idealistic, soft and quiet, qualities irresistibly attractive to both Sorena and Mihaela—nothing is what it seems, as the film informs us in its disengaged, light manner.

Luci had once made an attempt to flee Nikolae Ceausescu's Romania illegally, along with his cousin Nicu, by swimming across the River Danube into Austria; Nicu abandoned him on the beach and disappeared without a trace. Betrayed and left at the mercy of the local police, Luci was badly beaten by Mihaela's father, a police officer. One could only imagine the consequences of a failed escape from one of the most severely oppressed communist countries; but in spite of all the damning evidence, Luci obviously holds no grudge and the colonel (Dorel Visan) is portrayed as the perennially good Uncle Marian ("Times have changed, my boy!"). The director steers clear of any historical controversy, displaying an almost Buddhist tolerance toward all characters and points of view, leaving the judgement and the responsibility thereof not so much to the "moral

competence as [to] the shopping skills of the [viewer] for the choice of one ethical code from among many . . . [the one most] likely to emerge victorious" (5). This ethical "laissez-fairism," supported by the elegantly aloof style of the film, has made *Occident* exceptionally successful with young foreign audiences, who prefer to communicate directly with their Romanian peers without any back-up knowledge of their country, its history or its morals.

in a manner of conclusion: split personalities

The repeated representation of weak or victimized men in the postcommunist Romanian cinema is typical of the general postcommunist crisis of masculinity. The place of the hero—tragic or existential, or a flamboyant "new man"—is arrogated by the Jungian ambivalent trickster, "subhuman and superhuman, bestial and divine,"[11] born in the no-man's-land between communism and postcommunism. A number of recent Eastern European films take a close look at the drama of split trickster personalities. Or, to quote Bauman again, in the absence of "redemption and repentance" for the sin of choosing evil over good, offered by religion, in the wake of the postcommunist collapse of supraindividual agencies "endowed with exclusive moral authority to prescribe and proscribe moral rules," the individual is left to her own devices. This situation alleviates the loneliness and ambivalence that come with the "agony of choice by . . . a life lived in a succession of episodes." The life lived as a succession of disengaged episodes gives the trickster a license to challenge without remorse the very core of any ethical code—the inviolability of human life.

Dumitru (Dan Condurache), the male protagonist of Siniša Dragin's *În fiecare zi Dumnezeu ne saruta pe gura* (*Every Day God Kisses Us on the Mouth*, 2002), is an archetypal trickster figure, dominated by the inhuman and the bestial, as well as a victim of perennial betrayal. Although he never leaves the country, Dumitru is always on the move; or rather, on the run—not from his gruesome deeds, but from his slumbering conscience. After his final supervised shower, he, a convicted killer (and butcher by profession), is released from prison. But on the train home he meets a Gypsy gambler, wins his money and his goose (an ancient symbol of potency), makes love to his beautiful wife, and then kills him. The wife curses him, and from that moment on Dumitru's life takes a macabre downturn, plagued by supernatural coincidences and omens. Once at home, he finds his own timid wife pregnant with his brother's child. Devastated by this double betrayal, he kills his brother. On that very same night, the Gypsy woman torches his house, burning his wife and his mother alive. The film remains ambiguous as to whether this chain of misfortunes is explainable by uncanny social laws or should be seen instead as divine retribution, brought about by the curse. The ubiquitous presence of odd birds, and of Gypsies—one

of the few archaic symbols whose numinosity has remained intact—further blurs the boundaries between reality and unreality.

Once settled in the big city, Dumitru kills again—first his mistress for having cooked his pet goose for dinner, then his new friend, a policeman, for having confronted him about her murder. The story so far would have made a good "slasher film" and Dumitru would be a perfect serial killer if the murders were graphic and central to the narrative. But they occur predominantly offscreen and in an offhand manner, rendered almost unreal by the expressionist black-and-white visuals, which underscore the effects of the apocalyptic demise of the boundaries between tradition and modernity, where social and psychological motifs take over the representation of "pure" horror for horror's sake. Against the backdrop of the postcommunist "idiocy of village life" and its moral stupor, Dumitru's wickedness seems like a perfectly normal survival skill.

On a symbolic level, however, Dumitru's inhuman torment is a path to divine revelation. Haunted by surreal visions of his beloved wife, he marries a deaf-mute girl, but when she turns into a white goose Dumitru sees it as the beginning of yet another vicious cycle and summons death. In an act of diabolical reversal, God "kisses him on the mouth" once again by keeping him alive, and Dumitru comes to believe that he is now a part of God's plans. Dumitru the trickster thus becomes a spiritual werewolf—both bestial and superhuman—stuck between life and death, the demonic and the sacred.

Two recent Hungarian films feature split trickster figures, stuck between Bauman's "fragmentariness of the social context and the episodicity of life pursuits": Attila Janisch's *Másnap* (*After the Day Before*, 2003) and Nimród Antal's *Kontroll* (*Control*, 2003). After a rather prolonged crisis, the Hungarian cinema seems to have snapped back to life thanks not only to the dark energy of its scripts but also—and more notably—to its formal ingenuity. Each film is structured as a guest cum psychological thriller. The protagonist of the former is searching for an inherited country house in the middle of scarcely populated rural area when a beautiful teenage girl is raped and brutally murdered there; the protagonist of the latter is always on the move as he works as a ticket controller in the subway train system at a time when a number of subway murders are perpetrated by a hooded killer. And here the similarities end, as *Másnap* turns into an exquisite but tediously slow visual experiment, where the ambiguous complexity of the trickster figure is reduced to a simple case of schizoid dualism, in which one part of the personality watches idly while the other commits the crime. And yet even this clear-cut case of a split personality allows interpretation as a flight from responsibility due to clinical reasons, explained by psychoanalysts as an attempt at returning to the ego-ideal of the

imaginary stage or as the aggressive inability of the split subject to repress his division into self and other.

Antal's protagonist Bulcsú (Sándor Csányi), on the other hand, is a rounded, handsome person, involved in an elaborate web of relationships, ego trips, and hostilities between his colleagues and himself on one side, and the nonpaying passengers, the rival control group, and the supervising authorities on the other. Paradoxically for his profession, Bulcsú is ambitious and conscientious, fiercely determined to create a semblance of normalcy in his underground existence, which is by definition unusual. Bulcsú does his best to be ethical and exercise his agency in the choice between good and evil. The encounter with a charming girl in a bear costume, which she apparently uses in her work "up there," and the conversations between shifts with her father, a train operator sent "down here" as a punishment, push the interpretation of the subway allegory toward Dante's trip into Purgatory with Beatrice as his cherished guide—all the more so since the girl keeps inviting Bulcsú to a party "up there."

