Experimental Cinemas in State-Socialist Eastern Europe

Amsterdam
University
Press

Eastern European Screen Cultures

The series *Eastern European Screen Cultures* publishes critical studies on the screen cultures that have marked the socialist and post-socialist spaces in Europe. It aims to unveil current phenomena and untold histories from this region to account for their specificity and integrate them into a wider conception of European and world cinema.

The series aspires to fill gaps in research, particularly by approaching Eastern European screen cultures in a transnational and comparative framework and exploring previously underrepresented theoretical issues. It considers moving images in all stages and aspects: production, text, exhibition, reception, and education.

Eastern European Screen Cultures will also publish translations of important texts that have not been able to travel outside of national and/or regional borders.

Editorial Board
Greg de Cuir Jr., University of Arts Belgrade
Ewa Mazierska, University of Central Lancashire
Francesco Pitassio, University of Udine

Advisory Board
Anikó Imre, University of Southern California
Dina Iordanova, University of St. Andrews
Pavle Levi, Stanford University
Eva Näripea, Estonian Academy of Arts
Dominique Nasta, Université Libre de Bruxelles
Elzbieta Ostrowska, University of Alberta
Katie Trumpener, Yale University

AUP
Amsterdam
University
Press

Experimental Cinemas in State-Socialist Eastern Europe

Edited by
Ksenya Gurshtein and
Sonja Simonyi

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: Vukica Đilas, *Home Movies*, 1970–199?. Film still from digitized 8mm original. Courtesy Academic Film Center – Student City Cultural Center, Belgrade.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

ISBN 978 94 6298 299 4
e-ISBN 978 90 4853 296 4
DOI 10.5117/9789462982994
NUR 670

© The authors / Amsterdam University Press B.V., Amsterdam 2022

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owner and the authors of the book.

Every effort has been made to obtain permission to use all copyrighted illustrations reproduced in this book. Nonetheless, whosoever believes to have rights to this material is advised to contact the publisher.

Amsterdam University Press

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments 7

Introduction 11
Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi

Part I Key Figures

1. The Experimentalism of Gábor Bódy 35
Gábor Gelencsér

2. Circles, Lines, and Documentary Designs: Tomislav Gotovac's Belgrade Trilogy 59
Greg de Cuir Jr.

3. From the Workshop of the Film Form to Martial Law: On the Intersecting and Bifurcating Paths of Paweł Kwiek's and Józef Robakowski's Cinematographic Work in the 1970s and the 1980s 77
Łukasz Mojsak

Part II Production, Support, and Distribution

4. Amateur Cinema in Bulgaria 103
Vladimir Iliev with Katerina Lambrinova

5. The Polish Educational Film Studio and the Cinema of Wojciech Wiszniewski 125
Masha Shpolberg

6. *Home Movies* and Cinematic Memories: Fixing the Gaze on Vukica Đilas and Tatjana Ivančić 151
Petra Belc

Part III Viewing Contexts, Theories, and Reception

7. Alone in the Cinemascope 177
Aleksandar Bošković

8. kinema ikon—Experiments in Motion (1970–89) 197
Ileana L. Selejan

9. AudioVision: Sound, Music, and Noise in East German Experimental Films 221
Seth Howes

Part IV Intersection of the Arts

10. Intersections of Art and Film on the Wrocław Art Scene, 1970–80 245
Marika Kuźmicz

11. Conceptual Artist, Cognitive Film: Miklós Erdély at the Balázs Béla Studio 265
Ksenya Gurshtein

12. Works and Words, 1979: Manifesting Eastern European Film and/as Art in Amsterdam 293
Sonja Simonyi

13. Wizardry on a Shoestring: Čaroděj and Experimental Filmmaking in Late Socialist Czechoslovakia 317
Tomáš Glanc

Index 329

Amsterdam
University
Press

Acknowledgments

The groundwork for this volume, and for our collaboration as coeditors, was laid with a film program and web-based project Artists, Amateurs, Alternative Spaces: Experimental Cinema in Eastern Europe, 1960–1990 on which we worked together in 2013–2014. We are very grateful to Margaret (Peggy) and Joanna Raczynska at the film department of the National Gallery of Art (NGA) in Washington, D.C., for believing in the need for both the film series and the site and for bringing us together. We are also grateful to all the contributors who gave presentations during the NGA series: Pavle Levi, Diana Nenadić, Luka Arsenjuk, Eric Zakim, and Mauro Resmini, as well as to the authors who wrote for the website: Līva Pētersone, Łukasz Mojsak, Marysia Lewandowska, Diana Nenadić, Eva Näripea, Aleksandra Kedziorek, and Jiří Horníček.

