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NATIONAL CINEMAS



A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas

Edited by Anikó Imre

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Foreword

In my teaching I often face a room full of students who, in 1989, were not even born. I need to explain what the Cold War was, because all they know about is the war on terror. We all tell these students the story of communism: there is a more or less agreed-upon account of it. But we do not really have consensus on what the rundown would be on developments that took place in communism's aftermath. Some of us, mainly based in the social science disciplines, maintain that, once emancipated from Soviet tyranny, the countries of the former Soviet bloc promptly readjusted their political and economic course and soon caught up with the democracies of old Europe, rejoining a position where they always belonged, historically and culturally. Others, mainly from the humanities camp, focus their attention on the hiccups, the failed enthusiasm, and the disillusionment. Yet others simply decide to pass on and avoid the topic altogether.

By looking at film and media representations, at production and reception, this book aims to bridge older and newer narratives and propositions as they play out in the discourse on Eastern Europe's shifting realities.

The more effectively one deals with change, the more likely one is to thrive, management wisdom has it. Just like the natural world, societies and individuals encounter changing conditions that are beyond their control; successful adaptation to change is crucial for the success of the enterprise. Change management, in this context, is an approach to shifting individuals and groups from a current to a desired state, to empowering stakeholders to accept and thrive in an environment that has not settled quite yet.

The post-1989 transition of Eastern Europe makes for a suitable case study of flopped enthusiasm under the change management paradigm, where romantic fervor and zeal were dampened by short-term profiteering and a rush to redistribute limited quantities of wealth and power. The break-up of multicultural conglomerates on the one hand, with the bloody demise of "brotherhood and unity" in Yugoslavia and the proliferation of break-away "statelets" at the periphery of the former Soviet Union, and ethnic consolidation on the other, with the reunification

of Germany and the reabsorption of various dispersed populations back into a mono-ethnic nation-state, erected nationalism on the pedestal and legitimized it as an energizing political credo across the region. The most radical social change of the end of the tumultuous twentieth century, a soft revolution that was undertaken with a vision of renewal, reinvigoration, and reinvention of a social order, failed to deliver. It descended into economic volatility, precariousness, and massive outmigration.

The 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had dispelled whatever post-World War Two hopes regarding the chances of “socialism with a human face” still lingered. In the climate of fear that this event instituted, Eastern Europeans lived in anticipation of change, knowing that transformation of the system, politically oppressive and economically awkward, was inevitable and would come, sooner or later. Waiting for the change to come about, however, was marked by uncertainty and, often, by an inability to plan ahead. The omens of civil society and the change management process could converge meaningfully only after 1989.

In the years since “die Wende,” many amazing metamorphoses came about. Mikhail Gorbachev, the visionary general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party who came from within the ranks of the KGB, was emblematically seen in the new millennium actively promoting the consumer society by fronting ads for Pizza Hut and luxury luggage-maker Luis Vuitton. Newly found prosperity in some corners came hand in hand with destitution in other parts.

This transition trajectory was reflected in cinema, both in industry transformation and identity discourse. The film industry saw previous state assets sold off to new, usually foreign, owners, who swiftly turned the region into a cut-price production playground. The “film factory,” previously run by state apparatchiks, now turned into a bargain-basement service economy offering skilled personnel and amenities to international runaway film businesses. Global film franchises did not take long to arrive; the older one-screen theaters closed down, replaced by ostentatious popcorn-selling multiplexes. There is no longer much difference between the film industries in Western and Eastern Europe, both competing to secure a place in the lucrative manufacturing and exhibition of outsourced content.

Refashioning the narratives related to history, national character, or collective identities has been less straightforward. Any unanimity over what was happening rapidly vanished amidst crumbling communal memory. Post-communism’s finest films tackled the vigorous memory work that involved selective forgetting and the formation of new favored narratives. They inevitably evolved around the ambivalence of shared memory and the ambiguity of compromise. Films like *12:08 East of Bucharest* confirmed that it is no longer possible to reconstruct a shared narrative of what happened in 1989, while films like *Goodbye Lenin!* endorsed the view that it is no longer possible to leave intact previously uncontested storylines.

The East European cinema of post-communism focused on stories of morally ambiguous protagonists, a new array of characters, ranging from gold-chain-adorned

gangsters to budding *Gastarbeiters*, plotting their move to the West while stuck in the drab environment that communism had constructed and then left behind for future generations to tackle. Other films zoomed in on penurious pensioners subsisting on remittances from their absent sons and daughters who had struck lucky somewhere out in the wide world.

Alongside all this, other events emerged and hijacked the global political imagination, pushing the anxieties of post-communism aside. New narratives and concerns – of radicalization and terrorist threat, of a bellicose world order, and of environmental self-destruction – came to the fore as the world's attention moved away from the post-Communist world and Eastern Europe. The Arab Spring, most recently, relegated the “velvet revolutions” of 1989 categorically to the pages of history. Change management in the Eastern bloc did not fascinate anymore; the public interest moved away before the culture of communism and its aftermath were properly assessed.

The political venture of post-communism, however, is still in the center of the intellectual filmmaking explored in this volume. On the surface, not much has changed: like before, East Europeans wake up and go to work every morning. But whereas before they would be engaged in a collective effort to construct the bright future charted by the party officials, nowadays they are busy with deconstructing the derelict artifacts of state Socialist grandeur. Social and individual lives intertwine in this vital course of change management.

Dina Iordanova

Introduction

Eastern European Cinema From No End to the End (As We Know It)

Anikó Imre

In the 1980s, the Soviet Empire's last decade, the state of Eastern European cinema was best illustrated by its most recognizable parts: those few art-house films, made by selected national auteurs, that made it across the Iron Curtain to international festivals and distribution venues. If we take as an example the year 1985, the midpoint of the decade, Kieślowski's *No End*, Menzel's *My Sweet Little Village*, Szabó's *Colonel Redl*, and Kusturica's *When Father Was Away on Business* represent the cream of the crop. Recognizable products of Eastern European cinema were almost invariably dark and revolved around the crippling impact on people's bodies and minds, particularly those of intellectuals, speaking in a double language to evade censorship. Such films were typically made on modest state budgets, often employed experimental and avant-garde aesthetics, and were treated by Western critics and film buffs "as if they were from the moon," as Miklós Jancsó once put it (Mihancsik, 2000).

A quarter century later, the state of Eastern European filmmaking is best summed up by a range of very different kinds of productions. One of these new kinds is exemplified by *The Borgias* (Showtime, 2011–), a lavishly cinematic English-speaking historical television series. The show has been shot in Budapest and employs an almost all-Hungarian below-the-line crew. It is set in late-fifteenth-century Italy and centers on the dangerous and seductive lives of the infamous papal family of Spanish origin. It was created by Irish film director Neil Jordan and features English actor Jeremy Irons as Rodrigo Borgia, or Pope Alexander VI. The series was co-produced among four production companies and is distributed globally, most prominently by Showtime Networks.

What does *The Borgias* reveal about the transformations that have swept through Eastern European cinema? Most obviously, that filmmaking has become radically decentralized and depoliticized. Its beating heart is no longer the director and his

dissident artistic vision but the producer and the political-economic imperatives of a globalized media industry. Nation-states, and the independent film production companies that have mushroomed all over the region, are no longer vying just for Western festival attention but, more importantly, for the transnational investments that supply film production. *The Borgias* represents one of Hungary's victories in the competition among former Socialist states for a slice of the global entertainment market, mostly in the form of temporary jobs created by media conglomerates.

This victory has been scored by offering the producers of *The Borgias* an unbeatably cheap and experienced workforce and generous tax credits, which cover up to 25 percent of foreign investors' production costs according to a 2004 law. Thanks to these incentives, Budapest has recently become the most desirable post-Socialist destination for outsourcing Hollywood-based film and television production, overtaking the formerly favored Prague. The latest milestone has been the construction of Raleigh Studios on the outskirts of Budapest, a \$700 million investment and "the finest studio on the continent," as company president Michael Moore announced (Verrier, 2009). The facility includes nine sound stages, a 15-acre backlot, equipment rentals, production services, and line producing facilities (Caranicas, 2010). The Hungarian state provided only \$1 million of the funds needed to build the studio. It is just one of several production facilities recently built in greater Budapest, which include the Korda Film Studio, where the first season of *The Borgias* was shot. In addition to offering skilled, inexpensive labor and tax incentives, Moore adds, Budapest can double as other less affordable European locations such as London, Berlin, Paris, and, evidently, Italy.

Such arrangements are now essential to funding film projects everywhere in the region. In Chapter 22, for instance, Ioana Uricaru discusses Castel Films as a new paradigm for film financing. Established in 1993 as a Romanian-American partnership with Paramount Studios, managed and owned by director of photography Vlad Păunescu, Castel Films provides full services – sets, sound stages, personnel, casting, below-the-line talent, postproduction, equipment – to dozens of feature films and hundreds if not thousands of advertising productions. From making mostly B-series genre films in the 1990s (horrors, Westerns, vampire movies, action-adventure), it rose in prominence by contributing to the production of Anthony Minghella's *Cold Mountain* in 2002. This saved \$20 million in film production costs, thanks to the 20 percent tax deduction on the value of new investments over \$1 million and tax exemptions for importing film equipment and for profits reinvested in the film industry. Castel Films also trains and employs much of the film industry workforce in Romania.