The film allows for yet another interpretation of subway life as a metaphor of the pitiful postcommunist existence, where even a low-paid and nonprestigious job such as a ticket controller's could be a reason for bloody fights between rival gangs, where most people have turned into oddballs and weirdos, refusing to make even the simplest social commitment of buying a ticket, preferring instead to bicker with and humiliate the stressed-out controllers. Against this social backdrop Bulcsú is projected as the last man of honor, irrevocably responsible for his choices, a noble exception that proves the rule. But Antal frustrates once again any smooth and linear interpretation by strongly suggesting that the hooded killer and Bulcsú might be one and the same person, with the killer as embodiment of the repressed, "shadowy" (in Jungian terms) part of his psyche. A prolonged, dangerous and ultimately deadly chase with the hooded killer down the tracks of a speeding train also suggests that Bulcsú has entered a fatal fight with his own demonic alter ego, and this, paradoxically, is the only way to get rid of it. And indeed, only on his deathbed does the hallucinating Bulcsú see himself and the bear girl, appropriately dressed as an angel, on their way "up there," to the "light at the end of the tunnel."

Kontroll obviously touched a nerve not only at home, where it attracted over a million viewers, but also around the world, becoming one of the most awarded films to come out of Hungary in recent years. Against the backdrop of the films discussed herein it is not difficult to explain the success of the film with the determination of the director to invest in and stand by such a powerfully controversial (anti)hero. It has been a while since Eastern European (and, for that matter, any national) cinema has engendered a vital and convincing contemporary character

capable of resolving the "agony of ethical choices" by creating his own moral code and living by its demands of immediate pay in hard currency for any gratification, real or imagined. Antal's Bulcsú certainly towers above the losers and drifters, epitomizing the general escapist mood of young East European directors who, with very few exceptions, seem consistently to prefer the solace of closed existential worlds, far from engaged analyses of the maddening postcommunist social and ethical tensions, focusing their tongue-in-cheek curiosity on the strangest aspects of the postcommunist existence. The young Hungarian director has boldly reshaped this landscape, returning on a new curve to the artistic and intellectual responsibility of the socially conscious thinker, so typical of previous generations of Eastern European filmmakers and of the Eastern European cultural tradition as a whole.

notes

1. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1995), 4; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Life in Fragments*.
2. Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*.
3. The documentaries are Eldora Traykova's *Zabraveni ot Boga* (*Forgotten by God*, 2000) and Stephan Komandarev's *Hlyab nad ogradite* (*Bread Over the Fence*, 2002).
4. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Columbia UP: New York, 1998), 13; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *Globalization*.
5. More than 1,300,000 people have emigrated in the last decade—out of a population of fewer than 8,000,000.
6. Jan Švankmajer, interview by Peter Hames, *Sight and Sound* Volume 11, Issue 10 (October 2001), pp. 26–28.
7. The term Velvet Generation was used as the title of a retrospective of Czech Cinema at Riverside Studios, London, in October 2000.
8. Dana Duma (Romanian film critic and scholar), personal correspondence with the author, November 2004.
9. "Hitchcock built some of his most suspenseful films around what he called 'The McGuffin,' which was, in effect, nothing. . . . Over the years the McGuffin has come to have a description formalized as: 'A device or plot element that catches the viewer's attention or drives the plot. It is generally something that every character is concerned with.' The McGuffin is essentially something that the entire story is built around and yet has no real relevance." *Alfred Hitchcock's Film Techniques*, at http://sc.essortment.com/alfredhitchcock_rvhd.htm (accessed May 11, 2005).
10. Carl Jung, "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious: The Collected Works*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), vol. 9a:158–59.

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fifteen

the cinema of eastern europe

strained loyalties, elusive clusters

dina iordanova

In the summer of 2000 I was lecturing to a group of international postgraduates from various East European countries in Skopje, Macedonia. The *BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema*, for which I had been a coeditor, had just been published; I passed a copy of it to the audience.

I was proud of my work on this volume, as I thought I had managed to do some particularly progressive things. The entries had come to me extracted from the 1995 *Encyclopaedia of European Cinema*, which Ginette Vincendeau had edited for the BFI with a team of collaborators[1]; the publishers now wanted to produce country- and region-specific volumes; I was asked to update the existing East European entries and add about fifty more. And so I did: I wrote a range of new entries and thought through how the changing political realities in the region should be reflected in the book. In an addendum to the Czechoslovak entry, for example, I discussed aspects of sovereign Czech and Slovak cinemas (since we now had two countries here). I left the general Yugoslav entry intact, but then added material outlining the film traditions of each of the post-Yugoslav republic. In anticipation of the

rumored breakaway of Montenegro from the fragile union with Serbia, I even wrote an entry on Montenegrin cinema. These were difficult decisions, and I thought I had done brilliantly overall.

At the end of my lecture, a young woman came to me with the book in hand. She was dismayed, she said: the book did not include an entry on her country, Ukraine, and wasn't this disgraceful? I was stunned. Embarrassed, I browsed through the book. Yes, indeed, there was no entry on the Ukraine. Nor was there one on Belorus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, or any other of the former Soviet republics, for that matter.

Only now did I begin grasping what had happened. I had diligently dealt with what I had believed to be my part of the material (all entries related to the countries of what used to be called "Eastern Europe") and had not considered the cinemas of the former Soviet Republics part of my editorial responsibility; I had operated on the assumption that the editors on the other—Soviet—side would have taken care of whatever countries and cinemas had come about as a result of the Soviet Union's fallout. We had never held a joint editorial meeting, and it had never occurred to me that, as an editor of the East European part, I should have taken responsibility to ensure the cinemas of the newly independent former Soviet republics were properly covered. Or should I have?

This text comes about as a reaction to the incident I just described. It was not the first time I was confronted with the farcical postcommunist reconfiguration of the cultural space of the former Eastern Bloc. Simply, it was the moment when I gathered it crystal clear that the absurdity needs to be discussed openly. That one needs to scrutinize the opinionated choices made in the period of volatile political conflagrations and to acknowledge that damaging distortions often gallop through the emerging templates of rushed historiography.[2]

realignments and readjustments

When, after 1989, state entities in the former Soviet sphere dissolved, the new nations claimed their respective territories. Dividing cultural legacies along the new fault lines, however, was more sensitive than drawing state borders. The Soviet sphere of influence vanished as a conceptual "bubble" and the fact that over several decades it had encompassed a range of transnational and regional configurations in the cultural production not only of Europe's central and southeastern parts but also of the Third World (Africa, Central Asia, select Latin American countries) and the newly emancipated countries of the "near abroad" (former Soviet republics) went into quick oblivion. A host of pressing topo-temporal decisions had to be made, breaking down the established space of cultural exchanges and reinterpreting location, time and politics.

In the 1990s, the line that split Europe into two was abolished. Russia, the constantly overbearing force, was pushed away to the east; the space that was vacated this way was immediately filled by the reverie of Europe as a righteous site of inherent affinity, the bond with which had been continuously disturbed throughout history. The rush for emancipation from the coercive satellitism of the Soviet sphere and the turn westward was often supplemented by the assumption of a sycophant role in the "new Europe," manifested in a rhetoric that was at ease with Samuel Huntington's vocabulary of (Christian) "kinship" and (Western) "civilization." The public discourse was dominated by lofty aspirations for a glorious rebonding with "Europe," a concept used ambiguously both as geographical location and symbolic destination.