Because of the dearth of resources available to us as researchers during this curatorial endeavor, we subsequently coedited a special issue of the journal *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* in 2016, which provided an initial scholarly engagement with the region's experimental postwar cinemas. We are indebted to Ewa Mazierska, editor of the journal, for shepherding us through that process and for generously encouraging us to continue our editorial activities as part of Amsterdam University Press's Eastern European Screen Cultures series. The work of the contributors to the *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* issue—Cristian Nae, Mark Svede, Aida Vidan, and Maria Vinogradova—further helped us recognize how much research material was untapped and rife for discovery.

We also want to acknowledge Greg de Cuir Jr., who in his role as the series editor, a position he holds alongside Mazierska and Francesco Pitassio, readily responded to practical concerns during the publication process while also helping us untangle content-related issues, remaining an enthusiastic supporter of the project throughout.

Our editorial path in finishing this volume was by no means a straight one. Beyond the usual challenges of finding time to work on a project of this scale alongside professional and family obligations, we encountered the issue of promising papers remaining uncompleted due to various changes in authors' personal and professional lives, the sudden unexpected death of a prospective contributor, and the deeply saddening passing of one of our authors, Vladimir Iliev, before work on the volume was completed. We want to thank our fellow scholars and friends across the fields of film studies, art history, and beyond: Libby Boulter, Sirah Foighel Brutmann,

Amsterdam University Press

Katalin Cseh-Varga, Eitan Efrat, Candice Hamelin, Dina Iordanova, Yelena Kalinsky, Klara Kemp-Welch, Alice Lovejoy, Ainsley Morse, Doru Pop, Geoff Saxe, Stephanie Triplett, Maria Vassileva, Jaap Verheul, and Eszter Zimányi. In some cases, they suggested possible contributors and connected us with scholars unfamiliar to us, expanding our networks and our awareness of exciting new scholarship that we are now thrilled to have included in this book. They also offered us advice, suggestions, inspiration, encouragement, or assistance.

We owe a particular debt of gratitude to fellow scholars who organized events from which we benefited as participants. For Ksenya, the 2015 conference Shared Practices: The Intertwinement of the Arts in the Culture of Socialist Eastern Europe, organized by Anu Allas at the Kumu Art Museum, Tallinn and the 2018 Yugoslav Experimental Film symposium organized by Aleksandar Bošković at Columbia University were very productive in helping with work on this book. Ksenya was also a National Endowment for the Humanities fellow in 2015-2016 when work on this book began, and she is deeply grateful to the NEH for its support of her scholarship. For Sonja, participating in the 2016 conference Contested Spheres: Actually Existing Artworlds under Socialism held at the Kassák Museum in Budapest, organized by Maja and Reuben Fowkes together with Edit Sasvári, provided an important cross-disciplinary platform for discussions of late socialist experimentation. Co-organizing a screening and discussion of 1970s experimental films from Eastern Europe with Kaspars Reinis, Nell Donkers, and Jagna Lewandowska at EYE Filmmuseum Amsterdam in 2017 similarly generated new ideas regarding the complicated history of Eastern Europe's second public sphere.

At the Amsterdam University Press, we are grateful to Maryse Elliott, Mike Sanders, Chantal Nicolaes, Lucia Dove, and Danielle Carter, as well as to staff members with whom we did not interact directly, but whose labor we very much appreciate. We also deeply value the labor of the book's peer reviewers, whose comments greatly helped us to complete work on the manuscript.

