

VIA TRANSVERSA
LOST CINEMA OF THE FORMER EASTERN BLOC
International conference on film history
Tallinn, Art Museum of Estonia, Kumu auditorium
October 5–6, 2007

Abstracts

Elisabetta Girelli

Negotiating Space: Private, public, and the subversion of place in *The L-Shaped Room* (Bryan Forbes, 1962) and *Closely Observed Trains* (Jirí Menzel, 1966)

This paper examines the representation and use of space in two key European films of the 1960s: *The L-Shaped Room* (Bryan Forbes, UK, 1962) and *Closely Observed Trains* (Jirí Menzel, Czechoslovakia, 1966). While the British and Czechoslovak New Waves have been the objects of separate study, comparative analyses of the two movements have been scarce; this paper aims to explore the films' visual and narrative constructions of spatial division, appropriation, and social resistance, in the light of the cultural and political context of 1960s Britain and Czechoslovakia. The paper focuses on the films' development and negotiation of notions of inside and outside, of private and public space: specifically, both films present the blurring and subversion of given spatial oppositions, and the forming and re-forming of alternative spaces. I am hoping to show that, although operating within different economic and political contexts, and through different modes of production, British and Czechoslovak New Wave cinema share deep similarities: in the two films under discussion, these are exemplified by the articulation of an anti-authoritarian spatial discourse, and by a visual and narrative tension between constriction and freedom, resulting in a new aesthetics of place.

Elisabetta Girelli is a lecturer in Film Studies at the University of St. Andrews, UK. Her research interests focus on the construction of identity on screen, especially in terms of nationality, gender and sexuality. She has published on British and European cinema, and is currently expanding her research into Eastern European film history.

Petra Hanáková

Stylistic and Generic Hybridity in Czech Cinema (with special focus on popular cinema from the 1960s to the 1980s)

The question of stylistic and generic anomalies in Czech film has to be considered against the background of the development of Czech culture since the Revival Period of the 19th century. It can be claimed that Czech cultural tradition derives fully from a popular, democratic legacy, and is thus disconnected from any notion of exclusiveness, generic and stylistic purity, and directness. This thesis has significant consequences for the self-definition of Czech culture. Moreover, the power of popular origins and cultural democratisation seems to be especially reified in film.

The major Czech literary critic of the first half of the 20th century F. X. Šalda repeatedly stated that Czechs never knew the value of form in art and never respected it, because they never cultivated the forms of social life. Likewise, the development of Czech art and, particularly, cinematography during the 20th century is defined by radical, politically and socially determined, breaks, as almost every second decade developed its forms of cultural production anew. Big national cinemas have their natural development, inner structure and system: in Czech cinematography, we have fissures, turns and returns, breaks with foreign influences and adaptations to political changes. Forms and genres collapse before they reach perfection; they are hybridized and debased.

There is no single, sustained tradition of Czech cinema, its historical grounding being shaped more as a series of breaks and attempts to bridge the gaps. Still, we can see here an underlying frame of popular tradition and the relative permanence of hybrid and stylistically “patchworked” works – comedy usually blends with tragedy or a sci-fi, or even a horror, film, a western is parodied before it is domesticated, and some films are totally unclassifiable in terms of genre. The presentation will analyse several examples of hybrid films to introduce this bizarre aesthetics of Czech popular film and juxtapose it with stylistically “pure” Western cinema.

Petra Hanáková is Assistant Professor in the Film Studies Department, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. Her research areas include post-structuralist film theory, with a special focus on gender and psychoanalytical approaches, the history of looking and visual culture, and the image of national identity in Czech cinema.

Anikó Imre

Creatures of Nostalgia: Children's entertainment during socialism

Films from Eastern Europe are well known for their seriousness. They tend to engage head-on with weighty issues of history, ideology and politics. But there has also been a thriving popular film production industry in East European countries from the beginning, which continued without major interruptions during the Cold War. Everyone has heard of the allegorical dramas of Andrzej Wajda, but no one outside of Poland has seen the comedies of Stanislaw Bareja. Most film buffs are familiar with the work of Milos Forman, but very few have ever heard of the enormously entertaining Czechoslovak musical Western parody *Lemonade Joe*, directed by Oldrich Lipsky (1964). The list of such cinematic treasures includes East German musicals, westerns, melodramas and black comedies from the former Yugoslavia. Most such films are fascinating mixtures of Hollywood generic conventions and local cultural traditions. Even though they were much more eagerly watched by local cinema and television audiences than the political allegories generally associated with the region, they had very little export value during the Cold War.