When it comes down to politics of place, cultural topographies fluctuate and ideas about belonging change in time. The recent major social and political changes in the former Eastern Bloc led to a situation in which cultural historians had to make a series of geopolitically motivated choices and engage in an often unspoken remapping that implied a significant degree of potential distortion. Some of the main lines of the post–Cold War geopolitical repositioning were directly reflected in these readjustments.

In this essay I will inspect those areas of fluctuating topo-temporal mappings that appear particularly problematic and expose their direct dependency on the reconfiguration of political and metaphoric borders. I will look into several straightforward yet curious cases of the realignment that governs Eastern Europe's (allegedly previously unified) cultural space—such as the reduction of Soviet to Russian cinema, the extrication of East German cinema from its Eastern European context, or the curious cultural disparities ensuing from the Czech-Slovak split and the Yugoslav breakup—and try to work out the methodological maze of intersecting yet incessantly shifting frameworks of national, regional, and transnational approaches to the study of cultural production and film historiography.

Two divergent trends seem to be clearly distinguishable here: a drift into nationalism on the one hand, and the rediscovery of possible cultural groupings of countries on the other. The first trend, toward nationalism, is demonstrated in the outspoken nationalist rhetoric that substituted for the so-called *en bloc* thinking across the newly emancipated areas of the former Soviet sphere and reflected the backlash against the unwanted togetherness imposed in the earlier magnanimity of brotherly coexistence. The second tendency, the launch of regional configurations, came concurrently with the reconstitution of various new conceptual regions, now encompassing distinct areas of reestablished "cultural kinships" such as Central Europe or the Balkan states, even though concrete issues of boundaries and belonging remained hazy and prone to disagreements.

the drift into nationalism

> *I am reminded here of the sigh of relief from the author, who originally was to write the Soviet national cinema book, when the Soviet Union dissolved—"now, he declared, 'I need only write the Russian National Cinema book.'"*
>
> **—Susan Hayward, general editor of Routledge's** *National Cinema* **series "Framing National Cinemas"**

A situation similar to the one mentioned here by Susan Hayward applies not only to the Soviet film specialists. The Czechoslovak ones were relieved of Slovakia and could now do only Czech national cinema; the Yugoslav ones could focus on Serbia's film history. Everybody could now write their national film histories (and many did, usually in commemoration of cinema's 1995 centennial).

Sticking to the national paradigm appeared prudent and sensible; a Polish national film specialist, Marek Haltof, made the point in reviewing the *BFI's Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema*.[3] The inclusion of entries here, he observed, was determined on the basis of an obsolete geopolitical order and therefore the diverse assortment of the *Companion*'s entries "united" by a strained Soviet lineage was no longer justifiable. "Although such books undoubtedly make sense from the publisher's perspective," Haltof wrote, it made "very little or no sense" to discuss academically "Polish, Georgian and Albanian cinemas in one book." He would rather see "companions on 'less ambitious' subjects, for example on particular national cinemas from Central and Eastern Europe," because "the 'global approach' of the *BFI Companion* results in a sketchy and patronizing treatment of several vibrant national film industries."[4]

True, at a time when the unwanted togetherness of the Soviet block finally seems to be defeated, a "global approach" does not work. But Haltof's view also propagated survival of the fittest as it implied that some national cinematic traditions were more vibrant than others: recent years saw the publication of English-language books on Polish and Hungarian national cinemas, yet nothing similar happened with the cinematic tradition of Georgia, for example (isn't this one vibrant enough?). As a Bulgarian I am routinely asked if there is such a thing as Bulgarian cinema at all. (Yes, there is, and a vibrant one too; only nowadays no publisher considers putting out a book on it). Drifting into nationalism is not an option for the cinemas of countries like Romania or Ukraine, either: if they are at all to be covered in books published in the West, their only chance is putting up with the "sketchy and patronizing approach" that Haltof identifies.

post-soviet cinema: russia's "imperial fatigue"

At the moment of this writing, the study of Soviet cinema has been more or less reduced to the study of Russian cinema. It is extremely rare to see studies on the cinemas of Belarus, Ukraine, the republics in the Caucasus (Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaidzhan) or the Baltics (Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia). With the occasional exception of symposia on the (now sexy) new filmmaking from the Central Asian republics, the national cinematic traditions of the countries of Russia's "near abroad" exist in a vacuum in Western academia. The Russian (ex-Soviet) specialists are no longer interested in these academic orphans, while the East European ones do not yet know them.

This situation may change with the advent of a new generation of scholars who have now begun specializing in these national traditions—I know of someone who is completing a thesis on Lithuanian cinema; there is a Ukrainian film specialist in Canada; an established American film academic is spending a Fulbright year in Kiev; and a Byelorussian colleague makes occasional appearances at Western events. The Baltic cinemas will soon be covered by colleagues in the Nordic region; the cinema of Moldova will be incorporated within Romania's cinematic history; and the Armenian diaspora will take care of publicizing their traditions, and so on.

Yet, why this rejection of the minoritarian Soviet cinemas by Russianists? Why this shedding off of layers of rich multicultural Soviet dimensions? Why the treatment of the manifold dimensions of Soviet culture as irrelevant and the tenacious deliberations on the Russian core? A possible revealing explanation is, unexpectedly, offered within the University of Pittsburgh's promotional introduction to its 2002 Russian cinematic event, suggestively titled "Imperial Fatigue." Rather than giving up the dynastic-religious empire in favor of a nation-state (like much of Europe did in the early twentieth century), event organizer Vladimir Padunov argues, Russia had perpetuated its imperial state by substituting the "dynastic empire for a socialist one;" many decades were spent in cultivating the newly created colonial space of a multicultural Soviet Union. This is why, Padunov writes, "in the years after the 1991 collapse of the USSR, the critical task facing Russia's leadership was not 'merely' the appropriation of an existing structure. Instead, for the first time in Russia's thousand-year history, the task was to forge a nation-state from the remains of Europe's last multinational empire, the third largest empire in human history."[5]

It sounds plausible: acknowledging its "imperial fatigue," a self-reflexive Russia needs to spend time introspectively meditating over its national identity; one cannot expect it to cater for its colonial outposts. In the past, the Russian heart was so energetic that it sent vibrations onto a range of other smaller cultures and actively practiced

cultural colonisation in regard to the other cinematographies in the Soviet sphere. But now it is tired of these engagements; it wants to emancipate itself and wants to be left alone.[6]

czechoslovak cinema:
"coproductions based on close historical and cultural ties"

While Czechoslovak film history was treated, until recently, as a coherent entity, it is now being broken down into two distinct cinematic cultures; on top of that, it is claimed that this distinction has always been there. Czech and Slovak traditions "co-existed as separate cinemas within a single state from 1945–93," writes Peter Hames, "producing films in different languages but at the same time enjoying major exchanges of personnel."[7]

Writing also in 2004, L'ubica Mistríková notes that today films from the Czechoslovak period can "be found in both Czech and Slovak film encyclopaedias" and, "for the same reasons and criteria," they can also be "deleted from one source or another" (quoted in Hames, *Cinema*, 99).