Between 1985 and 2011, the emphasis has clearly shifted from nurturing national cinema cultures to globalizing national film industries within the region. National cinemas are now organic parts of an increasingly integrating transnational entertainment industry in which media forms, platforms, and technologies are intertwined. The economic integration among production and delivery platforms

goes hand in hand with an aesthetic convergence, which has challenged the long-held hierarchy between art films and popular entertainment. Such class and taste distinctions are no longer drawn exclusively by state-run, nationalistic cultural industries but are shaped by niche marketing and the affordability of certain forms of entertainment to specific demographics.

To return to the case of *The Borgias*, it is a good fit for the brand of the premium cable network Showtime, one of the “quality” television networks that target sophisticated, upscale audiences in the United States and worldwide. The producer, Jack Rapke, had long planned to produce the script as a feature film with Oscar aspirations, but eventually decided to transform it into the next best thing, a quality costume drama series directed by one of Europe’s preeminent auteurs and starring one of its most highly reputed actors. The success of *The Tudors* (2007–), another high production value, spectacular costume drama series elevated by its European historical subject matter and talent, was a reassuring economic trial run for Rapke and Showtime (Rapke, J., in question-and-answer session, School of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, 2011). While the story of the Borgia family has long been a source of intrigue, power, violence, and romance for fictional treatments it has also been popularized recently by the *Assassin’s Creed* videogame franchise, a series of three historical games in which one plays an assassin in Rodrigo Borgia’s court. Gaming blogs and discussion sites were animated with comparisons of the game and the television show and speculation about mutual influences even before the series was launched. After the first episodes were aired, gamers immediately commented on the CGI quality of some of the crowd scenes, which showed a remarkable similarity to the highly realistic video game. None of these discussions ever mentioned the actual location of the shooting – Eastern Europe – and the entire below-the-line context of production that made possible this spectacular, game-like, cinematic illusion of European history, which stays invisible as the other, submerged side of global convergence.

The blurring of the division between high and popular culture, or more specifically between art film and quality television, speaks to a global leveling out of geographical and cultural sensibilities in the cheery melting pot of Hollywood production values and European historical heritage and artistic prestige. In the post-Cold War media world, global consumer sensibilities crystallize around brand preferences and economic class. From the ruins of state-run film industries, cash-strapped Eastern Europe has emerged as an indispensable site for this transnational rearrangement: a cheap resource for production and a new consumer market, which offers to the cosmopolitan consumer eye an affordable, generic template for virtual historical tourism.

At the same time, while the nation-state is still one of the players, state funding for film and other arts has been consistently dwindling in the region, especially in the wake of the ongoing global economic crisis. The moral obligation to sustain national cinema still lingers and is encouraged by European cultural subsidies. But the state’s most important job has become the creation of an economic environment

that allows for the gradual lowering of regulation to seduce the foreign investment to which much of the actual support of the film industry has been transferred.

In Hungary, for instance, state funds to be distributed among film projects were progressively reduced throughout the first decade of the new millennium. In 2010, the budget spent on making Hungarian and co-produced films was cut in half. The Hungarian Motion Picture Foundation, which has been in charge of handing out money to produce scripts each year, has faced such a deficit that it had to suspend its operations altogether for a while (Gazdaság, 2011). The annual “Filmszemle,” (film review), the competition in which the best of the year’s films are debuted and compared, came close to being cancelled in February 2011 and had to be rescheduled, in a much reduced format, for May. If it survives in the future, it is likely to transform into a less centralized, international festival. As a perfect illustration of the changing tides, on January 15, 2011 the Hungarian government appointed Hungarian-born Hollywood producer Andrew Vajna, responsible for international blockbusters such as the *Rambo* series and some of the *Terminator* movies, government commissioner in charge of the Hungarian film industry. As head of the National Film Fund, the institution that replaced the Motion Picture Foundation, Vajna is responsible for deploying new strategies for Hungarian film preservation and development. The National Film Fund’s budget for financing local production is \$11.2 million in its first year, barely one-third of what the Motion Picture Foundation used to distribute annually.

What Is and What (Really) Was “Eastern European Cinema”?

The introduction to this chapter sets out the first goal for this volume: to account for the sea-change that has transformed Eastern European cinema as a cultural, economic, institutional, and political enterprise over the past 25 years. While a possible arc of this transformation may be drawn between *No End* and *The Borgias*, these productions are only signposts to what are much larger shifts in the landscape. In fact, one might wonder – and many have – whether there really is such a thing as Eastern Europe any more. To date, 10 former Socialist states have officially rejoined Europe. The expansion of the European Union has also led to redrawing the boundaries within and around the region. Eastern Europe has effectively disintegrated into smaller geopolitical areas, questioning the very legitimacy of the region as something defined primarily by a shared Socialist past.

The effort to categorize cinema along national lines certainly persists. However, regional rubrics such as “Baltic,” “East-Central European,” “Balkan,” and even “Mediterranean” have also been revived. Much post-Cold War attention continues to be paid to Russia. At the same time, the post-Soviet republics of the Baltic and Central Asian regions, as well as Turkey, Albania, and some of the successor states of the former Yugoslavia, have come to constitute the new borders of Europe to

the east and south. Slovenia has been welcomed into the Euro-zone, while Serbia and Croatia are still waiting for membership of the European Union. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have moved further apart. Romania has been forcefully rebranded as the land of Dracula, the last remaining resource of Communist backwardness and medieval mysticism (Imre and Bardan, 2011).

The consequences of such geopolitical redefinitions for local film cultures have been substantial. Eastern Europe has turned from a cold war other into an important component of the European Union's policy to establish a Europe-wide media and communications area able to stand up to competition with US-based and Asian media empires. As discussed by Ioana Uricaru in Chapter 22 and Melis Behlil in Chapter 26, the Council of Europe's Euroimages fund has been instrumental in financing co-production, distribution, and digitization projects among European states. The MEDIA (Measures to Encourage the Development of the Audio Visual Industries) program, another EU initiative, has provided crucial support for film projects in the areas of training, development, distribution, promotion, and Europeanization. The Television Without Frontiers initiative has been highly influential in integrating and deregulating television services within the European Union, while also setting policies to appease factions that want to protect national industries from corporatization. These European programs have certainly helped to reinvigorate media production in the former Socialist states. At the same time, European integration has further exposed Eastern Europe to neoliberal deregulation, weakening the political and economic power of nation-states and reinforcing existing geopolitical inequalities within Europe.

The post-Socialist revision of Eastern European cinema, the first goal of this collection, thus also brings into view a larger, no less important question: that of how and why these cinemas were constructed and consolidated into "Eastern European cinemas" by the dividing ideological force of the Iron Curtain in the first place. The second goal of this book is thus to peek behind the metaphorical curtain to see how it staged the story of Eastern European cinema and what other potential scripts it left untold. An immediate effect of this larger-scale historical revision is that it demystifies the aura created around certain filmmakers, and films that were treated in the West as "messages from the moon." This collection begins to provide a revised historiography of Eastern European cinema from vantage points that have thus far been obscured, selectively forgotten, or distorted by the Cold War dichotomy of "us and them," "East and West," "before and after." As several contributions elaborate here for the first time, Socialist film cultures were much less isolated and insular than earlier accounts would have us believe. Co-productions within the region and between East and West were made throughout the Socialist period and thrived from the late 1970s onwards, in the period of ideological and economic "thaw." The boundaries between genres and formats were much more permeable than the exclusive focus on philosophical art film intimates. Western genre film imports were consumed – national differences notwithstanding – by much of the Socialist viewing audience, and local genre films were widely enjoyed,

although without distribution outlets or acknowledgment outside the region. Television and film were also interlaced by sharing production facilities, creative and below-the-line personnel, and, of course, institutions of funding and ideological control.

In the light of the revised historiography presented by contributions in this book, perhaps a production such as *The Borgias* is a less surprising development, as much the result of continuity as of radical restructuring. It may be that the post-Cold War conditions that favor Eastern Europe as a site of runaway production, transnational outsourcing of labor, and tax reductions for corporate media giants run deeper than the four decades of socialism. Perhaps the division between Europe and the “other Europe” should not be EU-phorically cast away as the tainted legacy of the Cold War. Instead, it should be recast as a relationship of hierarchical interdependence, which can be traced back to its roots in the enlightenment, as several scholars have suggested. Larry Wolf famously tells the history of Eastern Europe as a discursive construct whose origins date back to two hundred years before the Cold War and Churchill’s infamous “Iron Curtain speech” (Wolff, 1994). It was in the eighteenth century that the division between Eastern and Western Europe established Europe as the bedrock of rationality and democracy (Korek, 2007: 15) and generated tropes that linked Eastern Europe with postcolonial Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America (Buchowski, 2006). While civilization was firmly tied to the West, Eastern Europe shifted to an imaginary location somewhere between civilization and barbarism, to serve as a boundary marker where Western empires were separated and protected from the invasion of uncivilized Eastern forces such as the Ottoman Turks. The borderland’s mission to protect Western European civilization became deeply internalized in the course of the struggles for national independence in the 1840s. Eastern European nationalisms were thus formed in the West’s image of the region, around a core of self-colonization. Although Eastern European cultures did not directly participate in actual territorial imperialism carried out by Western European states, the hierarchical division between the two Europes qualifies as an imperial order sustained through mutually constituting Eastern and Western discourses (Verdery, 2002; Böröcz, 2001).

