Introduction

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In the early autumn of 1989, citizens of the German Democratic Republic began to make the long journey that was to take them first to Prague and then via Hungary to just outside Austria, where they were allowed to pass across the newly opened border to what was then known as the "West." While the border between Hungary and Austria had been dismantled in May, and Solidarity had won in the Polish elections in June, it was the September flood of East Germans to the West that marked the decisive breach in the "Iron Curtain." Successively, Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania rejected the authoritarian governments that had ruled since the late 1940s. In late 1991, the USSR itself formally disbanded. The breakup of Yugoslavia, which was not, of course, part of the Soviet bloc, began in June of the same year.

The complex changes that have since taken place in the area have been considered in a variety of economic, political, and sociological analyses. However, there has been relatively little attention paid to the cultural realm, and cinema, which had played such a dramatic role in past decades, has found itself largely ignored in the worlds of international and comparative film studies. In the absence of such discussion, this volume provides analysis of eight of the former "Communist" countries, and considers structural, thematic, and aesthetic change within the context of globalization.

Of course, one can have extensive arguments about the definition of Eastern Europe, to say nothing of Central Europe and the Balkans. Using conventional definitions, it can be argued that the focus of this book is on the Central European countries of Hungary, Poland, the former Czechoslovakia (Czech Republic, Slovakia), and the former East Germany, the Balkan countries of Bulgaria, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro), and the Eastern European

country of Ukraine. Together, they make up what in the Cold War period was symbolically designated as "Eastern" Europe—a category still employed by the popular media and by many politicians. But, of course, many of these countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) are already part of the European Union. It would be true to say that all of them, including Ukraine and Serbia, see their futures in "Western" terms.

In a recent collection of literary essays, with contributions from both "Western" and "Eastern" European countries, the editor, Ursula Keller noted contributors' constant reference to Europe "as a mosaic, network, fabric, narrative, an open, porous, and self transforming context."[1] While noticing the tensions within this unity in diversity, she urged the recognition of "the many voices of European culture as sources of energy." Indeed, as the Hungarian director István Szabó has pointed out, without this variety of expression, people will lose their identity and culture, with dangerous and unpredictable consequences.[2]

The countries that we are considering experienced around forty years (and for Ukraine, seventy years) of what passed for Communism. With more than two decades now having passed since the beginning of the fall in 1989, it is clear that, for many, this period could soon be consigned to the museum, and, indeed, it is a period that is already being mythologized in various ways. It will be absorbed in a variety of national histories, while the economic imperatives of the present will focus attention much more on global culture in the widest sense of the term.

The cinemas of these countries, which, in most cases, also have a pre-Communist history, have, at various times, found themselves at the forefront of cinematic attention. In the 1950s, the international film community took note of the Polish school and the films of Andrzej Wajda, Wojciech Has, and Andrzej Munk, and in the 1960s, it was the turn of the Czechs and Hungarians—Miloš Forman, Jiří Menzel, István Szabó, Miklós Jancsó, and many more. In the 1980s, Emir Kusturica emerged in Yugoslavia, and Krzysztof Kieślowski of Poland headed the pantheon of "art" film directors in the late 1980s and early 1990s. If others, such as the Bulgarian Ranghel Vulchanov, the Romanian Lucian Pintilie, or the Slovak Dušan Hanák, are less known, it is not from lack of talent. Perhaps the only internationally known post-Communist auteur of similar standing is Hungarian Béla Tarr, but his characteristically demanding cinema inevitably restricts his audience appeal.

Despite the harnessing of cinema to the service of the state in the Communist period, it is clear that the nationalized system often allowed filmmakers to produce bodies of work in which cinema was also recognized as an art form. Similarly, filmmakers frequently acquired the means to challenge the system. Sometimes, the cinema operated under conditions of relative freedom, while at others—under Stalinism in the 1950s, after the Hungarian revolution of 1956, in Czechoslovakia after the Prague Spring of 1968, in Poland after martial law in 1981—it was initially constrained and silenced. But it is clear that a body

of aesthetically sophisticated, politically relevant, and entertaining films was produced throughout the period. The aesthetic, historical, and political importance of these films can certainly be said to equal those of Western Europe.