Discussing one of these disputed classics, Elmar Klos and Ján Kadár's Academy Award–winning *Obchod na korze* (*A Shop on High Street*, 1965), Mistríková calls it "one of the first Czecho-Slovak co-productions." But how can something that is made within the same country be coproduced? Coproductions, by definition, are realized between separate countries. (By the same token, Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1945), should be a Russian-Kazakh coproduction.)

Why is there this urge to present Czech and Slovak cinemas as historically discrete? Isn't the hasty discharge of Slovak cinema from the Czech embrace (an act that, essentially, assigns a juvenile cohort to the status of a fully grown autonomous collaborator), simply a matter of convenience? If Slovak cinema had been the "separate cinema" that it is now declared to be, one that was "coproducing" with the Czechs since the 1960s, why is it that after the split Slovakia is pretty much "the poor relation" (Hames, *Cinema*, 6) and remains continuously dependent on Czech postproduction facilities and a range of other services?

ex-yugoslav cinema:
"proliferation of film historiographic entities to match the various continuously redrawn state boundaries"

In Yugoslavia, cinema was one internally diverse yet integrated national tradition before; nowadays the cinemas of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, and even Montenegro are considered to have functioned as distinct entities. Earlier attempts to write the history of singular "national" cinemas within Yugoslavia were subjects of controversies: a monograph on Croat national cinema from the early 1980s, for example, was attacked as a nationalist piece of writing and was only published toward the end of the decade with the change in climate. But then, later in the 1990s, the "national" approach became the norm, and film historians

in the new countries got engaged in perpetrating a (previously untenable) view on separate national traditions that had happened to coexist within Yugoslavia but had nonetheless been (and remained) distinct. In the 1990s Berlin-based film journalist and Balkan expert Ron Holloway produced special English-language booklets charting the history of Slovene, and then of Macedonian, national cinemas. Extracting its own fraction of the federal cinematic legacy, each one of the newly emancipated countries from former Yugoslavia published its own history of cinema.[8]

Yet Serbian cinema remains the best known, and dominates in a situation where the center often does not know or particularly care about the cinemas from what it perceives as its periphery. The Belgrade Cinematheque produced a compilation videotape carving one hundred years of "Serbian cinema" out of the ex-Yugoslav state structures.

It is in this context that film historian Natasa Durovicova described the process in former Yugoslavia as a "proliferation of new film-historiographic entities to match the various continuously redrawn state boundaries," aiming to establish a new, principally Serbian, (Croat, Bosnian, etc.) canon as well as a set of distinct "national" aesthetic criteria. She compared it to the publication of the *One Hundred Years of Slovak Film History* volume that had appeared in late 1990s in Bratislava, "figuring for a 100-year continuity where none existed 10 years ago (apart form Czechoslovakia)."[9]

cinema of the german democratic republic: europe's "secret enlargement"

During the Cold War, and for about forty years, the culture of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) was an integral part of the culture of the Eastern Bloc; its cinema was closely linked with those of the other East European countries in all aspects of ideology and style. GDR cinema was regularly included in the study of East European cinema. Yet as soon as East Germany "returned" to Europe (in what George Schöpflin described as Europe's "secret enlargement") its culture vanished from all East European conceptual contexts. Less than a decade after the reunification, the cinema of the GDR was no longer part of East Central European film studies; a picture of a unified German cinema was promptly stitched together.

First was the extrication of the GDR from East European frameworks and its amalgamation into Germany, a new context in which the GDR effectively disappeared and was no longer spoken about as a separate entity. The 1995 *Encyclopedia of European Cinema* entry for "Germany," for example, refers to occasional East German films in the context of the general German narrative but does not mark out GDR cinema as a sovereign film tradition. *The BFI Companion to German Cinema* (1999) further carves out GDR film from the Eastern Bloc and incorporates it into Germany proper.[10] Speaking on East European cinema in the 1960s

at the *Berlinale* 2002 retrospective, film historian Hans-Joachim Schlegel did not make a single reference to GDR cinema (it was not the subject of his talk, he claimed), thus ignoring the intense exchanges that defined the output of the DEFA during the period. The new BFI *German Cinema Book* (2003) was criticized for including too little on East Germany.[11]

Effectively, this meant deleting an important dimension of cultural history: many of the GDR developments had closely followed the logic of events in the Soviet sphere and not the internal East-West German logic (which set the new framework). Even though the traumatic internal split of Germany is a key element in understanding both East and West Germany, in the case of the GDR the Eastern Bloc aspect was an equally important formative factor, as the GDR's entire nation-building efforts evolved around the idea that the new country would act as a showcase for the bloc at large.

The concern over these knotty historical scaffolds is best articulated in Katie Trumpener's essay "Moving Germany into Eastern Europe" (little seen outside Germanist circles), which insisted that ignoring the East European context of DEFA cinema "may have important intellectual consequences."[12]

The East European attachment of the DEFA, Trumpener stressed, had not only political but also important stylistic aspects: it was the other cinemas of the Eastern Bloc—"particularly those of Poland, Hungary, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia"—that, "having led the way in aesthetic experiment and political debate," had "captured the interest and attention of the world." In this context, DEFA "looked for the most part politically and aesthetically orthodox" ("DEFA," 95). This view was echoed by German cinema specialist Eric Rentschler, who described DEFA cinema (during the 2003 DEFA summer school at Smith College in Massachusetts) as "bland" in comparison with these other film traditions.

Given that many Germanists "hardly could have followed Eastern European film history very closely" ("DEFA," 100), there is a drive among Germanists (primarily those involved with the Amherst-based DEFA Film Library) to reinstate the attention to GDR cinema's East European context, to reintegrate East Germany with its defining East European historicocultural geopolitical context.[13]

sanctioned national cinemas: a *causa perduta*?

All examples discussed here represent, in one way or another, an enhancement of "the national" framework: from the "disappearance" of the GDR via its amalgamation into the larger German structure to the segmentation into small national traditions in the case of the Yugoslav breakups. But this is happening in a context that makes it all irrelevant: the moment is one where wider national cinematic borders collapse to give way to

increasingly trans- and supranational trends. Isn't committing to new national frameworks today a *causa perduta*?