The fall of the curtain renewed the discursive hierarchy between East and West within the guise of neoliberal free-market ideology. Most post-Socialist populations have been designated as the losers of capitalism, who are blamed for their immobility and incapacity to adjust (Buchowski, 2006). József Böröcz argues that the European Union’s eastern expansion is yet another effort to solidify a contiguous (as opposed to detached) empire. The European Union’s rhetoric has in fact revived the discarded modernization scheme to discipline the East through the superior rationality of the market and democracy. The reality of EU expansion, Böröcz claims, is a continued division within the continent. Despite the European Union’s pledge to extend the four freedoms (of labor, capital, goods, and services) to all of its citizens, the hierarchy between the former imperial powers and the

peripheral newcomers is unmistakable in patterns of governmentality and in markers of an imperial order: the unequal and unidirectional economic flows that have characterized the privatization of post-Socialist government assets, the tax incentives created to lure direct foreign investment, and new policies that have allowed for siphoning off the national wealth of new member states. EU-based corporations are the most prominent investors while Eastern companies have small investment portfolios. Geopolitical power remains concentrated in the Western center; and technologies of Foucauldian governmentality are being deployed to normalize, standardize, and control the operation of post-Socialist states. The European Union's eastern expansion thus features and combines state coloniality with a civilizing mission that features low-level violence (Böröcz, 2001). Reading the persistent symptoms of a two-tiered Europe within post-Socialist films, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli argues in Chapter 5 that rather than democracy, it was a "cultural wasteland of violence, corruption, isolation, and disenfranchisement that succeeded socialism in the former Eastern bloc countries and the Balkans."

Far from erasing "Eastern Europe" in view of post-Cold War European integration, then, this collection also makes an argument for reclaiming it. Despite its Cold War resonances, there is no better term that would allow for a profound understanding of the history of a divided but intertwined, two-tiered Europe. The media cultures of socialism and post-socialism have been mapped onto and are incomprehensible without this larger history. The chapters in this book keep these two goals simultaneously in mind – to account for post-Socialist transformations, but also to place these transformations within a larger perspective that calls for a retrospective historical revision on a European scale. These two goals serve as the context within which this collection makes three major interventions in the study of Eastern European cinema:

- it challenges the nationalistic demarcations of film cultures;
- it brings into view a Europe-wide circulation and dialogue of films and ideologies during and after the Socialist period; and
- it foregrounds the theoretical currency of Eastern European cinemas for a globally conceived and interconnected film studies.

First Intervention: Un-nationalizing Cinemas

There is no doubt that nation-states have been instrumental in creating and sustaining film cultures in the region. It is also undeniable that nationalism remains the primary source of identification for most of the region's population. At the same time, categories of the nation and the national have tended to ossify histories, aesthetic forms, and industrial practices in most accounts of Eastern European cinema and culture – something reinforced under but not limited to the Socialist period.

Given that cinema built on and organically integrated pre-cinematic cultures, beyond the national specificities one also discovers a regional cinema that consistently recycles shared cultural elements, from language through historical events and personalities to imagery to a sense of humor and spectatorial sensibility that is hard to define. Furthermore, national cinemas have been thoroughly woven together by economic collaborations and circulations, historical memories of imperial oppression and occupation, and a sense of marginalization in relation to Western Europe. In this longer view, one could argue that the national specificities that have guided cinematic histories have been foregrounded precisely to disavow a shared sense of peripheral marginalization. The claim for unique national cinema is part of a broader, unspoken claim to national exceptionalism to a regional marginalization within Europe. It is compelled precisely by a self-colonizing competition for European/Western recognition and, more blatantly in recent decades, economic investment. The structure of the Soviet empire facilitated such a competitive nationalism. The Soviet Union benefited from a divide-and-conquer strategy where neighbors were suspicious of one another, information flow within the bloc was limited, and ethnic tension festered along national borders.

Another way to grasp the relevance of “un-nationalization” is to ask by whom and on whose behalf accounts of national cinema have been written. It quickly turns out that the national spectator has been a missing or entirely imagined element. The films that constitute national canons were produced and distributed strategically by institutions of Socialist nation-states in a precarious, often tense relationship with “Big Brother” in Moscow. At the same time, they were viewed and evaluated – that is, legitimized – mostly within a circle of Western-looking intellectuals, the most cosmopolitan population group in each country, those most familiar with international art films, people, and ideas. While “national cinema” traveled within the narrow circuit of cultural institutions, national intellectuals, Western critics, and movie buffs, the actual national spectator avoided national cinema and quietly migrated to television and popular films. Of course, as Andrew Higson (2000) writes, national cinema, at least in Europe, is always an idealistic, top-down, and paradoxical construction in that it foregrounds the most diverse, hybrid, and progressive elements within a national culture. In Eastern Europe, this contradiction – and the gap between national cinema and national spectator – was further widened by the ideological pressure of Soviet occupation, in some cases the lack of national independence, and the peculiar leadership role assigned to national intellectuals.

One of the areas where the particular paradoxes of Eastern European national cinema come into relief is the genre of historical drama. The region-wide obsession with national histories involves not only the perpetual work of historical revisionism that has accompanied the post-Socialist transitions and the opening of the archives, it extends to how history has been depicted and manipulated in cinema to select leading figures and formative events in order to foster a sense of national uniqueness that overrides regional solidarity. In Nikolina Dobрева’s analysis, in

Chapter 18, of the shared regional preoccupation with the Middle Ages in the historical epic this has been both a top-down and a bottom-up project. The revival of the historical epic, the favorite genre of Socialist cinema in the 1960s–1980s, was due to a simultaneous turn to popular nationalism. This turn was motivated by local government efforts to consolidate their own power in subtle opposition to the Soviet regime. Importantly, this occurred not only in film but also on television, where historical drama series were some of the first popular scripted programs produced by Socialist television (Imre, forthcoming).

In the former Yugoslavia, historical spectacle was also a key tool in consolidating socialism on a national basis. Under former partisan Josip Broz Tito's long leadership, the partisan film, a product of the postwar years, endured as a popular genre. However, Greg DeCuir explains in Chapter 21 that the partisan patriotism facilitated by the genre was also criticized in Yugoslavia. The Sixth Party Congress of Yugoslavia officially rejected Socialist realism as a standard of representation as a result of Tito's break with Stalin. This opened the way for the Black Wave, perhaps the most innovative and politically daring film movement during socialism. The films of Makavejev, Pavlović, Petrović, and Žilnik questioned the partisans in power through mocking the partisan film, the vehicle of Communist–nationalist historiography. In Chapter 5, Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli writes that the films made in the wake of the wars of Yugoslav succession, such as *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (Dragojević, 1995), *Underground* (Kusturica, 1995), or *Cabaret Balkan* (Paskaljević, 1998), continue the legacy of the Black Wave, not only in their excessive, carnivalesque style and frequent citation of the Tito era through the use of documentary footage and partisan songs, but also by exposing and mocking the mythic historical continuities fabricated by nation-states to justify territorial and ethnic violence. Ravetto-Biagioli uses the word “patchwork” to describe the way in which “all of these rival histories edit themselves and each other out of shared stories and experiences and reconstitute their former compatriots as moral enemies through the selective notions of nationalism, ethnocentrism, religion, folklore, and history.”

As several other contributions also testify, the effort invested in conjuring up the spectacle of independent national histories in historical films, while it was effective in consolidating nationalist sentiment in opposition to Soviet rule, has also invariably betrayed its own performative dimension. Recognizing this dimension – the fact that such films have constructed the very historical memories that they allegedly document – begins to relieve nationalisms from their fixation on the present and reveal them to be evolving and opportunistic processes. As Petra Hanáková observes in Chapter 24 in her analysis of the current nationalistic reinvention of Jan Hus, “it is often impossible to separate the present themes and forms from their historical roots and lineages – and the current uses of nationalist rhetoric and motifs have to be regularly read as relics and revivals of strategies present in the Czech culture throughout its whole modern era.” One could substitute virtually any nation for “Czech” here. The ongoing work of geopolitical and cultural

repositioning to which Hanáková calls attention requires adjustments to the entire fabric of historiography to rewrite national histories as regional at the same time.

As seen in Hanáková's case study, since the nineteenth century, the Hus legacy has functioned as an ambivalent register of nationalism, surfacing in times of uncertainty and transition, as is the case in the current revival of the Hussite film. It is a legacy with multiple, often contradictory, and competing political and historical readings. At its heart is a medieval cleric whose figure anchors one of the most secular nationalisms in the world. Hanáková also shows that the historical memory of the martyrdom of Jan Hus was instrumental in giving substance to the Czech film industry. Cinema inherited from other art forms the paradoxical mission of codifying a reverse teleology of nationalism, at the beginning of which stands the figure Jan Hus at the moment of national glory to which the nation should try to return.