But if one is to read the standard texts of film studies, the significance of the films is barely recognized. To some extent, this is a relatively new development. In the 1950s, the 1960s, and, to some extent, the 1970s, these cinemas were much better known than is currently the case. Unfortunately, the past thirty years have been much less generous, and a generation of critics and audiences have grown up for whom the cinemas of Eastern Europe are very much unknown territory. It is worth perhaps recalling that without the work of the Eastern European film schools, there would have been no *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Miloš Forman, 1975), *Chinatown* (Roman Polański, 1974), *Mephisto* (István Szabó, 1981), or *Three Colours Trilogy* (Krysztof Kieślowski, 1993–1994)—and, in the field of cinematography, no Miroslav Ondříček (*If . . .* , 1969; *Amadeus*, 1983), László Kovács (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 1977), or Vilmos Zsigmond (*Deliverance*, 1972)—and that is to name but a few. As the libraries of on-demand downloads and DVDs continue to expand, there will be much to discover.

However, as the cinemas have moved into the free market, they have faced a number of dilemmas. At different times, and in different ways, the nationalized systems have collapsed and the numbers of cinemas and audience sizes have been drastically reduced. The era of cultural globalization has arrived, signaling the dominance of English-language (mainly U.S.) cinema. However, the notion that the degree of such domination is a response to public demand is highly questionable.

All of the countries, including even a relatively large nation such as Poland, have film markets too small to sustain the increased costs of film production, and they have become dependent on a number of strategies for survival. In the absence of direct government support, financial backing has come in the form of greater or smaller levels of government grants, support from publicly funded television stations, and levies raised from the exhibition sector. Hence, the countries of the former Eastern Europe do not differ from those of the European community, all of which signed up for the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) Convention for Cultural Diversity in June 2005. Basically, the convention would recognize that cultural works—books, films, plays, and so forth—have a dual nature, both cultural and economic, and that individual countries should have the right to develop independent policies to sustain their cultural industries. U.S. opposition to the convention is based on the notion that UNESCO is "interfering" with matters of trade.

The need for public support does not mean that there are not substantial audiences for locally produced films. Polish and Hungarian epics have fared well with national audiences, while the ironic tragicomedies of Jan Svěrák and Jan Hřebejk, including Svěrák's *Kolja* (*Kolya*, 1996), noteworthy for having

won the best foreign-language film Oscar,[3] have succeeded in the Czech Republic. While it is normal for U.S. films to predominate in the box office top ten throughout Europe, Andrew Horton points out in Chapter 8 that in Yugoslavia and Serbia today, there are normally four locally produced films in the top ten (and the same is true of the Czech Republic). A number of countries, notably the Czech Republic, Romania, and Hungary, have become centers for international production. Anthony Minghella's *Cold Mountain* (2003) restaged the American Civil War in Romania, Szabó's *Being Julia* (2004) re-created prewar Britain in Budapest, and Polański's *Oliver Twist* (2005) constructed Dickensian London in Prague. But despite the large numbers of local creative talent involved, one would still have to regard these films, with their English-language scripts and actors, as "culturally American" or "culturally British." What they most resemble, of course, is the kind of cultural interactions characteristic of classical Hollywood. The increased tendency for these films to involve local coproduction interests suggests a clear recognition that English-language production provides the only significant path to the international market.

But what of the need for national cinemas and cultures already identified? It is essential to sustain these within the local communities, and it is also important that international audiences have the opportunity to experience other cultures. The control of exhibition and distribution by interests solely concerned with profit threatens to produce a homogenization of culture that would all but eliminate the variety of expression, cultural interaction, and debate that so many feel is vital to the European project. Already, it is the European norm for exhibition and distribution to be divided into U.S. and "national" sectors, with other European countries receiving marginal distribution (in the United Kingdom and Ireland in 2004, "the rest of the world" constituted only 2.7 percent of the market).[4] However, while opportunities to experience the variety of European culture may remain few in the centralized world of the multiplex and in the fake multiplicity of digital television, DVD sales have indicated a grassroots interest in more diversified products.