Exploring the ways international cinema is taught in the West, Dudley Andrew identifies the insistence on "sanctioned national cinemas" as one of the points in need of some more scrutiny. Why do we still operate from a presupposed notion that equates nation with homogeneity? he asks. The very idea of national cinema is in flux; and we are witnessing a shift of conception whereby we must acknowledge the "constitution of films as objects made and distributed in an increasingly global manner." Books and courses may still continue to cover singular national cinematic traditions, he noted, yet "our students should be encouraged to examine films and nations in contexts of varied size and scope" and pursue a "wider conception of national image culture" that "insist[s] upon the centrifugal dynamic of images, yet without surrendering the special cohesion that films bring to specific cultures" and include concepts like "rooted cosmopolitanism" and "critical regionalism."[14]

regionalism as marginalism

From early on in the 1990s it was clear that the unifying and superficially homogeneous notion of "the other Europe" would no longer work; the cultural space of the Eastern Bloc was to be broken apart. One of the common courses of action taken was the reduction to discrete national cultures. The other path was to cultivate regional groupings; three new cultural subdivisions—the former Soviet Union, Central Europe and the Balkan states—grew out of this discourse, with the former Soviet Union further broken down into Russia and "near abroad" (this latter is still undergoing restructuring).[15] Some of the former East Europeans became Central Europeans (and, more recently, surfaced as "new Europeans") while others were relegated to the Balkan periphery; specific cultural connotations came into play for each one of these spheres. Approaches from sociology and cultural studies were deployed in the process of this reconceptualization, often used without overt illumination of the underlying ideological motivation of the undertaking.

During the Cold War the conceptualization of Europe had been linked to distinct economic and political structures; and East-West divisions had prevailed. In the 1990s, the previously irrelevant tagging of "North" and "South" came across as better suited for the postcommunist era; it was applied to the region in a quiet consensus, with all the characteristics of the orderly, well-to-do and affluent "North" preserved for Central Europe, then juxtaposed to the disorderly, chaotic and poor "South" of the Balkans.[16] Postcolonial-type frameworks, referencing dependencies on previously active empires, came into the picture and became directly relevant. In the aftermath of the Soviet empire, earlier

cultural kinships were called to the stage. New subdivisions were now defined by the cultural links to former empires; based on the unspoken premise of previous alignments, a new structure came into play and the remnants of the Russian/Soviet Empire were juxtaposed with two other spheres defined by the denominator of former colonial dependencies (the Hapsburg Empire for Central Europe and the Ottoman for the Balkans).

The concept of Central Europe had been actively cultivated throughout the 1980s and by the time of the post-Soviet emancipation it had already grown into an established notion, even though it was clear that the concept was of speculative nature and defined more by benevolent perception rather than by a concrete set of exchanges in the area of cultural production.

The countries of the Balkans, respectively, were encouraged to conceptualize themselves together as well. This resulted in real exchanges: film production alliances and various networks and events fostered the growth of a Balkan cultural realm; and today intellectuals in these countries are not only avidly interested in each other but are also willing to collaborate. A new concept of Balkan cinema, juxtaposed with the concept of Central European cinema, is coming into being; unthinkable until recently, this new cultural geopolitics insists that the cinemas of Greece and Turkey pair comfortably with the historical exploration of the cinemas of Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

All these conceptual transformations result in more or less recognized conventions for the regional assemblage of national cultural traditions into groups for the purpose of their study. But doesn't this "grouping of countries according to certain assumed identities" mean routine marginalization, as Peter Hames alleges?

"It is noticeable," Hames writes, "that in film encyclopaedias, most English language and West European cinemas find themselves written about individually, as 'national' cinemas while much of the rest of the world finds itself appearing under 'regional' categories. The concept of a regional cinema more often than not embodies a process of marginalisation with respect to cultures perceived as minor" (*Cinema*, 4).

Yet, provided that the only alternative to regionalism seems to be the drift into nationalism, one wonders what can actually be done to counter this marginalization. Hames is quite right in his remark that the cultures of Central and Eastern Europe are regularly "presented as an undifferentiated 'other' and tend to be marginalised or ignored" (*Cinema*, 10); yet he makes his claim in the context of a volume on Central European regional cinema that he has agreed to edit. Similarly, I may have comparable doubts and reservations about the groupings in the Balkan region, yet I have entered into a contract to edit a *Balkan Cinema* volume within the same series.[17] Ironically, the only way to comment publicly on these

awkward cultural groupings is to work from within the same perpetually problematic national and regional categories.

It is a situation of "take it or leave it," where I believe "take it" to be the right choice; if we look for consistency in the way decisions are made in regard to the categories for the study of world cinema, we will not get very far.[18] On one side the cinema of cultural conglomerates like India is treated, albeit provisionally, as a singular national tradition, while on the other subjugated traditions are elevated to the status of "national" cinemas (Scotland, Québec). It is an interesting situation in which people like us, concerned with the marginalization of minoritarian and peripheral cinemas, have no other choice but to accept regionalism (even if it is in the hope of having the chance to act subversively and critically) and perpetuate it.

geopolitics, transnational historiography, and academia: jerky maps, stiff timeframes

In their now classical book on East European cinema, Antonín and Mira Liehm name the presence of "a nationalised film industry" as the main criterion for including various film traditions in their consideration. They acknowledge the "inexactness" of the term *Eastern Europe*, yet they use it to "signify the countries in that part of the world which found themselves within the Soviet sphere of influence after World War II." At the same time, they bring into play yet another, more geographically specific dimension—a map on which a straight vertical line just east of Moscow cuts off the rest of the Soviet Union—that effectively rules over decisions on what belongs and what does not, what must be considered and what can be left out. It is due to this line on the map, they specify, that they do not include "important film-producing republics" like Soviet Georgia in their consideration, because they lie "to the east of the map border."[19]

In other instances, the maps have not been applied as rigidly, yet there seems to have been an equally stiff timeline that has applied to issues of belonging. Like the Liehms's book, the 2000 *BFI Companion* does not include (nor explain the absence of) an entry on Georgia. But there are entries on Georgian filmmakers like Tengiz Abuladze, Lana Gogoberidze, and Irakliy Kvirikadze, and even on Otar Ioseliani (who has been based in Paris since 1984). Evidently, Georgians are deemed to "fit in" even if only up to a point; and the decision on belonging seems to be determined not by a country's location within or beyond Europe's geographical borders but by changing temporal frameworks, flexibly adjusted on the basis of the perceived degree of allegiance to Russia. (There isn't an entry on renowned Lithuanian director Sharunas Bartas [b. 1964], for example, yet there is an entry on Lithuanian actress Ingeborga Dapkunaite [b. 1963], who, before emigrating to the West, played in several Russian films.)

Listing knotty inconsistencies and identifying instances where topo-temporal criteria are announced and then twisted almost immediately can go on for quite a while, but the point to be made is that we need to grow conscious that varying boundaries in space and time do indeed encompass intertwined mutability, and if we want to practice historiography competently we need to find a way to keep the interrelation of time and space into account in some more supple way than we do at present.