The selective and contradictory construction of national teleologies is best exposed, Marsha Kinder argues, by considering historical database documentaries – and, conversely, by considering national histories database narratives. The database documentary is a genre whose properties are best disposed to reveal “the range of choices out of which any particular narrative is spun, including any narrative configuration of the national.” Kinder examines films made by both Spanish and foreign filmmakers about the Spanish Civil War, including Hungarian Péter Forgács's database documentary *El perro negro* (2005):

By revealing the process of selecting particular narrative elements (characters, events, objects, locations, languages) from an underlying database of possibilities and combining them to create a particular narrative account that is presented as only one among many possible versions, this database structure lessens the hegemonic power of any particular configuration and thereby undermines all master narratives, including those on which national identity depends. By acknowledging both the plurality and incompleteness of all narrative texts, this mode of knowledge production always leaves room for the unknown – including foreign and future perspectives. (Chapter 3)

The cinemas of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia abound in historical contradictions of nationalism specific to the Baltic region-within-the-region, which has received little international attention so far in film studies. Local cinema cultures were launched under the Russian empire, gained relative independence in the interwar period, and were forcefully incorporated into the centralized film industries of the Soviet Union after World War Two. Eva Nāripea in Chapter 13, Maruta Vitols in Chapter 17, Irina Novikova in Chapter 19, and Andreas Trossek in Chapter 20 discuss how the tug of war between domestic and imperial production, and national interests and centralized command, impacted film production and reception in Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian popular cinema respectively. Nāripea argues that the very definition of Estonian national cinema in the 1960s occurred within a transnational process of oscillation between foreign influences and

national cultural traditions. Trossek's lens is Estonian animation, while Vitols considers the recent history of Latvian documentary as the form where the complex interaction is best described among the Soviet imperial center, national film authorities, and leading Europhile intellectuals, including filmmakers.

In the Baltic republics, the interruptions in national independence have made it particularly challenging to generate narratives of origin and organic development around which the emotional investment of the population could be consolidated. As Novikova shows, from early on, popular film took over from literature the task of generating these feelings. By virtue of their "low," derivative status, genre films were also able to convey subtle political messages that high-art cinema, prominent on the censors' radars, could not. Much as in the more specific case of the Hus heritage, historical drama had an instrumental role in forging nationalism by fusing mythical, fictional, and actual historical events and figures who, in the spirit of a Europe-wide romanticism, crossed these realms with ease. During Soviet occupation, cinema had to do this in a way that also obeyed the imperative to enforce Soviet propaganda and catered to both national audiences and the vast viewership of a Soviet empire. The centrally approved genre of the biopic, typically featuring outstanding Soviet men, served as one of the most trusted templates for these negotiated readings. Film adaptations of cherished national literary works from the nineteenth century were also platforms for sustaining nationalism while observing Soviet ideological requirements. But these films were also a part of the international circulation of heroic masculine media images that included Wajda's trilogy, Tarzan, French adventure series, Robin Hood, and East German Indianerfilme featuring the dashing Serbian actor Gojko Mitić as the Indian.

Perhaps the least known and recognized popular genre of Eastern European cinema is science fiction. In Chapter 11, Stefan Soldovieri explains that, despite the high production costs and the ideological burden of such films, the 1950s and 1960s gave rise to a number of homegrown Soviet, Polish, Czech, and East German space adventures. He follows the making of Kurt Maetzig's *Der schweigende Stern* (*Silent Planet*, 1960), which was produced in a collaboration between the German Democratic Republic and Poland after plans for involving Western European partners fell through. Soldovieri's meticulous historical account of the process, from scripting to distribution, demonstrates that the film "provides an unusually well-documented and instructive illustration of the multilayered influence of Cold War politics on the GDR cinema and, significant national, political, and institutional differences notwithstanding, other Eastern European cinema as well."

Second Intervention: A Case for European (Post-)Socialism

The second major intervention of this book, intertwined with the first, is to uncover the ways in which Socialist cinema participated in cultural, economic, and

political circulations and collaborations within Europe as a whole, interlacing the two Europes more intricately than Cold War accounts would have us believe. There is a significant register of Eastern European cinema that calls into question the image of a region entirely determined and dominated by Soviet socialism, cut off from the bloodstream of European culture and economy. Conversely, the work presented here also reveals that Socialist ideas had a wide influence, which regularly crossed the East–West divide.

As Francesco Pitassio shows in abundant historical detail in Chapter 14, Eastern European socialisms informed and nourished Western socialisms, not least through cinematic exchanges. He uncovers an entire cultural and political network dedicated to importing, exhibiting, and deploying Czech films in Italy thanks to the Italian Communist Party's efforts to implant a version of socialism in the 1950s–1980s. This kind of circulation was not specific to an Italian–Czechoslovak exchange. Ewa Mazierska writes that “by and large, the 1960s, up to 1968, was a period of unprecedented cultural exchange between the European West and East, with Eastern European filmmakers being feted in the West and Western European artists and cultural personalities frequently traveling to the East” (Chapter 25). She shows that co-productions extended well beyond ideologically motivated collaborations among the Warsaw Pact countries. Through case studies of *Le Départ* (1966), directed by the Polish Jerzy Skolimowski, *Vtačkovia, siroty a blázni* (*Birds, Orphans and Fools*, 1969), directed by the Slovak Juraj Jakubisko, and the science fiction film *Test Pilota Pirxa* (*The Test of Pilot Pirx*, 1979), directed by the Polish Marek Piestrak, in Chapter 25 Mazierska draws consistent parallels between the filmmakers' hybrid, inside–outside status, the international production of their films, and the transnational aesthetic–thematic solutions they embrace. Such films tended to be released from the political burden of national cinema and therefore received less critical attention. However, they could afford to strike more playful tones and voiced the sensibilities of a contemporaneous European culture, including the counterculture of the 1960s and European cinematic New Waves.

In a similar vein, in Chapter 15 Michael Goddard revises the dominant critical approaches to Polish cinema, which have revolved around the “holy trinity” of Wajda-Kieślowski-Zanussi, often identified as key figures of the Polish School, or the “Cinema of Moral Concern.” Goddard reinserts in this history a group of filmmakers who made some or most of their films in exile and have thus been excised from Cold War accounts of Polish cinema. Goddard argues that the oeuvres of directors such as Walerian Borowczyk, Roman Polański, Jerzy Skolimowski, and Andrzej Żuławski, whom he calls the “accursed auteurs” of the Polish New Wave, is both national and international in orientation. As he puts it in Chapter 15,

While new wave and new cinema movements in the 1960s tended to be defined in national terms, their outlook was clearly internationalist both in their critical appreciation of films from diverse cultural origins and the orientation of their own

works towards the international markets serviced by the contemporary burgeoning of international film festivals. New wave movements in places as diverse as Latin America and Eastern Europe also were composed both of a reinvigoration of national cinema and an influx of formal influences from the French and other new wave movements that had already begun, which in turn had been nourished on eclectic international sources including Hollywood B movies and Italian neorealism as well as politicized film movements such as, for example, the Polish School.

Goddard proposes that we re-examine the critical opposition towards social realism that has defined the image of Polish cinema. While Polish New Wave directors did draw on and participated in the non-realist experimentations and transnational exchange that characterized new waves elsewhere, they were forced to leave the country in the 1960s and 1970s when censorship tightened – in comparison with Czechoslovakia, where filmmakers had relative freedom at this time and thus their work was registered in national film history as the “Czech New Wave,” or the rebellious directors of the Yugoslav Black Wave.

Perhaps the least explored and acknowledged aspect of East–West interaction during the Cold War is the extent to which the economic foundations of Socialist film industries depended on European validation. Dorota Ostrowska explains this in her discussion of the Polish film units in Chapter 23 – unique economic and artistic collaborations established in 1955, among which the National Film Board divided state funding each year. While the board ostensibly placed much more weight on the political outcomes of the creative work conducted within the film units, these teams were in fact linchpins in the economic functioning of the Socialist film industry. The industry depended on the hard currency derived from sales of Polish films from the Polish distributor Film Polski to foreign distributors. This favored festival-worthy films, which were exactly the kind that expressed subtle, often allegorical critique of the very authoritarian system that supported film production. Ostrowska points to the career of revered auteurs Wajda and Zanussi, also artistic leaders of film units, who straddled the contradictory and muddy international waters of Socialist cinema. The film units, in spite of their entanglement with the Socialist state, were in fact similar to Western European independent production companies formed around individual auteurs, such as Lars von Trier’s *Zentropa*, Pedro Almodovar’s *El Deseo*, and Wim Wenders’ *Neue Road Movies*.

Polish documentary production also attracted considerable interest among cinephiles in Western Europe during the 1960s. In Chapter 10 Bjørn Sørenssen argues that this was because of its performance at international film festivals, where the films referred to as the *czarna seria* or “black series” were seen as daring detours from Communist propaganda and also benefited from their association with the films of the Polish School. Sørenssen explores the impact of the *czarna seria* both within and outside the Soviet bloc, especially its connection with the British *Free Cinema* movement of the same period – a link that has been largely

overlooked by documentary film historians. Some films in the series, such as *Warszawa 56* and *In Old Lublin Town*, looked back to the British documentary cinema of social concern of the 1930s, while others, such as *Article Zero*, show a formal and thematic affinity with the French *cinéma vérité* and the American direct cinema of the 1960s. The personal relationships established in the course of exhibiting films of the *czarna seria* in Western Europe contributed to the interchange of ideas and aesthetic impulses, which defied the rigidity of official, institutional cultural exchanges.