Almost twenty years after the Wall came down, this submerged register of East European cinemas has become significant again as a shared reservoir of regional and national memories. My presentation will track the major achievements in regional and national popular film production during the socialist period. I will then focus on perhaps the least known and researched register of socialist media entertainment: children's media. I will discuss the nationalized and Soviet-influenced politics and narrative aesthetics of some of the popular animated series that ruled television and cinema screens within the Soviet Bloc, creating an enduring resource for shared regional memories today. The Czech *Krtek*, the Polish *Bolek i Lolek*, and the Hungarian *Vízipók* were allegorical fables conveyed by low-budget, stop-motion animation. As I will show, the distinct allegorical culture of Soviet Bloc animation was underscored by an ideological convergence between the notion of children's play as a crucial imaginative rehearsal for proper, gendered national citizenship and the creative energies of film-makers forced out of other public discourses by censorship. I will also discuss the essential role played by state television in the production and distribution of

national and regional children's media and in the filtering of Western, particularly American, products.

Anikó Imre is Assistant Professor of Critical Studies in the School of Cinematic Arts of the University of Southern California. She taught at the University of Washington before completing a three-year post-doctoral fellowship at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, where she participated in a collaborative project on globalization, the media and the transformation of identities in the new Europe. She has published articles on media and globalization, feminism, nationalism, post-colonialism, education and East European transitions in *Screen*, *Camera Obscura*, *Framework*, *Third Text*, *CineAction*, *Signs* and various book collections. She is the editor of *East European Cinemas*, published in Routledge's Film Readers series (2005), and co-editor of *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media*, forthcoming in Palgrave's Comparative Feminist Studies series. Currently, she is completing a book entitled *Identity Games: Globalization and the Transformation of Post-Communist Media Cultures*.

Dina Iordanova

Paternalist Omnipresence: State ownership of cinema and its ironies

The state socialist model of the film industry was a perfect example of a vertically integrated cycle of production-exhibition, where the intermediary of distribution had become obsolete. State ownership of cinematic output was a situation that allowed the state to behave paternalistically in deciding which product would get exhibited and which not (thus the only distribution type decisions were those taken from censorship and not from a marketing point of view).

Fully led by the logic of understanding cinema as an entertainment product within a market economy, the Western critique of communist censorship resulted in the development of an incongruously twisted, yet influential, view asserting that if a film had been censored or withheld from distribution it must have had some intrinsic merits that qualified it as a better film than one which had been duly distributed.

In post-communist times, the trope that evoked the memory of censorship became a sort of marketing tool for cinematic output from Eastern Europe. In my talk, I will engage in a critical scrutiny of the issues of the relationship between ownership and control, the freedom of the corporate artist, and of the premises of the censorship marketing argument, which I will develop by referencing a number of examples from older and newer films from the region.

Dina Iordanova is Professor and Chair in Film Studies, University of St. Andrews, UK. She is a leading specialist in Eastern European and Balkan cinema. Her research areas also include Soviet film historiography, the cinematic traditions of non-Western cultures, cultural industries, transnational dynamics of culture and film, international cinema and diasporic identity, cross-cultural representation, documentary film-making and film festivals. She is the author of *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (2001), *Emir Kurturica* (2002) and *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (2003), and is the editor of *Cinema of the Balkans* (2006).

Mari Laaniste

Pushing the Limits: Priit Pärn's Animated Cartoons from 1977 to 1987 and Soviet Cinema Censorship

This paper discusses Priit Pärn's career in animated cartoons in the late Soviet period and the impact of censorship on his creative practice at that time. In the case of Pärn's directorial debut, *Is the Earth Round?* (1977), the main problem seemed to be the difference between his drawing style and the norms of Soviet drawn animation, as well as the ambivalence of the film's narrative and Pärn's authorial position. However, due to these features young Pärn quickly achieved the status of the most valued animation talent in Estonia. The relationship between the increasingly self-confident Pärn and the growing pressure of Goskino's censorship system, which controlled Soviet film production, was irksome and frustrating. The limit of what was allowed in films depended on some random personal tastes rather than on any clearly defined rules. This made the process of seeking official approval for film projects "playful" in a way that was far from fun and games. Almost without exception, Pärn's projects were perceived as problematic and, after a few years in the business, he became tired of having to try to fit his vision within the constantly shifting limits of ideological acceptability. The peak of conflict between Pärn and Soviet cinema censorship arrived in 1982 with his film *The Triangle*, after which Pärn consciously gave up all efforts to contain his work within the limits of what was officially permitted. A few years worth of hopeless struggle to find approval for the provocative script of *Luncheon on the Grass* followed. In an ironic twist of fate, when the film was finally released in 1987, it coincided with the height of *perestroika* and turned out to be exactly what the Soviet film bureaucracy was looking for at the time. In the end, the controversial film received more official approval than any of Pärn's previous works.