We also want to express our gratitude to the authors whose work is featured in this volume. They tirelessly revised their texts, provided additions, and offered truly engaging intellectual debates that have greatly facilitated and enriched our experiences as editors and have enriched the book overall. Their excavating and highlighting of under-researched fields of Eastern European audiovisual culture will hopefully continue to engender many more inspiring conversations.

Numerous evocative images on celluloid, accounts of vibrant artist gatherings, and depictions of thriving multidisciplinary creative communities across socialist Eastern Europe have accompanied our work as editors over the past six years. We wish to acknowledge the filmmakers and artists discussed within these pages, whose experimental spirit and creative tenacity in the face of often adverse circumstances have been our guiding lights in bringing this book to fruition.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this book to our families: Josh, Maya, and Yasha; and Niels, Jens, and Nico. We thank our partners in particular for their support of our own perseverance in producing this book.

AUP
Amsterdam
University
Press

AUP
Amsterdam
University
Press

Introduction

Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi

Structure of the Book

In the simplest terms, this volume seeks to bring together and share with an interdisciplinary readership the histories of experimental filmmaking in state-socialist Eastern Europe between the 1950s and the late 1980s. This introduction is our effort as coeditors to be as transparent and self-aware as we can about the motivations and underlying assumptions that guided us in putting together a book that could accomplish that seemingly simple goal.

When we began this project in 2015, our assessment of the limited relevant English-language scholarly terrain[1] came from having previously coedited

1 The English-language books published recently, but prior to 2016, on postwar experimental filmmaking in Eastern Europe that we referenced in our earlier research were all studies focusing on a single country's experimental film culture; these include: Łukasz Ronduda and Florian Zeyfang, eds., *1, 2, 3…Avant-Gardes: Film/Art between Experiment and Archive* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2007); Bojana Piškur and Tamara Soban, eds., *Vse to je film!: Eksperimentalni film v Jugoslaviji 1951–1991 / This Is All Film!: Experimental Film in Yugoslavia 1951–1991*, exh. cat. (Ljubjana: Moderna Galerija, 2010); Ana Janevski, ed., *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiments in Yugoslav Art in the 60s and 70s* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2011); Pavle Levi, *Cinema by Other Means* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Alice Lovejoy, *Army Film and the Avant-Garde: Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015); Kamila Kuc and Michael O'Pray, eds., *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film, 1916–1989* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2014). Since 2016, new English-language publications include Pavle Levi's *Jolted Images: Unbound Analytic*, published by Amsterdam University Press in 2017 as part of the same series as this book; Marika Kuźmicz and Łukasz Ronduda, eds., *The Workshop of the Film Form* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017); and a monograph by one of the contributors to this volume: Seth Howes, *Moving Images on the Margins: Experimental Film in Late Socialist East Germany* (Rochester: Camden House, 2019). Chapters that focus on experimental filmmaking can occasionally be found in larger surveys of postwar Eastern European art; for example, Edit Sasvári, Hedvig Turai, and Sándor Hornyik, eds., *Art in Hungary 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018). Individual filmmakers on whom English-language scholarship has been published and most of whom are also discussed in this book include Tomislav Gotovac, Józef Robakowski, Paweł Kwiek, and Dóra Maurer.

Gurshtein, K. and S. Simonyi (eds.), *Experimental Cinemas in State-Socialist Eastern Europe*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022
DOI 10.5117/9789462982994_INTRO

AUP Amsterdam University Press

a special issue of the journal *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* (*SEEC*) on experimental cinema in socialist Eastern Europe and, prior to that, having worked together on the film series and accompanying web-based project Artists, Amateurs, Alternative Spaces: Experimental Cinema in Eastern Europe, 1960–1990 (2014).[2] Our first aim was to give the broadest possible regional account of experimental filmmaking in the former socialist bloc. The geographic scope of the Amsterdam University Press's Eastern European Screen Cultures series, for which this book was commissioned, is defined as including "All of the former socialist and current post-socialist states in Europe, excluding Russia." In soliciting essays for this volume, we chose to focus on state-socialist countries outside the former U.S.S.R., given that the conditions of cultural production in the latter (including the special case of the Baltic republics) have been more extensively addressed in the existing Anglophone literature. In the end, we identified case studies from seven countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Finding authors to address countries on which little to no scholarship existed, such as Bulgaria, or countries less frequently discussed in the context of Eastern Europe, such as East Germany, was a particular priority. The resulting book contains the widest geographic overview of its topic in one place to date.[3]