Perhaps nowhere in the region were European exchanges as formative as in the case of Yugoslavia. Aleksandar Petrović was born in Paris and, like many other Eastern European filmmakers, studied at the film and television faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague. Miodrag Popović moved to Paris in 1951 and lived there until 1954. Boštjan Hladnik attended the Sorbonne in the late 1950s and then worked as an assistant to Claude Chabrol and German filmmaker Robert Siodmak. As Greg DeCuir puts it, “these Yugoslav filmmakers enjoyed an international upbringing in cinema, a cross-pollination that would continue throughout their careers” (Chapter 21). Institutional venues of cinematic exchange also enhanced this cross-pollination. Some of the most influential of these were the 1954 French Cinémathèque exhibit organized by Henri Langlois at the Yugoslav Cinémathèque in Belgrade, and the Korčula Summer School in Croatia, attended by notable Western Marxists such as Ernst Bloch, Erich Fromm, and Jürgen Habermas. DeCuir writes that Yugoslavia was a powerhouse and production center for international collaborations, which included Makavejev’s *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (an international co-production with the Munich company Telepol, also supported by the Ford Foundation) and Petrović’s films *The World Will Soon End* (Yugoslav–French) and *The Master and Margarita* (Yugoslav–Italian). Decades before the region’s official conversion to capitalist democracy, the economic reform policies implemented in the 1960s turned Yugoslavia into a liberalized haven within the bloc where the Fulbright Program opened as early as 1964, facilitating a relatively unchecked trade of ideas between East and West.

Alice Barden in Chapter 7 and Ioana Uricaru in Chapter 22 both analyze the so-called Romanian New Wave’s more recent, spectacular success on the international festival scene. Uricaru, who, as a director, personally contributed to the new wave’s reputation, along with filmmakers such as Puiu, Mungiu, Porumboiu, Mitulescu, and Muntean, points to a less visible but certainly crucial component of her generation’s accomplishments: the ways in which they have been able to carve out a financing structure within and between the complicated schemes of state and European funding and public and private enterprise. Barden zooms in on Corneliu Porumboiu’s award-winning film *12:08 East of Bucharest* to make a more theoretical argument: she draws on Thomas Elsaesser’s influential view of European cinema, which makes a political distinction between Eastern

and Western Europe that can be traced within distinct aesthetic patterns. Bardan argues that *12:08* is no different from the (Western) European films Elsaesser calls “typical,” in which irony, performativity, and reflexivity are linked. At the center of the film, and of Bardan’s analysis, is the ambiguous spatiotemporal and epistemological status of the Romanian Revolution of 1989. An event whose definition still causes a great deal of disagreement among the Romanian public, it is also a turning point in European history which has evoked a number of reflections from European intellectuals from Chris Marker through Giorgio Agamben to Andreas Dresen and Jacques Derrida. Bardan cites George Lawson’s argument in the introduction to his tellingly titled collection *The Global 1989* (2011) that we should be careful about using 1989 to divide the old from the new. Given that in many ways post-Cold War capitalist expansion represents a return to old exploitative practices, “a complex picture emerges in terms of the temporality of 1989, one which embraces important continuities alongside, and to some extent instead of, simple notions of ‘all change’” (Lawson, 2011: 3).

When it comes to a retrospective revision of the European cinema map, the status of Turkey deserves special consideration. In Chapter 26, Melis Behlil revisits the hybridity of the particular borderland that Turkey represents through the lens of film circulation. She explores Turkey’s cinematic connections with Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Europe as a whole. Turkish films have been influenced by Bollywood melodrama as much as by Hollywood genre films, European avant-garde waves, and Eastern European, especially Russian, filmmaking. Behlil uncovers one of the most influential and systematically overlooked bloodlines of (Eastern) European histories, which reach back to the Ottoman Empire and clearly connect present-day Turkey, the longest-standing candidate for EU membership (since 1987), with the rest of Europe. It is a sign of changing geopolitical times that these organic links with Turkey’s hybrid Asian–European–Middle Eastern culture can now be acknowledged and valued, rather than simply rendered “other” and excluded. Turkey’s situation shows a marked contrast with that of Eastern Europe. Since 2004, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism has embarked on an ambitious and successful funding program to support Turkish films that are competitive on the festival circuit, a program similar to the French system though more limited in scope. Many of these films are Euroimages-funded co-productions, for which producers from France, Greece, and Hungary are preferred by their Turkish counterparts.

These studies pose a collective challenge to the national cinema framework and call for new international and transnational histories of European cinema. Making visible the complex routes and venues of interchange between East and West, socialism and capitalism, of which the cinema is just one register, also challenges the neoliberal justification for the “shock therapy” that Eastern Europe received after the Wall collapsed to transform Socialist authoritarian regimes into capitalist democracies from the inside out.

Third Intervention: East European Cinema within Global Film Studies

The third way in which this collection expands the study of Eastern European cinema is by putting it in a relationship of mutual infusion with the questions that animate contemporary film and media studies. The contributions introduce approaches that have not, or have rarely been posed in relation to cinema and open them up for theoretical reconsideration. This has the effect of liberating Eastern European cinemas from the area studies framework into which they have been locked, along with “other cinemas,” in a framework delimited by a bipolar world order. Several chapters explicitly propose dimensions that rethink the region’s cinema as organic and valuable pieces of a globally conceived film theory and history. One of the most obvious such dimensions, long obscured by the exclusive focus on ideology and aesthetics in the work of national auteurs, is the attention to the film industries and institutions within which movies have been made, disseminated, exhibited, and consumed. Pioneering work in this area can be seen in the contributions of Uricaru, Behlil, Ostrowska, and Soldovieri.

Several chapters identify specific fields in which studying Eastern European cinema can make a unique contribution. In Chapter 6, Catherine Portuges considers the trajectory of Polish, Czech, and Hungarian films about Jews and Jewishness from the theoretical perspectives of Holocaust and memory studies. She tracks the aesthetic and thematic manifestations of the “transgenerational transmission of trauma” in the work and lives of three generations of filmmakers: camp survivors, those who were born just before or during the Holocaust and have direct experience but few or no memories, and those who inherited the trauma indirectly from their parents or grandparents.

Theories of post-coloniality have recently taken on newfound relevance in the wake of the realization that neoliberal shock therapy has failed and European integration has in many ways only entrenched the region’s subordinate status. In Chapter 19, Irina Novikova describes the situation of the film industry in the Baltic states as explicitly postcolonial and gendered. She engages theories of the gendered register of nationalism as it is manifest historically in the historical epic, which first constituted national stories as the struggles of heroic male heroes over feminized battlefields often embodied by actual women.

A theoretical concern with new concepts and experiences of time and space has also emerged in the cinemas of the region as well as in critical approaches to these cinemas. Spatial mapping is a central thread in Eva Năripea’s assessment of the transnational features of Estonian cinema, while Ioana Uricaru points to a thematic preoccupation with time scales as a unifying feature of the New Romanian Wave. This is also an important thematic issue in Albanian cinema, which Bruce Williams introduces in Chapter 12 in one of the first thorough historical overviews of this small nation’s barely known cinema. Williams structures this cinema history into

three distinct periods, which are nevertheless interwoven by continuities: film production during communism, in the interim period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and 1998, and the “post-Pyramid” period that stretches from then to the present. The discussion, while it gives a thorough introduction to the major filmmakers and their work, such as Kujtim Çashku, Mevlan Shanaj, and Vladimir Prifti, three veterans of the Communist Kinostudio, and Gjergj Xhuvani and Fatmir Koçi, more recent directors whose work is internationally known, is not limited to film itself: it places films at the cross-section of the training of film professionals, the role of domestic and international film festivals, and scholarly work on Albanian cinema. In Chapter 8, Shekhar Deshpande and Meta Mazaj think through Slovenian cinema’s struggle for recognition in the map of world cinema through two conceptual lenses: Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie’s concept of “the cinema of small nations” (2007) on the one hand and Fredric Jameson’s writing on regional cinema (2004) on the other.

Marsha Kinder also contributes to the spatiotemporal theoretical revision of the region’s cinema. Bringing together her work on database narrative and Spanish cinema, she identifies Péter Forgács’s database documentary *El perro negro* (2005) as a gateway into what she calls networked relations between national and transnational systems of meaning. Kinder’s exploration of this cinematic network offers a theoretical model that foregrounds both the national specificities and the transnational interconnections of representing history without pitting these against each other or using one dimension to erase the other.

Steven Shaviro reads Hungarian filmmaker György Pálfi’s spectacular “body” film *Taxidermia* as a reflection of the region’s twentieth-century history from the point of view of the disillusionment and demoralization brought about by triumphant late capitalism. He describes the film as an exercise in *genealogy*, in Michel Foucault’s Nietzschean sense of the term: an investigation that works “to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (Foucault, 1998: 376). Each of *Taxidermia*’s three parts depicts a particular historical regime (feudalism, communism, capitalism) as a regime of the masculine body and a corresponding body politic and representational/aesthetic style. “Each part of the film,” Shaviro says in Chapter 2, “traces one of the ways that social, political, and economic forces are literalized, implanted directly in the flesh, and thereby expressed in the bodily anguish of a single male protagonist”— what he identifies as Deleuze and Guattari’s “bachelor machine” (*machine célibataire*). This is a radical view of history, a counterpoint to Western neoliberal views of an organic evolution that supposedly reaches its climax in triumphant Western capitalism.

Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli discusses post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet films that counter the epistemological violence of ethno-national mythmaking with the aesthetic violence of the carnivalesque and, in its more extreme forms, the “Nietzschean ass festival.” She counters criticism leveled against the work of Muratova, Luzik, Dragojević, Kusturica, Paskaljević, Balabanov, and others, that their films trivialize and perpetuate ethno-national violence and yet fail to entertain. Rather, Ravetto-Biagioli finds a different, distinct “entertainment value” in these films, one

that is relentlessly critical, that revels in the “joy of negative analysis” and allows for a Heideggerian “unthinking” of violence achieved through claims to purity and self-righteousness.

While film and media conferences in recent decades have devoted increasing attention to strategies of teaching international and global cinema, teaching film from the former Soviet empire brings its own set of challenges. Zoran Samardžija’s meditation on these challenges in Chapter 4 starts with a question asked by a student in his class: “Why did people choose to be Communists?” This question becomes Samardžija’s platform to develop a pedagogy of teaching films made under and in the aftermath of socialism, which are inevitably confronted with powerful ideological templates in the students’ minds, formed under the influence of a bipolar world view and the taken-for-granted victory of consumer capitalism. Samardžija takes us through his own experience with teaching two Serbian films that dramatize the defeat of their characters by historical forces: *Lepa Sela Lepo Gore* (*Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, 1996), a story of inter-ethnic friendship-turned-hatred in the course of the Bosnian civil war; and *Optimisti* (*The Optimists*, 2006), a series of five vignettes set in a post-Yugoslav-War Serbia of general disillusionment. Both are useful pedagogical tools that require students to imagine history before considering individual character choices and to demystify unfettered market capitalism as a transparent state of “non-ideology.”

Two significant areas of Eastern European filmmaking that have remained submerged in film studies – although have been cherished by film buffs and local audiences – are the sizable animation and documentary output of the Soviet era. Andreas Trossek makes one of the few existing contributions to the critical and theoretical appreciation of this work at a time when animation is enjoying a boom within the global industry and study of film. He follows the delicate aesthetic and political maneuvering that Estonian filmmakers Priit Pärn and Rein Raamat had to employ across the ideological minefields of making films for national, Soviet, and international festival audiences simultaneously through the thaw of the 1970s and the perestroika of the late 1980s. Pärn and Raamat exemplify two different strategies of “cultural bilingualism”: Raamat took a nationalist and more conservative localist line, while Pärn struck a more innovative and rebellious note. Both trajectories complicate the dichotomy between oppressive state and dissident artist by revealing the entangled and sometimes surprising mechanisms that allowed a film to be produced or prevented it from being produced; and both trajectories are unimaginable without a serious historical grounding of animation in wider European art trends and movements.

Documentary production defined Latvian cinema as much as animation defined Estonian cinema. Maruta Vitols gives an overview of the main trends and players in the thriving Latvian documentary scene. As she notes, to this day, most contemporary Latvian filmmakers begin their careers in documentary. While the first generation of postwar documentary filmmakers were educated in Moscow’s All-Russian State University of Cinematography, or film school, VGIK, by the

1960s and 1970s, artists such as Hercs Franks, Aivars Freimanis, Ivars Seleckis, Ansis Epnens, and Uldis Brauns, constituted themselves into what became known as the Rīga School of Poetic Documentary. This influential movement dominated the Latvian documentary scene until the 1980s, when the arrival of glasnost and perestroika profoundly changed the country's film industry.

In Chapter 16, John Cunningham tracks the post-Socialist transition through Hungarian documentary maker Tamás Almási's seven films, made over the course of 11 years, about Hungary's steel industry and its decline. The films range from *In a Vise*, made in 1987, which reveals the signs of crisis beyond the last efforts of Socialist propaganda to keep up the charade of robust industrial production in the 1980s, to *Barren* (1995), in which gypsies pick at the scrap heap that is what is left of Hungary's heavy industry. The series concludes with *Helpless* (1998), a compilation film that takes the viewer through the entire sad history. These films are unique in that they eschew the authorial "voice of God" narrative and focus on the human face of history across the decades. Almási takes his camera into the workers' and managers' apartments and films them at dinner, in the pub, and in their workplaces. After decades of authoritarianism, Almási allows the participants of this story to talk about the past in their own voices as witnesses. Bjørn Sørenssen shows that the Polish *czarna seria* served a similar purpose: the films were to reveal the hidden realities behind the official propaganda, including those of the Polish steel industry. For instance, Maksymilan Wrocławski's *Place of Residence* (*Miejscze zamieszkania*) confronted the propagandistic image of building the giant steelworks in Nowa Huta with candid and stark depictions of the cramped and deprived living conditions of thousands of workers.

Much like Almási, Czech documentarian Karel Vachek also set out to document the transition from socialism to capitalism in a series of four films he calls his "Little Capitalist Tetralogy." Similar to Almási's films, these long, philosophical, eclectic documentaries, made on 35 mm, are "populated by characters ranging from politicians in the highest positions to ordinary citizens" as Alice Lovejoy describes them in Chapter 9. Far from being a straightforward documentation of the changes from the Velvet Revolution to the country's accession to the European Union, these films, she says, outline "a virtual second society that represents the director's own philosophical and idiosyncratic blueprint for an ideal – and ultimately fictional – state." Vachek, who spent some of his career abroad, accentuates his outsider status with a handheld cinéma vérité aesthetic and a pronounced presence, or rather performance, which very much calls into question the documentary status of his work.

Conclusion and Acknowledgments

The three main interventions that are discussed in this book have begun to be made since the early 1990s in conferences, workshops, and publications, within a growing

network of scholars, curators, and cinephiles. The contributors to this book have been instrumental in these efforts. What this volume offers is only a synthesis of such work, providing the most current and comprehensive overview of the state of cinema in Eastern Europe. While it is dedicated to the twofold goal of assessing post-Socialist change and revising film histories from a transnational vantage point, these goals did not appear out of the blue. Rather, the collection rests on the shoulders of scholars and critics who carved out a critical and cultural context for Eastern European cinema in the first place at a time when access was limited and precarious – Mira and Antonin Liehm, Daniel Goulding, David W. Paul, Peter Hames, and many others who began writing about specific national cinema and filmmakers during the Cold War. Since the Wall fell, the field has grown too large and heterogeneous to make it possible to list everyone who has made a significant contribution to it. I will therefore limit my acknowledgments to a few outstanding people whose work and spirit have been channeled by the authors of this volume: Dina Iordanova, Natasa Durovicova, Pavle Levi, Katarzyna Marciniak, Tomislav Longinović, Dušan Bjelić, Andras Balint Kovacs, and Katie Trumpener. My heartfelt gratitude to Felicity Marsh for the superb copyediting and to Finnian McGillivray for saving me so much time with the index. The credit for creating this assessment of Eastern European cinemas, on an until now unprecedented scale, and my gratitude, go to Jayne Fagnoli, who envisioned it for the Blackwell Companion series, and to the scholars who have brought the vision to life.

Note

The styling of translated film titles is never without problem; in the case of those discussed here that is particularly so as a number of them are known under more than one English-language title. It is impossible to differentiate succinctly between the various translated titles of all the films under discussion, and for this reason, all translations are treated alike, whether or not the film released in English. The authors' references to the English-language title of each film are to the versions most commonly used.

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Part I

New Theoretical and Critical
Frameworks

Body Horror and Post-Socialist Cinema

György Pálfi's Taxidermia

Steven Shaviro

György Pálfi's *Taxidermia* (2006) is a landmark work of post-Socialist cinema. It reflects upon the history of Hungary over the past century: a history of sociopolitical failures, betrayals, and disappointments. But more particularly, the film is the product of a specific and profound disillusionment – one that still resonates for us today. The end of Communist Party rule in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 led to a “genuine elation, caused partly by the incredible ease with which the much-feared dictatorial powers crumbled”; entire societies felt “a rush of liberty and...an outbreak of collective imagination, intelligence, and inspiration” (Szeman and Tamás, 2009: 22). In the aftermath of this exhilaration, however, things went bad. The newly freed societies were swamped, as the Hungarian philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás puts it, by “oligarchic rule, fake electoralism, a yellow press, a precipitous decline in culture and education, a revival of authoritarianism and racism/ethnicism, misogyny, and homophobia” (Szeman and Tamás, 2009: 26). Conditions today, in the early twenty-first century, are thus quite different from anything that Central and Eastern Europeans hoped for, or imagined, when they brought down the Socialist regimes that oppressed them, for Hungary and the other former Socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe have been entirely absorbed within the framework of global neoliberal capitalism. The only “winners” in the new social order, Tamás says, have been “the transnational corporations and the power networks that can be loosely called ‘Western’” (2009: 20). The result, for the people of Central and Eastern Europe, has been “an inhuman, unjust, unfair, inefficient, anti-egalitarian, fraudulent, and hypocritical system that is in no way at all superior to its predecessor, which was awful enough” (2009: 24).

A similar sense of disappointment haunts the West. In Western capitalist societies, the events of 1989 were greeted less with exhilaration than with a smug,

triumphalist assurance that the values of liberal capitalism had been established on a worldwide basis once and for all. Symptomatic of this is the way that Francis Fukuyama (1993) celebrated the events of 1989 as marking “the end of history.” Fukuyama placed capitalism in the very position that socialism had previously claimed for itself: that of being the unsurpassable endpoint of social struggle, the Hegelian culmination of all human hope and effort. Today, however, this sort of proclamation rings hollow. Far from fulfilling the needs and desires of humanity, the universal triumph of capitalism seems to have propelled us into a condition of perpetual financial instability, increasing economic inequality, and a ubiquitous cynicism that corrodes all effort and all hope. We are now in the terminal state that Mark Fisher calls “capitalist realism”; a situation in which “beliefs have collapsed at the level of ritual or symbolic elaboration, and all that is left is the consumer-spectator, trudging through the ruins and the relics” (2009: 4). History has not ended so much as it has been worn out and exhausted.