Tiina Lokk

Lost Generation

The thematic focus of my presentation concentrates on the school of Estonian documentary film-makers from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. It can be argued that Estonian, as well as Latvian and Lithuanian, documentary film-making was, in the context of the Soviet Union, a trendsetter in unique film language, and can be indeed described as an avant-garde and innovative enterprise. The presentation will ask several questions, among them what the school of documentary film-makers of Tallinnfilm was really about and why, in the mid-1980s, just before the *perestroika*, this generation disappeared from the film arena.

Katarzyna Marciniak

How Does Cinema Become Lost? The spectral power of socialism

My presentation will focus on various pre-1989 Polish motion picture and TV productions and consider different national and transnational meanings and registers of “lost cinema.”

The notion of the loss of cinema invites complex reflections: Which films have been lost and for whom? What are the ideological issues that motivated deliberate instances of “shelving” a particular piece of art in the socialist era? What specifically were the reasons that rendered some films “risky” for the well-being of the nation?

The many cases of banning politically charged films during the socialist era are well-known, at least to Eastern European audiences. Certain censored films by Ryszard Bugajski, Agnieszka Holland, Wojciech Marczewski, or Janusz Zaorski, for example, at one time deemed “dangerous,” have already been de-shelved and, in many instances, awarded and canonized in post-Wall times. However, there has been a current of post-socialist practices of shelving films, as well. The present day mechanisms are more subtle and remain less known and theorized on than those employed by the communists. Today’s targets are, for instance, overtly pro-socialist TV series such as *Czterej pancerni i pies* (*Four Tank Men And a Dog*, 1966), or *Stawka większa niż życie* (*The Stakes Larger Than Life*, 1968) that were widely popular before the 1980s.

In the contemporary climate favouring the rhetoric of “entering” Europe and thus detaching the nation from its socialist past, the old socialist productions are seen by the authorities as offering distorted historical accounts and “wrongly” influencing new generations. My presentation will examine historical ironies and paradoxes of what might be termed a “reversed,” or “transversed censorship,” which has been the driving force behind the erasure of specific visual media. I will probe how socialism, once officially celebrated and now repudiated, continues to haunt the nation, imprinting its spectral power on the New European cultural imaginary.

Katarzyna Marciniak is Associate Professor of Transnational Studies in the English Department at Ohio University. Currently she holds the position of Visiting Scholar at the

Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California. She is the author of *Alienhood: Citizenship, Exile, and the Logic of Difference* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006) and co-editor of *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in November 2007). Her interdisciplinary work on transnational feminist cultural studies, transcultural cinema and literature, exile, immigration and visual culture appeared in *Camera Obscura*, *Cinema Journal*, *differences*, *Social Identities* and in the AFI Film Reader, *East European Cinemas* (Routledge, 2005). Her current research focuses on the notion of 'immigrant rage' in relation to feminist theory, migration studies and global visual cultures.

Ewa Mazierska

Politics of Space in Polish Communist Cinema

My paper is an investigation of the way Polish film-makers during communist rule used space to convey criticism of the state. I will examine representations of certain elements of mise-en-scène, especially some typical generic sites and buildings, including the housing estate, the standard apartment block, the railway station and the office, and some specific ones, such as the Palace of Culture and Trasa W-Z in Warsaw, and their relations to other aspects of films, such as dialogues and narratives. What is of particular interest to me is whether the mise-en-scène in the films discussed is in tune with or in conflict with the messages communicated through those filmic discourses which were easier to censor. Equally, I am interested in the way depiction of space changed over the decades in Polish cinema.

I will focus on films of a number of directors renowned for their critical attitude to the system and the unique ways they depicted space, such as Stanisław Bareja, Andrzej Wajda, Krzysztof Kieślowski, Marek Koterski and Juliusz Machulski.