In the post-Communist world, awareness of Eastern European cinema has further declined. The Oscar for Jan Svěrák's Czech production *Kolya* remains an isolated instance, and, while auteurs such as Béla Tarr and Jan Švankmajer have achieved international recognition, their audiences are small. The U.K. Film Council's failure to support Tarr's *The Man from London* (*A London férfi*, 2005) did not show great faith in the uncompromising Hungarian director. In countries such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, an average of fifteen to twenty films are produced each year, and some countries average as few as three to five. Yet, while there has been no new Kieślowski to dominate the art house circuit (and his films achieved real popularity only when they were in French), as the following chapters reveal, there have been many films of interest produced and deserving of a much wider interest than they are currently accorded.

Cinemas with strong cultural traditions have evolved mixed responses to the views of politicians, such as the Czech Republic's president, Václav Klaus,

who regards cinema as a business like any other. The situation has been the catalyst for innovative works about key problems in the transition from societies that were Socialist in name (and sometimes provision) toward more "liberal" models of capitalism that could hardly be questioned before the recent crises. The films confront contemporary subjects, such as the resurgence of ethnic nationalism, the struggle to establish a "civil society" in the face of authoritarian resistance and criminal opportunism, the eruption of interethnic warfare, social unrest and despair arising from widespread economic dislocation, and the impact of new variants of capitalism.

The eight chapters that follow offer a wide-ranging but rigorous look at the similarities and differences that characterize these cinemas with the intention of addressing an audience extending beyond the specialized field of Eastern and Central European film studies. Our contributors examine some of the major shifts in the dynamics of film production, exhibition, and reception, including the interrelationships of thematic, aesthetic, and infrastructural change; the globalization of the international cinema marketplace; and the problems and promises arising from the privatization of national cinemas.

In Chapter 1, an examination of the Bulgarian cinema, Dina Iordanova considers recent thematic, artistic, and stylistic developments through a detailed analysis of representative works. The chapter addresses issues of ethnic identity and nationalism, cinematic reflections of the Communist past, problems of a declining domestic audience, increased competition from international films, and the search for a new "voice," together with the sociocultural and political rationale for maintaining a national film industry in the face of other pressing economic and social priorities.

In Chapter 2, Peter Hames frames Czech and Slovak cinemas within the former Czechoslovakia's rapid transition from Communism to democracy and its separation in 1993 into the Czech and Slovak Republics. He analyzes the ways in which the film industry has been restructured, the strategies employed to retain a domestic film audience, and the increased role of television and international coproductions in maintaining an economically viable cinema. He compares the pre- and post-Communist periods in Czech and Slovak cinemas with respect to commercial genres, cinematic reflections of the Communist period, and new thematic and aesthetic perspectives. The chapter offers a critical assessment of important film works of the post-Communist period, including those by an earlier generation of filmmakers—associated with the "Czech film miracle" of the 1960s—as well as productions by emerging filmmakers.

In Chapter 3, a discussion of the cinema of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), Barton Byg argues that film produced in East Germany from 1946 to1992 requires rethinking all of German film history, suggesting that the cinema of the German Democratic Republic—in particular, its strong antifascist tendencies—forms part of a long-repressed discourse of "otherness" within German culture. He considers the question of where "Eastern" contributions might fit in future developments of German media culture, arguing that, where

DEFA (the state studios of East Germany) has been treated at all, it has largely been seen as a subject internal to the GDR. His essay examines developments in film from and about the East since unification: the self-understanding of artists, their imagined and real audience, the funding and production avenues that allow them to work, and the types of subjects and styles that reflect these considerations.