I believe it is particularly important to articulate such need, because beyond "Eastern Europe" (which, albeit with difficulty, can more or less be geographically and temporally defined) there is a whole universe of cultural relations, the conceptualization and the study of which escapes us almost completely for the time being. We do not even touch on the uneasy questions about the position of Cuban cinema, for example, or the film traditions of communist Vietnam or North Korea, both of which sit uncomfortably in their respective local surroundings.[20] The way things stand at the moment, I wonder when (and if) there will ever be a chance to widen the narrow scope of our current studies and find ways of recognising the fluid connectedness of places that are not located next to each other and of points in time that are not strictly chronological.

If distribution circuits were studied historically in such more fluid and dynamic manner, for example, one would be clear today that the pattern of cultural consumption that was linked to the Eastern Bloc was considerably more wide-ranging than commonly perceived (from the Soviet center to the peripheries). Due to the then active distribution networks comprised of non-Western countries (China, India, the Soviet Union, and a range of quasi state socialist countries in Latin America and Asia, as well as newly independent countries in Africa), films produced in Eastern Europe were granted a much wider international exposure than it is generally remembered today. This scheme of thriving exchanges also included an intense trade in entertainment products, where East European–made films of mass appeal (comedies, action-adventure films, Westerns, spy movies, and crime series) circulated widely and created a jolly universe of undemanding popular distractions. All this was taking place in a geopolitical context, the study of which has been suppressed and diminished to such an extent that present day manifestations of consumption patterns linked to these past cultural realities (like the *Ostalgie* phenomenon in Germany, for example) come across as bewildering and puzzling, and are often overlooked or misunderstood. Ostalgie can be translated as 'Eastalgia' (Ost is German for East); it is the nostalgia for all things East German (e.g., films, fashion, locations), which developed as a major cultural trend in Germany in the second half of the 1990s after the German reunification (Wende). The best-known 'Ostalgie' films include

Leander Haussmann's *Sonnenallee* (*Sun Alley*, 1999) and Wolfgang Becker's *Good-bye, Lenin* (2003).

A rich aspect of present-day cinema that remains obscured because of the unyielding patterns in the exploration of the Eastern Bloc's cultural dynamics is the neglect of the influences that passed from the cinemas of the Second World to those of the Third. An elaborate and intense system of international education operated across the Soviet Bloc; it functioned as the basic tool for forging cultural and economic links with the former colonial countries and became a tested mechanism for reinforcing desirable geopolitical influences. As far as cinema is concerned, Eastern Europe's film schools were alma maters to a significant number of today's leading filmmakers from various African, Asian, and Latin American countries. If one looks closer at the work of these filmmakers today, one would recognize in surprise their East bloc schooling, thus opening up interesting pathways of exploring the specifics of their style, narrative and intertextuality.

The loss of consciousness about these quasi-global dimensions of the Second World's system of cultural production and circulation worries one particularly today, when we work in classrooms full of students too young to know what "Cold War" meant and how 1989 can possibly matter.

Multiple dimensions of previously active cultural barters have become extinct from cultural memory and are treated today as nothing more than curious anecdotes. When I speak, for example, of Raj Kapoor's *Mera Naam Joker* (*My Name is Joker*, 1970)—an autobiographical film in which this quintessential icon of Hindi cinema falls in love with a Russian circus actress and dreams of emigrating to the Soviet Union—and use the reference to the film to bring up issues of the intense but neglected cultural exchanges between the Soviet Bloc countries and India, it is all perceived as if I am pointing at an anecdote rather than at a possible sphere for disciplined research. Again, my mention of the complex and intricate relations with China come across as anecdotal evidence when I say that a number of Albanian films are available today on VHS and even DVD over the Internet—only you find them from Chinese online distributors, with subtitles in Mandarin. And yet again, in the absence of established historiography frameworks, the fact that the Yugoslav partisan film *Valter brani Sarajevo* (*Walter Defends Sarajevo*, 1971, dir. Hajrudin Krvavac)—which in its time was sold to sixty countries—came to be fanatically adored in China where it is still one of the most popular films of all times,[21] remains yet another example of exotic yarn.

Acknowledging the multifacetous dynamism of these exchanges and engaging in studying them as something more than singular idiosyncrasies is of essential importance for the robust reconstruction

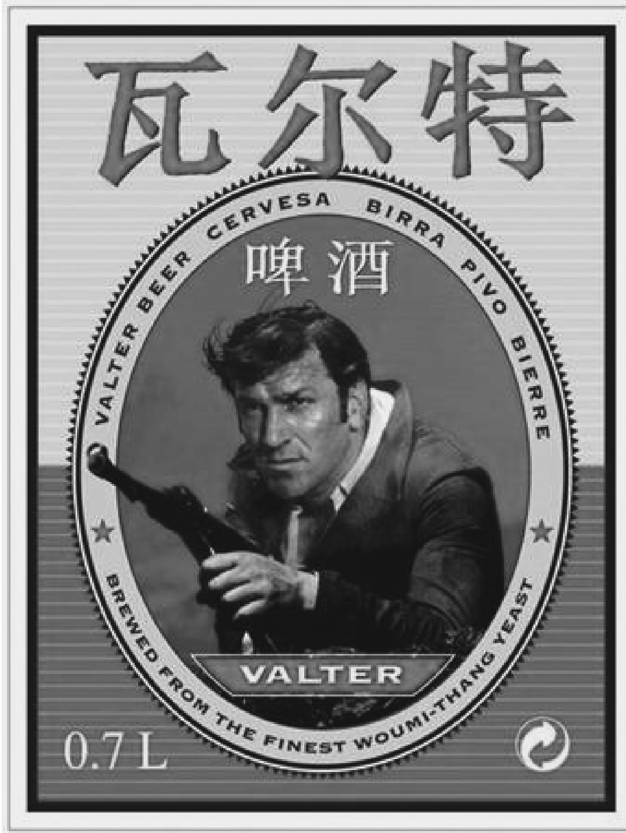

Figure 15.1

Exotic yarn or significant aspect of cultural trade: Veteran actor Velimir "Bata" Živojinovic pictured on the label of this Chinese beer brand, named after the Yugoslav 1971 partisan chartbuster Walter Defends Sarajevo.

of a richer and more truthful picture of the wider circuit of cultural interactions that span far beyond the clear-cut lines of contacts that we are satisfied exploring today. Yet, while the focus of concern is only on the East-West relations and while all these other directions remain ignored, we are robbed of all the rich multidimensionality and are not able to recognize influences that may have come from anywhere else but the West. The result is a one-sided exploit, turning the practice of transnational historiography away from being accurate and truly proficient.

writing east europe's film history: anthropology of academic survival

I made the acquaintance of the editor of this volume, Anikó Imre, after I came across her claim that East European scholarship had remained

insensitive to general developments in film theory and cultural studies and was making no use of the frameworks found within the discourses on postmodernism, postcolonialism, globalization, feminism, and queer studies.[22] I not only agreed with these assertions but had also spent a number of years trying to figure out why this was the case. Today I still do not have the full answer, but I believe one of the key reasons for the anachronistic feel that often permeates the research into East European culture has something to do with the set-up of the respective language departments and area studies centers in the West.