Ewa Mazierska is Reader in Contemporary Cinema, Department of Humanities, University of Central Lancashire. Her publications include numerous articles in Polish and English and several books, such as *Crossing New Europe: The European Road Movie* (Wallflower Press, 2006), *Dreams and Diaries: The Cinema of Nanni Moretti* (Wallflower Press, 2004) and *From Moscow to Madrid: Post-modern Cities, European Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2003), all co-authored with Laura Rascaroli, *Women in Polish Cinema* (Berghahn, 2006), co-authored with Elżbieta Ostrowska, *Polish Postcommunist Cinema: From the Pavement Level* (Peter Lang, 2007) and *Roman Polanski: The Cinema of the Cultural Traveller* (I.B. Tauris, 2007). She also co-edited *Relocating Britishness* (MUP, 2004). She is currently working on a book about masculinity in Polish and Czechoslovak cinema.

Eva Näripea

Spatial Discourse of the Soviet Estonian Feature Film, 1947–1959

The beginning of Soviet Estonian feature films occurred in the year 1947, when *Life in the Citadel* was produced. It was an adaptation of a play of the same title by the Estonian playwright August Jacobson and was performed by an Estonian cast, but produced by Lenfilm and created by a group of already quite famous Soviet film-makers (directed by Herbert Rappaport, screenplay by Leonid Trauberg). The guest directors largely defined film-making in Soviet Estonia until the end of the 1950s and the tradition and models of Soviet film-making were imported here in a relatively mature and integral form. The feature films of the period are characterised by the visual and narrative form typical of the post-WWII Stalinist (film) culture: continuity editing and other formal features supporting narrative clarity and the effect of realism, closed narrative etc. The spatial discourse of these films is characterised by certain binary patterns, expressed chiefly by the opposition of centre and periphery, as well as the marginalisation of local space/territory. It is best articulated in the fact that the stories are often located in (peripheral) small towns, suburbs or some other small spatial settings. Also, frequently a certain sense of enclosure is suggested through space, as well as through the set of characters. Repeatedly the motif of the private house or villa occurs as a significant figure. On the one hand, it refers to the certain “embourgeoisement” of the post-war Soviet culture and society; on the other hand, it relates to the way the new regime saw the local situation: more often than not, these villas and private houses signified remnants of the pre-war “bourgeois” Estonian Republic, which in the new ideological situation was, of course, seen as something fairly negative. In Estonia, the urbanization process had started at the turn of the century and was well under way in the 1920s and 1930s, but it reached entirely new dimensions (both in terms of physical amplitude and ideological significance) in the Soviet period. Over time, the national mythology associated the industrialised urban areas more and more with Soviet immigration (and thus with a serious threat to the continuation of national traditions and culture). At the same time, small towns and rural areas became the strongholds of nationality.

Eva Näripea is a PhD student at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Institute of Art History, and a researcher in the Estonian Literary Museum, in the research group of cultural and literary

theory. Her research concentrates on the representations of (urban) space and architecture in cinema, and she is also interested in the changing of visual and narrative forms in cinema.

Irina Novikova

Baltic Cinemas – Flashbacks in/out of the house

My paper will address the films produced by several film-makers of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania from the 1960s to the 1990s. From both comparative and historical perspectives, I will address at least two questions.

My first question is how to re-examine the legacies of Baltic national cinemas and re-think critical paradigms within which it would be possible to address them in the context of re-conceptualisations of nationhood/European identity. I will specifically discuss the film *Nobody Wanted to Die* (directed by Vytautas Zalakevicius, Lithuania, 1963) and *The Last Relic* (directed by Grigori Kromanov, Estonia, 1969).

My second question, related to the first, is: what is the significance of “national affiliation” today for film-makers from the Baltic countries, transnationally mobile, in some cases diasporic, and transcending the borders of the concept of national cinemas? What are their imaginations of the transnational, vis-à-vis the national? Can we look at their work as going beyond the cinematic vernacular central to the national imaginary? With these questions in mind, I will discuss the films of Peeter Simm (Estonia), Herz Frank (Latvia) and Sharunas Bartas (Lithuania).

Irina Novikova is a professor in the Department of Culture and Literature, University of Latvia, Director of the Centre for Gender Studies. Her research interests include the questions of gender/genre, and body/trans/nation in contemporary literature and cinema.