Taxidermia is very much a product of – and a reflection upon – this atmosphere of disillusionment and demoralization. The film has a specific Hungarian focus, but it also resonates with Western-capitalist concerns. *Taxidermia* might well be described as an exercise in genealogy, in Michel Foucault’s Nietzschean sense of the term: an investigation that works “to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (1998: 376). The film relentlessly foregrounds bodily stress and torment even as it performs an excavation of Hungary’s traumatic twentieth-century history. It has three parts, set respectively during World War Two (when Hungary was ruled by a fascist regime allied with the Axis powers), during the time of Communist Party rule, and in the capitalist present. Each part juxtaposes the private and the public: a body-horror case study in imploding masculinity is joined with a parody of the spectacles of power and privilege. The three parts trace the lives of three generations of men (although, from one generation to the next, paternity is dubious).

Taxidermia’s first part tells the story of Vendel Morosgoványi (Csaba Czene), a soldier during World War Two. Stuck in a remote outpost he does not see combat; lonely and sexually frustrated, he spends his time masturbating in bizarre and inventive ways. The second part of the film focuses on Kálmán Balatony (Gergő Trócsáni), a Socialist sports hero in the 1960s, the era of so-called goulash communism (when party rule involved “soft repression” and a certain degree of economic liberalization). Balatony is a champion in the (imaginary) Olympic sport of “speed-eating,” which involves shoveling as much food into one’s mouth as one can, as quickly as possible. The third part of the film, set in the contemporary post-Socialist era, concerns Kálmán’s son Lajos Balatony (Marc Bischoff), a pallid, thin, and painfully shy taxidermist, who ultimately applies his grotesque art to human as well as animal bodies.

The first part of *Taxidermia* takes place deep in the countryside, in almost total isolation. An army lieutenant (István Gyuricza) lives in a small house with his obese peasant wife and their two teenage daughters. There is no hint of warfare,

and no contact with the rest of the world – except during one scene in which some other officers visit and they all make a toast to “the final victory” (i.e., that of the Axis powers). Aside from the main house, there is also an outhouse, a barn for the animals, and a shack, in which Morosgoványi, the lieutenant’s orderly, has a small room. The lieutenant treats Morosgoványi as his personal servant, browbeating and bullying him and making him do all the household chores. Morosgoványi also serves as a captive audience for the lieutenant’s pontifications on how “cunt makes the world go round.” The relations between the lieutenant and his orderly could be described as fascist, but perhaps they are better understood as feudal. The master’s domination of his servant is entirely direct; it is not mediated by money, by spectacle, or by any pretense of personal independence.

This opening section of *Taxidermia* is centered upon Morosgoványi’s grotesque and abject body. The orderly’s face is disfigured by a harelip; his expression ranges from a rigid attention to the lieutenant’s orders to the tense contortions and blissful release of orgasm. Alone in his tiny room Morosgoványi compensates for his servitude and loneliness by engaging in fantastical acts of masturbation. His penis shoots off sparks of flame like fireworks; his ejaculate spurts into the heavens and becomes a star. He stimulates himself by playing with lit candles, by pederastically imagining sex with Hans Christian Andersen’s Little Match Girl, and by spying through peepholes on the lieutenant’s beautiful daughters as they bathe in an enormous tub or engage in a snowball fight. At one point, while he is watching them, Morosgoványi coats a hole in the wall of his shack with lard, and inserts his penis, thrusting it frantically in and out – only to have it pecked at by a rooster. His scream of pain is transmuted into the voice of the lieutenant’s wife, calling the girls back into the house for dinner.

Morosgoványi’s sexual performances are mostly shown to us in sequences that juxtapose extreme close-up and long-shots with nothing in between. There is frequent cutting, but the camera never moves. In this way, we learn the intimate details of Morosgoványi’s autoerotic fetishes and rituals, but we never get a sense of him as a feeling and inwardly reflecting subject. The camera treats Morosgoványi in much the same way that it does the barnyard animals with whom he lives; especially the pig for which he is supposed to care. “Don’t worry about your figure, just grow nice and fat for me,” he says to the animal, tenderly cradling its head in his lap. Shortly afterwards, the pig is slaughtered for a feast. There is an extended montage sequence of the dead animal being skinned, cut up, and roasted. The sequence includes several close-ups of the pig’s internal organs, oozing as they are removed from the carcass. Pig flesh is equated, via montage, with human flesh. Morosgoványi, like the pig, is reduced to the abject status of mere meat. He lives a life entirely subject to the whims of others, tormented both by the cruel limitations imposed upon him and by his own physical cravings. Pálfi’s cool, elliptical editing style puts us in a strange position: we empathize with Morosgoványi’s sufferings, and with his desperation, but he remains too strange and alien for us to “identify” with him.

Eventually Morosgoványi is seduced by the lieutenant's plump wife. His frenzied sex with her is presented, like his masturbatory fantasies, in a series of fragmented close-ups. They utter obscene endearments to one another ("my pretty mangalica piggy") as they fuck in the same immense tub that was previously used both for the daughters' bath and to hold the bones and entrails of the slaughtered pig. In a rapid-fire sequence, as Morosgoványi rocks back and forth he seems to be simultaneously (or alternately) penetrating and grunting over the bodies of the wife, the two daughters in turn, and finally the pig. In the next scene, the lieutenant executes Morosgoványi for his transgression with a quick bullet to the head. In the scene after that, the lieutenant's wife gives birth to a boy, presumably the fruit of her dalliance with Morosgoványi. The midwife, leaving the birth chamber, spits on the ground in disgust, right in front of the lieutenant. The baby is healthy, but he has been born with a little squiggly pig tail. The lieutenant accepts the child as his own, but first he brutally snips off the tail with tweezers.

That baby grows up to be Kálmán Balatony, the protagonist of the second part of *Taxidermia*. Kálmán is enormously stout, as befits his role as a speed-eater, an athlete pushing his body to extremes. Today, there actually is a global fringe subculture dedicated to the sport of "competitive eating" (Nerz, 2006), but *Taxidermia* hilariously presents it as a massively popular, Olympic-level athletic competition, supported and promoted by the Communist state: International speed-eating matches take place in large stadia, before cheering crowds. Jet fighters fly in formation overhead; Young Pioneers march and wave flags during the pauses between rounds; military officers and party officials watch from their box seats. Speed-eaters are trained from childhood, and offered extensive coaching – as athletes in the Socialist countries actually were during the Cold War. Successful sportsmen such as Kálmán are rewarded with access to special privileges otherwise only available to the party elite: choice uncrowded vacation spots, rare edible delicacies such as fresh fruit and caviar, and even travel to the West. By focusing all this public spectacle and elite privilege on the figure of Kálmán the speed-eater, the second section of *Taxidermia* grotesquely parodies the official culture of "actually existing socialism."

This second section also ups the ante on bodily disgust. The camera dwells on the bloated bodies of Kálmán and the other speed-eaters as they gorge themselves on soup, pudding, caviar, chocolate "at the fluid stage," and a horse sausage that is "dry, dangerous, and full of shit like gauze and wadding." The contestants chew and swallow this stuff as the crowd roars and the commentator delivers a breathless spoonful-by-spoonful account of the match. Then, between rounds, in order to make room for more, the contestants puke it all up again, in flows of half-digested gruel. The camera seems to dote on these displays. It moves in lengthy, fluid shots, panning horizontally past all the competitors, or circling around Kálmán. These mobile long-takes are strikingly different from the fixed shots and dense montage of the movie's opening section. Morosgoványi's masturbatory fantasies were private rituals, gaining their meaning and intensity through metaphorical

associations – hence the heavy use of montage. But Kálmán's physical convulsions are addressed outward and assume an audience. They are imbued with grandiosity and blown up to spectacular proportions, like everything else in official Socialist culture. This body frantically ingesting and then regurgitating food needs to be shown at length, in order to capture the full duration of its actions. This frenzied rhythm of incorporation and expulsion is only halted when suddenly, in the heat of competition, Kálmán is paralyzed with lockjaw. He halts in mid-chew, his body rigid; then he passes out and topples, his spoon still stuck in his mouth.