It is a big and complex issue; I do not have the space to tackle it properly here. Yet I need to point at some aspects that I consider detrimental to the chances of East European cultural studies coming closer to up-to-date scholarship. During the Cold War the nations within the Soviet Bloc were dominated by the Russians; it was an imperial configuration that came to an end in 1989 (but not in Slavic departments and area studies centers in the West). While in the real world paths parted, research in Western academic units remained dominated by scholarship that was generated by the Cold War set-up and kept reproducing itself rather than hooking up with the new trends and concerns that had come to preside over academia at large. Many Slavic studies academics had shared an entrenched yet never publicly recognized disdain for the "brotherly" nations of the Third World that they had to tolerate within the Soviet sphere. The aftermath of 1989 finally allowed them to turn their backs on the subaltern periphery, so they failed to notice that innovation in the humanities was ultimately coming into Western academia mostly from these vibrant peripheries (via anthropology; postcoloniality; and gender, queer, migration, and diaspora studies). Nowadays the majority of Slavic studies departments struggle to attract students and yet remain archaically fixated on the customary nineteenth-century Russian literature diet with small-sized West Slavic programs (Polish, Czech) coexisting in a downcast position, and with an occasional Hungarian or Serbian thrown in.

The former centers for Soviet and East European studies have now been renamed by all sorts of euphemisms, often avoiding a mention of Russia while factually mostly engaged with the study of what is officially not identified in the title. They either linger in living with the ghosts of anticommunism or are committed to corporate-dictated research agendas and actively seek out projects sponsored by big business or the military. The peripheral position in which studies of the smaller cultures in the region are continuously confined is tolerated by the respective academics, who simply have no other choice. Provided they are not yet integrated into the European studies framework, those whose research is on the smaller Slavic-language cultures fear extinction if they do not stick to the safe shoulder of the big Russian brother.

In such a set-up the omission of Ukraine or of whole range of other national cinemas from a film studies guide is an offence so minor that it is not even noticed.

It is not that the situation will change very much once, in the "new Europe," the cultures of Eastern Europe get integrated into the European studies arena: academics engaged in research of the Eastern peripheries will go on hanging about in the same tangential ranks, only now they will have to learn that French culture specialists are entitled to speak of "Europe" even though they may not know anything beyond France, while Polish or Czech specialists are only sanctioned to talk about their small corner of the woods.

Nonetheless, there is hope that, by making a quiet shift toward the new European context and shedding off past Soviet legacies, countries like Hungary or Romania will disappear from their former context by withdrawing one after another individually, like the GDR, which vanished much earlier; no matter that, on the way, one would need to live through deprecating exercises like "being rediscovered" and treated as if one has come into existence yesterday (asserted by all sorts of situations where one is described as "emerging" or "nascent"). In order to join Europe one needs to first disappear from the Cold War set-ups and then reemerge and let oneself be discovered.[23]

If one turns to scholarly publishing, it is difficult to say what would be the situation with publishers if the academic set-up allowed for a better and more meaningful yield. It is possible that if there were vibrant output in cultural studies in relation to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, more and better publishers would be on board. It is a chicken-and-egg kind of codependency. Each one of us can tell stories of making the rounds with publishers who keep turning us away due to the perceived unsexiness (and thus lack of market appeal) of no matter what valuable writings we, East Europeanists, may have produced. In the rare instances when editors get interested in our projects, it is time and again they who dictate the framework for research based on their (often biased and discriminatory) ideas of what would sell in a marketplace that they claim to have a grasp of. It is ultimately the publishers and not the scholars who make the decisions of what in cinematic history deserves to be covered as a single national tradition, and what should be included in whatever type of regionalist grouping.

Who am I, however, to call for a dynamic topo-temporal exploration of cultural history and, on top of it, to make all these arrogant statements? Why did I open this essay by speaking of "damaging distortions" that "gallop through the emerging templates of rushed historiography"? Am I forgetful about the old saying, "There is no history but only historians"?

Born and bred in Bulgaria, I spent nearly thirty years of my life behind the Iron Curtain, trying to be as open to the West as possible (which meant taking yearly trips to the westernmost destination accessible to us, East Berlin). Back then we loathed the Russians for all their controlling interference; yet today I know that most of the individual representatives of the oppressor have never been really aware of the extent the Soviet rule was affecting us, so I am happy to drop any claims and let them withdraw in their "imperial fatigue." Back then we cherished the West, yet today, after many years in emigration, I know just how much of the appealing image that was projected to us had been downright propaganda. I since found my Balkan identity in the process of the realization that as a Bulgarian being rejected by snooty Central Europeans who were now busily rediscovering their "European-ness," not the least by denunciating my fellow citizens from Southeast Europe as insufficiently civilized, helped me find and recognize my true self. I should also confess in occasionally feeling nostalgic for the Eastern Bloc—not because I want it returned, but because it is gone and I cannot bear seeing the best years of my life invalidated in the context of prejudiced and sweeping negative generalizations, which dominate the current depiction of the period.

This whole examination is, therefore, a self-reflexive one. Operating from within a marginal and restricted academic context, having had to struggle to get out of the intellectual periphery and to overcome the tyranny of publishers by using whatever means appeared acceptable, I admit to having helped perpetuate some of the historiographic clichés that I now subject to critical scrutiny. I organized my writing around the "regional" perspective on Balkan and Central European cinema in more than one book, and, even though I am likely to continue working within the same nation-transcending framework, I am conscious that my original move to adopting the "regional" may well have been because I wanted to see my books published.[24] I gave talks in various politically loaded contexts that I did not particularly believe in (e.g. on Bosnian cinema and on Serbian cinema as if these were different traditions within what used to be the cinema of Yugoslavia). I proposed to break apart Czech and Slovak cinemas in the *Companion* I edited; I kept quiet over the extrication of East German cinema out of its East European context; I did not even notice the fact that former Soviet republics were left out and completely forgotten—all things that I am culpable and concurrently critical about today. At the end of the day, I am an academic survivor (and a successful one at that). It is not possible to be fully free from ideology; the least I can do is acknowledge where I am coming from and allow my bias to be taken into account when judging the opinions that I committed to paper in this essay.