Another choice that shaped the book was its temporal focus, which is concentrated mainly on the long 1960s and 1970s. These two decades saw the greatest flourishing of experimentation on film stock globally, and Eastern Europe was no exception. If anything, the trend was, arguably, more pronounced in that region than others: it was only by the early 1960s that most places in the region had both enough post-Stalinist political freedom and enough film equipment available in circulation to allow for experimental film cultures to emerge. Similarly, by the early 1980s, a combination of a shift toward video, a very different medium technologically, and changing political circumstances seems to have inaugurated a new era of video and media art, which, given its different production, distribution, and circulation contexts, must be addressed as a separate topic.[4]

2 Ksenya Gurshtein and Sonja Simonyi, guest editors, "Experimental Cinema in State Socialist Eastern Europe," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* vol. 7, no. 1 (2016). The web project can be found at https://www.nga.gov/features/experimental-cinema-in-eastern-europe.html.

3 The book does omit Albania, which, to the best of our knowledge, is a special case where the region's most severe autocratic conditions made the existence of any kind of experimental cultural practices impossible.

4 See, for example, Edit András, ed., *Transitland: Video Art from Central and Eastern Europe 1989–2009* (Budapest: Ludwig Museum, 2009).

Finally, we sought to make the book as diverse as possible not only in terms of its geography but also in terms of its ability to address key contemporary methodological concerns in the fields of both film studies and cultural history of socialist-era Eastern Europe. Hence the book's organization of its thirteen contributions, which mostly address distinctive national contexts, into four sections that strive to bring out different methodological lenses in a transnational perspective. The book's four sections are Key Figures; Production, Support, and Distribution; Viewing Contexts, Theories, and Reception; and Intersection of the Arts. We readily acknowledge that these topical divisions are extremely porous. Most of the book's essays could easily fit into more than one of these four categories. The groupings of essays, nevertheless, highlight some of the key aspects of the experimental film cultures they address: who made experimental films under a state-socialist system and how were they made; which institutional platforms were activated, appropriated, or bypassed through these creative processes; how the parameters of experimentation were shaped by existing film production or distribution circuits; and how experimental cinema interfaced with or fit into other artistic practices, from popular to experimental, in the larger cultures within which the niche activities of experimental filmmakers were nestled.

One way in which the book's essays signal shifts in both film studies and Eastern European cultural history scholarship is by moving away from telling stories of personal genius and individual dissidence toward seeing personal creativity as almost always embedded in larger social systems. Hence the book's heavy focus on experimental cinemas' relationship to institutions—official ones of the state, foreign ones, and self-created ones that existed, even if briefly, either in parallel or in a complex entanglement with official ones. The section titled Key Figures discusses influential artists and filmmakers who both made significant bodies of experimental cinematic work themselves *and* played central roles in organizing and disseminating experimental film culture, often connecting filmmaking to other creative disciplines or forms of artistic experimentation. Production, Support, and Distribution focuses on the institutional, organizational, and administrative structures that made the creation of many of the films discussed in the book possible—under discussion here are primarily state-sanctioned and state-funded spaces of film production, such as amateur film clubs or smaller official film studios, and the ways in which these became centers of formal experimentation. The third section, Viewing Contexts, Theories, and Reception, turns to case studies concerned with theoretical framings of experimentation and how alternative conceptualizations of

film culture, and the inherent possibilities of cinema, engaged novel sites of film distribution and consumption. The final section, Intersection of the Arts, zooms in on questions of interdisciplinarity and intermediality, predominantly in relation to experimental, neo-avant-garde visual art practices and institutions and the ways in which visual artists specifically engaged the possibilities of cinema during the late socialist period.

Tracing the Boundaries of Experimental Cinema

One key methodological question that undergirds the entire book is what we mean by "experimental film." This is a question that we have had to tackle in our earlier work as well, and we urge anyone interested in a lengthier discussion to read the "Co-Editors' Introduction" to the *SEEC* issue cited above in conjunction with this text, because the discussion found here builds on the earlier work.