In Chapter 4, Catherine Portuges suggests that Hungary's rich diversity of cinematic production underwent several stages over the course of the 1990s. She argues that the country's filmmaking nonetheless reflects a vibrant artistic community, albeit struggling for profitability and resisting the cocoon of invisibility that increasingly envelops smaller national cinemas. She examines the consequences of the new forms of censorship deriving from the impact of globalization and the concern for profitability, situating current Hungarian cinema within the framework of a century of cinema and analyzing its intergenerational dynamics. In the face of hegemonic attempts to conceal or eradicate cultural difference, she considers the extent to which post-Communist Hungarian cinema offers an alternative to dominant cinemas by maintaining a focus on issues of national identity, collective memory, minority representations, and individual subjectivity.

In Chapter 5, Ewa Mazierska explores significant trends and texts in the post-Communist Polish cinema in the context of a restructured industry, the move toward a producer-dominated system, and a radically altered film culture. Focusing equally on industry and art, she considers the growth of generic cinema, specifically the police/gangster and heritage genres, setting these against the development of a so-called dark realism and against an independent cinema concerning itself with life at the margins. She reveals a vibrant, compelling, and critical cinema too little known to international audiences.

In Chapter 6, a discussion of developments in Romania, Bogdan Ştefănescu and Sanda Foamete offer an account of filmmakers' strategies for handling the infrastructure, economics, and social implications of the new society in the early days after the changes. They identify the new narrative approaches and discourse strategies of film directors working in the first years after 1989, concluding that the recent emergence of the work of young Romanian directors on international screens can be partially linked to the decentralization of the industry, the externalization of funding, and a greater flexibility in financial legislation.

In Chapter 7, Bohdan Y. Nebesio analyzes the major thematic and aesthetic trends and the role of film in Ukraine's ongoing process of rebuilding its national culture, examining the nation's struggle to construct an economically viable system of production, exhibition, and distribution capable of retaining a domestic audience in the face of competition from foreign films, Hollywood in particular. Nebesio draws on periodical film literature published in Russian and Ukrainian, providing a compelling account of the struggle to sustain an

industry and considering transformations in visual culture in the post–Orange Revolution landscape.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Andrew Horton offers the perspective of both a film scholar and screenwriter, contending that the former Yugoslavia is undergoing one of the most searing cinematic transformations in the region. Horton traces the evolution of that country's mixed federal and republican system of film production, distribution, and exhibition to one that is reorganized along national lines. He describes the efforts of the new states of the former Yugoslavia to address economic questions, the political control of filmmaking activities, the status of state subsidies, and the extent to which recent work reflects and comments on contemporary social and political realities. He assesses the ways in which the traumatic wars that characterized the breakup of the former Yugoslavia—from Bosnia to Kosovo—have impinged on the realities and possibilities of filmmaking in the region.

The essays in this collection suggest that the post-Socialist cinemas of Eastern and Central Europe have been moving away from earlier Cold War perspectives and iconographies toward identifications more closely linked to redefinitions of Europe. While contributors acknowledge the vital screen cultures that existed in these countries before 1989, they also explore the exchanges and transformations that have taken place in aesthetic and organizational structures, considering how each cinema engages with questions of market viability within a new nexus of local, national, and international film cultures. We conclude that these evolving and transformative cinemas point toward new areas of content, style, and identification. The essays provide a basis for the comparative analysis of these too often undervalued cinemas, with the intention of opening a space for further dialogue on the multilayered meanings of European identity and its cinematic representation.

Visitors to Central and Eastern European film festivals will immediately become aware that the rich and varied cinematic culture of the "Other Europe" has yet to find a natural place in the major Western European festivals. As if to offset this, a number of specialist festivals have been established, including those at Cottbus and Wiesbaden, and the New Europe Festival in Edinburgh. There have nonetheless been a number of major critical successes, foremost among them the award of the Berlin Golden Bear for best film to the Bosnian film *Grbavica* (*Esma's Secret*, Jasmila Žbanić) in 2006 and the Cannes Palme d'Or (best feature film) to the Romanian film *4 Months, 3 Weeks, 2 Days* (*4 luni, 3 săptămâni şi 2 zile*, Cristian Mungiu) in 2007. One of the major recent developments can be seen in the Romanian New Wave, which has achieved continuing success over a five-year period with a significant range of awards at Cannes for films such as *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu* (*Moartea domnului Lăzărescu*, Cristi Piu, 2005), *12.08 Bucharest* (*A fost sau n-a fost?* Corneliu Porumboiu, 2006), *California Dreamin'* (*Nesfârşit*, Cristian Nemescu, 2007), and *Police, Adjective* (*Poliţist, Adjectiv*, Porumboiu, 2009). While this constitutes a

real artistic achievement by any standard, it is also the first time that Romanian cinema has attracted international attention.