Bjørn Sørenssen

Real Men of Marble: The disappearing image of the working class in East European film

Post-war East and Central European cinema was initially very much influenced by the official Marxist-Leninist rhetoric of the new “Peoples’ Democracies”. However, as time went on, and especially after the 1956 “thaw”, the image of the worker in the films of the “workers’ states” began to fade. This became very evident in the films that were chosen for export to the West, which, apart from World War II action films, as a rule portrayed environments and situations that could be safely ascribed to the intellectual petite-bourgeoisie.

This became strongly highlighted by Andrzej Wajda in his 1978 film “Man of Marble”, which re-focused on the worker-intellectual relationship in the countries under Soviet influence and was a precursor to the Solidarity movement in Poland two years later (treated in Wajda’s “Man of Iron”).

Using “Man of Marble” as a focal point, this talk will discuss how the image of the worker in East and Central European cinema changed over the years, as well as how this relationship appeared in the cinematic image projected onto Western screens.

Bjørn Sørenssen is Professor of Film and Media Studies at the Department of Art and Media Studies in the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. His main research interests are film history, documentary history and theory, and new media technology.

bjorn.sorensen@hf.ntnu.no

Peeter Torop

Poetics of Resistance: *The Last Relic* and/as Estonian Film After 1968

The events of 1968 were reflected in Estonian culture in very diverse ways. Resistance to cultural hegemony acquired new forms and the motion picture *The Last Relic* can be perceived as one of them. Grigori Kromanov's *The Last Relic* (1969) turned the initial 'Russification' narrative into a philosophical confrontational film, the poetics of which were based on the found motifs of visuals and lyrics hidden in the historical adventure film. The paper discusses the story of the making of the film, its connection with Eduard Bornhöhe's historical tale *Prince Gabriel, Or, The Last Days of Pirita Convent* (1893), and analyses the message of Paul-Erik Rummo's lyrics, and the latter's relationship with the visual presentation. The paper demonstrates the association of the historical-philosophical message of the film with the effects of the events of 1968 and analyses the artistic devices used to express this link.

Katie Trumpener

“When do we get our cinema?” Stalinist populism and East German media critique

In East Germany, the 1950s saw sustained attempts to remake the cinema and cinematic experience. Drawing primarily on a range of forgotten films, this paper explores revolutionary aspects of Stalinist film culture, from its systematic critique of the star system to its portrayals of radically anti-hierarchical film-making practice (entitling studio canteen cooks and bystanders on location-shoots to intervene, critique and change films-in-progress). During the late 1950s and early 1960s, moreover, the emergence of an East German New Wave became inextricably entwined with the critique of Western media, which was characterised as a successor to fascist media practices. Such critiques cast the Cold War itself as a media war. More surprising, perhaps, these critiques often became occasions for formal innovation. Communist political orthodoxy, paradoxically, frequently took the form of formal (and formalist) experimentation, sometimes in subterranean dialogue both with Weimar modernism and with Western avant-garde critiques.

Katie Trumpener is Professor of Comparative Literature, English and Film Studies at Yale University. Her comparative history, *The Divided Screen: The Cinemas of Postwar Germany* (to be published by Princeton) situates East German film in relationship to the Cold War and the Eastern European New Waves.

Natalia Zlydneva

The Avant-garde Trace in Educational Cinema of the 1950s

This talk deals with Soviet educational films made by such directors as Raitburg, Sobolev and Tavrog. It can be considered that a lost cinema developed its experimental features regardless of the ideological mainstream and managed to shelter a number of marginals willing to practice alternative cinema language. The educational cinema appeared as a branch of the initial avant-garde documentary and it owes a great debt to pioneers of the Soviet film industry – Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. In the post-war period, educational cinema managed to articulate itself as an opposition to ideological censorship and the strictly regulated model of official feature films. Due to its subject (science and technology), which was a relatively independent area in the totalitarian society, the educational film of the 1950s reveals its links with the avant-garde heritage on the level of poetics. Avant-garde principles (montage, shift of angles etc.) and some novelties provided the opportunity to manipulate, through time and space, the limits of the human body. The talk aims to demonstrate in which way the subject of educational cinema occurred as a pretext for experimental language and, vice versa, in which way the language of form defined narrative strategy.

Dr. Natalia Zlydneva is Head of the Culture Department at the Institute for Slavic Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow and Leading Research Fellow at the Institute for World Culture, Moscow State University. Her research interests include the semiotics of culture, 20th century Russian literature and art, Balkan and Slavic mythology, and visual/verbal transmediality.