notes

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endnotes

1. Ginette Vincendeau, ed., Encyclopaedia of European Cinema (London: Cassell/British Film Institute, 1995).
2. An even more important realization that I recently arrived at in the aftermath of this occurrence is that, even though the Companion was widely reviewed in the academic press, not a single reviewer actually noticed (or made remarks about) the absence of these national entries.
3. Richard Taylor, Julian Graffy, Nancy Wood, and Dina Iordanova, eds., BFI's Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema (London: British Film Institute, 2000).
4. Marek Haltof, "Review of BFI's Companion to East European and Russian Cinema," Canadian Slavonic Papers 43, nos. 2–3 (2001): 381.
5. Vladimir Padunov, Russian Film Symposium: Global Amnesia and Imperial Fatigue, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 2002, available online at http://www.rusfilm.pitt.edu/2002/if1/index.html.
6. Could this be the reason why the paradigm of postcolonial studies is not really being picked up in the context of Slavic cultural studies? In a typical postcolonial studies set-up the self-critical participation of the colonizer plays an essential part for the whole discourse.
7. Peter Hames, introduction to The Cinema of Central Europe, ed. Peter Hames (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 6; hereafter cited in the text as Cinema.
8. Newly emancipated Macedonia, for example, a country which has only about fifty feature films on its national roster, published several volumes of national film history; the Cinematheque in Skopje launched a project to put out a tome for each and every feature film made there, and at least four of these were already published by 2000. A leading American academic tells me he recently received a huge volume (described as "self-congratulatory" and "too heavy to lift") about the 1994 Macedonian blockbuster Pred dozhot (Before the Rain, dir. Milcho Manchevski) put out by the Skopje Art Museum.
9. Durovicova pointed out that it may be worthwhile looking at the rhetorical strategies used to establish a Serbian (Croat, Bosnian etc.) canon as well as a set of distinct "national" aesthetic criteria (Durovicova, personal communication, March 2003).

10. Thomas Elsaesser with Michael Wedel, eds., The BFI Companion to German Cinema (London: British Film Institute, 1999).
11. Timothy Bergfelder, Erica Carter, and Deniz Göktürk, eds., The German Cinema Book (London: British Film Institute, 2003).
12. Katie Trumpener, "DEFA: Moving Germany into Eastern Europe," in: Moving Images of Eastern Germany: The Past and Future of DEFA Film, ed. Bartion Byg and B. Betheny Moore (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies and Johns Hopkins University Press, 85–104; hereafter cited parenthetically as "DEFA."
13. The trend can be seen to evolve through a series of publications that focus on the cinema of East Germany, such as Sean Allan and John Sandford, eds., DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946–1992 (New York: Berghahn, 1996); Joshua Feinstein, The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949–1989 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Leonie Naughton, That Was the Wild East: Film Culture, Unification, and the "New" Germany (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); and Daniela Berghahn, Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).
14. Dudley Andrew, "Dialects and Dialectics of Cinema in the World," keynote address at the World Cinema Conference, University of Leeds, July 2002, 2.
15. Maria Todorova (Imagining the Balkans, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 140, notes, "The vanishing of the bipolar world after 1989 saw a nervous search for more appropriate categories for the organisation of academic and journalistic knowledge." In a chapter titled "Between Classification and Politics: The Balkans and the Myth of Central Europe," Todorova offers one of the best explorations of the evolution of the culturist transformation discourse and discusses in detail the evolution in the rhetoric used to provide intellectual justification for the politically sensitive tripartite division into the former Soviet Union, Central Europe, and Balkan spheres.
16. Stuart Hall, "European Cinema on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown," in Screening Europe: Image and Identity in Contemporary European Cinema, ed. Duncan Petrie (London: British Film Institute, 1992), 46, notes, "At the same moment as the east-west barrier, which seemed to give 'true Europeans' a sense of who they were, begins to fray and disintegrate, the north-south meridian begins to advance on Europe from the other side."
17. Dina Iordanova, ed., Cinema of the Balkans (London: Wallflower, 2005).
18. It was my intention to scrutinize, as part of my commentary on regionalism as marginalization, the organizing principles of regionalist groupings used for Eastern Europe in some of the key publications on world cinema. For example, Vincendeau, ed., The Encyclopaedia of European Cinema uses the category of "Central and Eastern Europe," which includes Albanian, Bulgarian, Czech/Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, and (former) Yugoslavian entries. It then has separate subdivisions for Greece, Germany (with the GDR incorporated), and the (former) Soviet Union. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, eds., The Oxford Guide to Film Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), has a general overview article on Eastern Europe, but the examples are restricted to those

of Czechoslovakia and Poland; Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ed., The Oxford History of World Cinema (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), covers "Central Europe" (which includes Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia), while the authoritative Gian Piero Brunetta, ed., Storia del cinema mondiale [History of World Cinema] (Turin: Einaudi), vol. 3, part 2, has only national coverage where countries like Albania, Bulgaria, the GDR or Romania appear in alphabetical order (and where Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia are still covered within one article). No publication of this range gives autonomous coverage to any of the former Soviet republics.

I have moved these observations here to the notes, however, as I no longer believe that scrutinizing editorial decisions on regionalist groupings reveals something new. The editors work within the framework that is given to them by the publishers in a context where preapproved word length and page count often matter most. The editors then work in consultation with "regional" specialists who have to supply the information in the fixed format; editing a world cinema dictionary or a similar project is ultimately an uninspiring and lackluster process of upholding the status quo of (often uncritical) historiography.

19. Mira Liehm and Antonin Liehm, The Most Important Art: Soviet and East European Film after 1945 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 2, 3, 7.
20. The preface to a recent collection of essays supposed to cover the cinemas of Japan and Korea, for example, does not even mention the existence of North Korea (nor does the collection include a single film from there), because, according to the compiler, "a simple geographic grouping is an insufficient justification" for inclusion; see Justin Bowyer, ed., Cinema of Japan and Korea (London: Wallflower, 2004), 7. I thought this was an oversight and, as a member of the international advisory board of the series, tried to bring it to the attention of the publisher, to hear in response that the exclusion of North Korea had been "discussed at length with the editor and also with the two expert readers of the volume" and that "it was felt that this was fine as the actual essays, if not the introduction explicitly, did incorporate sufficient mention of North Korea." Yoram Allon, personal correspondence with the author, May 2004. I should admit I think such logic to be flawed. (If transposed to another context, for example, one could say that if a book on Middle Eastern cinema did not mention the existence of Israel it would still be okay because clearly there would be enough mention of it in the actual essays on Arab films.)
21. Rada Šešić, "Valter Defends Sarajevo," in Cinema of the Balkans, ed. Dina Iordanova (London: Wallflower, 2006).
22. Anikó Imre, "White Man, White Mask: Mephisto Meets Venus," Screen 40, no. 4 (1999): 406.
23. John Cunningham, Hungarian Cinema: From Coffee House to Multiplex (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 1, ridicules the "joining Europe" rhetoric: If Hungary is only now "joining Europe," he notes, one wonders where the country has been before.
24. See Dina Iordanova, Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media (London: British Film Institute, 2001); Dina Iordanova, Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film (London: Wallflower, 2003); and Dina Iordanova, ed., Cinema of the Balkans (London: Wallflower, 2005). In Cinema of the Balkans I identify a range of stylistic and thematic affinities that lay the ground for the

conceptualization of Balkan cinema as one dynamic entity. In Cinema of the Other Europe I insist that certain sensibilities and features of Central European cinema can be seen only if we look at the "forest" (region) and not at the individual "trees" (nations). In Cinema of Flames I argue that the Balkans should be considered together because they are marginalized, misrepresented, and vilified by the West in their totality (and not as individual countries).

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