The market share of national cinemas, of course, varies from year to year. But it is nonetheless possible to make some comparisons. The most successful national cinema in Europe is France, with a market share of around 37 percent (compared with 18 to 20 percent for Germany and the United Kingdom). Only the Czech Republic and Serbia have achieved similar figures, averaging about 25 percent. Poland and Hungary have averaged roughly 10 percent, Slovenia 5 percent, Romania 3 to 4 percent, and Bulgaria 1 percent. International success has not automatically translated to the domestic box office or vice versa.

If we turn to the overall situation as it exists in 2010–2011, a number of developments are worth noting. Poland's Cinematography Act of 2005 established the Polish Film Institute, leading to an increase in public funding and a progressive increase in movie production, from around twenty features a year to about sixty, with a market share of roughly 14 percent. There have also been efforts to stabilize the production situation in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In contrast, government support in Hungary and Bulgaria has undergone a significant decline (despite the relatively successful performance of Hungarian films at international festivals). Ukraine, with almost no state support, nonetheless competed successfully at Cannes for the first time with Sergei Loznitsa's *My Joy* (*Schastye moye*, 2010), a coproduction with Germany and Netherlands. While the need for government support is now recognized throughout the region, the struggle to maintain cinema as a cultural service is likely to remain an ongoing subject of struggle and debate.

Preparations for this book began in the mid-1990s, with the deliberate intention of charting the early years of transition, a process that has been little documented. Some of the chapters (those on the German Democratic Republic, Romania, and Ukraine) focus almost exclusively on this early period, whereas others provide a more extended coverage. Given the time required to assemble this full range of essays, we did not seek to establish absolute uniformity between chapters in terms of the subsequent years covered. Thus, for instance, there is no extended coverage of the birth and development of the Romanian New Wave.

On this topic, it is worth noting two recent press items, one negative and one positive. The first points out that, of the nine hundred state-run cinemas operating in Romania in 1989, only forty-two remain, and that the new multiplexes have not been that successful.[5] Although international success has generated considerable interest in Romanian cinema, its market share remains at less than 5 percent. On the other hand, a recent report by the cinema research company Dodona, "Cinemagoing Central Europe," envisages an increase in cinema screens in Romania from 122 to 350, leading to a threefold increase in audiences by 2013 (from 3.4 million to 9.5 million). For the region reviewed—Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—it envisages an overall annual rise of 20 million filmgoers, an unprecedented expansion.[6]

NOTES

1. Ursula Keller, "Writing Europe," in *Writing Europe: What Is European about the Literatures of Europe? Essays from Thirty-Three European Countries*, ed. Ursula Keller and Ilma Ragusa (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 3–20.

2. István Szabó, interview by Peter Hames, London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1999.

3. The 2001 Oscar awarded to *No Man's Land* by the Bosnian director Danis Tanović was also of considerable importance, not least in Bosnia (see Andrew Horton's account in Chapter 8). However, as a French/Italian/Belgian/British/Slovenian coproduction, it was essentially an "international" project.

4. See Holly Aylett, "Transatlantic Drift: Britain and the UNESCO Convention for Cultural Diversity," *Vertigo* 2, no. 9 (Autumn/Winter 2005): 2.

5. Sinziana Demian, "Pirates on the Danube," *Transitions Online*, July 23, 2009, available at http://www.tol.org/client/article/20721-pirates-on-the-danube.html?print.

6. Nick Holdsworth, "Central Europe to See Filmgoing Boom: Theatre Construction to Drive B.O. Rise," *Variety*, July 16, 2009, available at http://www.variety.com/article/VR1118006067.html?categoryid=19&cs=1.