Despite his unusual body and his extreme profession, Kálmán seeks to have a “normal” life – something of which Morosgoványi could not even dream. As he recuperates, he starts to woo the female speed-eating champion Gizi Aczél (Adel Stanczel). Eventually they marry. They seem happy enough together, enjoying the domestic bliss and material well-being provided by “goulash communism.” We see them in stereotypical romantic poses in locations such as the amusement park, the ski lift, and the beach. Of course, they continue to stuff themselves with large quantities of fattening foods, even as they are engaged in these more typical pastimes. However, all is not well in this Socialist paradise. Gizi sneaks out during the wedding celebration to have sex with another speed-eater, Kálmán's rival. After the marriage, Gizi becomes pregnant, much to Kálmán's delight, as he assumes he is the father. The doctor orders Gizi to go on a strict all-vegetable diet, but he relents after Kálmán passes him a bribe: everything is negotiable in actually existing socialism, as long as you have the perks and privileges to pay for what you want. The gynecologist marks down Gizi's condition as a uterine myoma (a non-malignant tumor), so that she may continue her usual speed-eating regime. Sometime later, Kálmán and Gizi are invited onto a high-ranking party official's yacht in order to give a command performance for a visiting Soviet dignitary. As a demonstration of their prowess, they consume 45 kilograms of red caviar in 20 minutes. But Gizi is taken ill after this exhibition, collapsing while the Soviet official drones on about international brotherhood and the task of constructing communism. Cut immediately to the sound of infant cries, and a tracking shot of babies in the hospital. Gizi has given birth prematurely to Lajos, an unusually frail and scrawny boy.

Lajos Balatony, as an adult in post-Socialist Hungary, is the protagonist of the third and final part of *Taxidermia*. He is a taxidermist, running his own small business. His shop is cluttered and claustrophobic, a grotesque menagerie of stuffed animals of all sorts, much like a real taxidermist's workshop (Milgrom, 2010). There is also a Michael Jackson poster on the wall, reminding us of how Hungary has been entirely incorporated into global capitalist culture. Lajos does not seem to have much of a life. Every day he follows the same routine. After completing his meticulous taxidermical labors and shutting up his shop he goes to the supermarket. He buys the same items, in the same quantities, every day – 30 kilos of margarine and 800 candy bars – at a total cost of HUF 38 526. At the checkout counter, he asks the cashier for a date. But she does not even bother to

reject his proposition; instead, she simply ignores what he says and informs him of what he owes. After this rebuff, he goes to a cafe, and sits alone for a while at a small table. Then, he heads to his father's apartment to feed the cats and to clean.

Kálmán has become a monster, both physically and morally. Gizi has left him (we glimpse her on television, as the coach of the American Olympic speed-eating team). Now Kálmán is so bloated and enormous that he can no longer move. He has become little more than an obscene mountain of flesh. He sits in his chair watching speed-eating contests on television and devouring the candy bars that Lajos brings him without even bothering to remove them from their wrappers. He alternately feels sorry for himself and boasts that he is still the champion he once was. His only remaining passion in life seems to be to fatten his cats and train them in speed-eating. He has them locked in a cage where they are fed exclusively with the margarine purchased by Lajos, and they are always growling angrily from behind the bars. When Lajos comes by to do the household chores, all Kálmán can do is to curse and insult him; he is disgusted both by Lajos's anorexic thinness and by his introversion and meekness.

One day, faced as usual with Kálmán's bitter recriminations, Lajos angrily storms out, neglecting to lock the cats' cage. When he next returns he finds a new tableau of body horror, an obscene spectacle of excess. Kálmán lies dead, his belly burst open. His bloody entrails extend in a trail outwards from his body; they are strewn across the floor like so many sausages. Maybe his bowels exploded from the stress of junk food overload, or maybe the hungry cats attacked him. In any case, the animals have eaten parts of his body. Lajos, however, is unfazed by his discovery. He calmly responds, in the way he knows best: with the art of taxidermy. He carefully restores Kálmán's flesh and stuffs and mounts him. Then he prepares himself for a similar fate.

In order to embalm his own body while he is still alive, Lajos constructs a complex device of gears, wheels, and harnesses. He straps himself into this apparatus and proceeds to remove his own viscera, to replace them with stuffing, and to apply preservatives. The apparatus holds him in place, keeps his circulation going, and presumably it dulls the pain enough for him to operate on himself. We see close-ups of flesh being surgically sliced open and sutured up again, of internal organs being neatly extracted, of fluids bubbling through tubes, and of intestines being untangled and wound carefully along spools. At the last moment, Lajos presses a button; the machine decapitates him and cuts off his raised right arm. Lajos has turned himself, as well as his father, into a trophy or a statue.

Each of *Taxidermia's* three parts thus presents a particular *regime of the body*, associated with a dominant political and economic order. This is how the film works within a Nietzschean/Foucaultian genealogy. Each of the three regimes has its own representational style. Each of them also involves a specific organization and regimentation both of individual human bodies and of the general "body politic." Each defines "masculinity" in its own particular manner. Each is characterized by a certain set of concrete bodily practices together with a certain

articulation of power relations. Each regime breaks down the male body in its own way, the better to remold it and control it. Through its form and style, no less than through its content, *Taxidermia* makes visible (and audible) to us a ubiquitous, but diffuse and impalpable, network of power relations, social norms, and ideological background assumptions. Each part of the film traces one of the ways that social, political, and economic forces are literalized, implanted directly in the flesh, and thereby expressed in the bodily anguish of a single male protagonist.

Taxidermia does not tell an actual story so much as dramatize and explore a discontinuous series of attractions and repulsions among grotesquely deformed bodies. The film moves, without offering us any explanations or logical connections, from Morosgóványi's masturbation to Kálmán's speed-eating and finally to Lajos's taxidermy. At the same time that it presents these historicized images of bodily appetite and disgust, *Taxidermia* also deliberately elides the major turning points of recent Hungarian history: the liberation at the end of World War Two; the revolution of 1956; and the dismantling of the one-party Socialist system in 1989. It does not show us those moments of "general elation" and of the "outbreak of collective imagination, intelligence, and inspiration." Rather, it is entirely concerned with the normalized oppression that succeeded each of these moments of opening and hope. In its refusal to focus upon these uprisings, or "lines of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3–4 and *passim*), the film emphasizes the arbitrariness and unpredictability of historical change. A social regime is not determined by the events that gave birth to it; if anything, it is organized as a systematic betrayal of these events.

It is worth dwelling on the way in which *Taxidermia* handles the transitions from one regime to the next – which are also the transitions between the three parts of the narrative. The first segment of the film ends with a shot that shows us baby Kálmán, his pig tail just having been cut off, held up in the air in the lieutenant's arms. From there, the camera pans in a circle, downward to the ground, up again the length of the lieutenant's body, over his head, and into the sky. Without a cut, the sky is suddenly crisscrossed by the flight of 1960s jet fighters. The camera continues its circle, down from the zenith to a stadium in which a speed-eating contest is being held. Eventually, the camera reaches the adult Kálmán, shown in a close-up shoveling soup into his mouth with a large spoon. The shot continues as the camera pans around Kálmán, eventually viewing him from the back and showing beyond him the cheering crowds in the stadium's stands. Later in the film, the second segment ends with the scrawny baby Lajos sucking at Gizi's enormous breast. The camera pans sideways to a window of opaque glass; then it passes through the glass, with coruscating, refracted color effects. On the other side of the glass, we see an extreme close-up of feathers: the underside of a wing, the bottom of a bird's body, and an orifice from which a bit of excrement squirts. There is a cut to a close-up of the excrement hitting and staining the ground, from which the camera pans upward then zooms through a doorway into the adult Lajos's taxidermy studio. The camera tracks through a series of corridors and into

a back room, where it circles around an enormous stuffed bear, finally reaching the sight of Lajos putting some finishing touches to the bear's upraised paw.

In both of these sequences, the passage of time is elided and replaced by a camera movement through space. We are taken without pause, and in a single motion, from a character's infancy to his maturity, and from one social system, and one kind of intense embodiment, to another. History does not progress, it merely reconfigures, trading one way of breaking down the male body for another. More generally, *Taxidermia* systematically avoids portraying any processes of organic development; it relies, instead, upon spatial juxtapositions and analogical correspondences. In one astonishing montage sequence in the first part of the film, the lieutenant's enormous tub is rotated on its axis and we see the various uses to which it has been put: bathing, sleeping, storing the pig's bones, laying out a corpse, cradling a newborn baby, doing the laundry. These are all constituent elements of the supposedly traditional way of life predating both communism and capitalism which this portion of the film depicts.

There are also repetitions and echoes among the various segments of the film. For instance, animal entrails appear in all three portions. We move from the slaughtered pig upon whose remains Morosgoványi fucks the lieutenant's wife to the viscous gristle-filled foodstuffs of Kálmán's eating competitions, to the animal bodies that Lajos stuffs and mounts. The viscera Morosgoványi removes from the body of the slaughtered pig in the first section are mirrored by the viscera Lajos removes from his own body in the last. Or again, there are suggestive resonances between Morosgoványi's prosthetically enhanced sexual body, Kálmán's monstrously engorged eating and vomiting body, and Lajos's anorexic, self-eviscerated body. In all three cases, the men's bodies directly register, and immediately suffer, the social forces that pass through them and mold them.

Taxidermia thus insists upon a radically discontinuous history: one that is filled with resonances and reconfigurations but is not subject to mediation and does not exhibit any sort of narrative development. The practice of genealogy, Foucault says, "does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us" (1998: 386–387). Such a vision of history is radically opposed to the sort of unified and self-reflective account advocated by Hegel, Kojève, and Fukuyama. The historical movement depicted in *Taxidermia*, a passage from fascism to communism to capitalism, cannot be understood as a linear or dialectical progression. It is, rather, a succession of contingencies, a series of mutations, in the course of which "the body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances" (Foucault, 1998: 380). *Taxidermia* works precisely by calling attention to, and indeed monstrously inflating, those everyday "rhythms of work" and "eating habits" in the course of which the male body, in particular, is systematically and repeatedly broken down.