In *SEEC*, we framed "experimental" film as filmmaking that deploys unconventional strategies—in other words, ones not (yet) codified as genre conventions—with regards to both content (typically character-driven narrative and plot coded as clearly fictional or nonfictional) and form (audiovisual tropes used to convey and frame the narrative). Under the broad "experimental" umbrella, we *also* included practices that establish unconventional approaches to the production, distribution, and reception of moving images. For this publication, we continue to favor the more neutral term "experimental" over related concepts such as "avant-garde," "underground," or "independent" filmmaking, because it best encompasses different types of cinematic works that counter more mainstream approaches to film, covering both textual and contextual elements. As Patti Gaal-Holmes notes in citing Duncan Reekie's usage of the term, its "open-ended possibilities" relate to the fact that it

> refers to both process and product, adapts easily as a noun and an adjective, and […] has been accepted by a significant number of divergent film movements and theorists as a transcendent historical term. Experimental in this context would not be limited to formal experimentation but would include experiments in narrative, acting technique, sound, *mise-en-scène*, technology, working practices, distribution, exhibition.[5]

5 Dunkan Reekie cited in Patti Gaal-Holmes, *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.

Amsterdam University Press

Given the still largely uncharted histories of experimental filmmaking in socialist Eastern Europe, particularly in comparative transnational frameworks, a primary goal of this volume is to engage the multiplicity and variety of modes of experimentation with moving images that existed in the region. Hence the book's engagement with both the more familiar relationship between filmic experimentation and neo-avant-garde art (e.g., Mojsak, Kuźmicz, Howes, Gurshtein) and activities within a variety of other film cultural contexts. The latter include documentary filmmaking, such as the idiosyncratic nonfiction oeuvre of Polish filmmaker Wojciech Wiszniewski (Shpolberg), politically engaged amateur films from the Bulgarian town of Rousse (Iliev and Lambrinova), and even the realm of experimental feature-length narrative films, as in the case of the Hungarian filmmaker Gábor Bódy's mature work, which deployed fragmented and disjointed formal techniques alongside established genre tropes to produce highly unusual works of fiction (Gelencsér).

Given this range of sites for "experimental" practice, which, in their totality, surpass limited and contested notions of "independence" in filmmaking and states of being "underground," the volume broadens our understanding of areas of film culture within which experimentation was and was not possible. It thus highlights that, in socialist Eastern Europe, virtually any field of moving-image production could and was appropriated, rethought, and disrupted to generate unconventional output. The one exception we as editors made in pursuing the breadth of sites of experimentation is the field of animation. We chose not to include histories of experimentation in that fascinating medium, because the particularities of production and reception of twentieth century Eastern European animation deserve more thorough stand-alone exploration than we could offer here.

By focusing on the expansion of relevant contexts, our key aim was to move beyond scholarship that foregrounds filmic experiments as primarily grounded in formal developments that are traced textually. While an undeniably valuable analytic tool, textual analysis alone offers a limited framework for the adequate mapping of experimental filmic output in a broader social context. A similarly nuanced approach that focuses attention not just on aesthetic form but also on modes of labor and relations involved in filmmaking is relevant to understanding experimental film scenes, particularly given the complexities of the sociopolitical, economic, and cultural systems within which such experimentation occurred in state-socialist countries. Recent scholarship on Western experimental film, such as *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s* (2017), edited by Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, and Erica Balsom's *After*

Amsterdam University Press

Uniqueness: A History of Film and Video Art in Circulation (2017), as well as earlier work by David Andrews, David E. James, Kathryn Ramey, and Michael Zryd,[6] situates experimental cinema in its social, political, and institutional contexts, with the effect of vastly expanding canons first established in the 1970s and negating any simplistic definitions that equate experimentalism with formal innovation combined with an imagined unqualified cultural oppositionality and independence from institutions.[7]

Similarly, the essays collected in this book, while offering a diversity of scholarly approaches to their case studies, all seek to establish the ways in which creative work was embedded within concrete social realities and institutional settings. In this way, we consider Alice Lovejoy's 2015 *Army Film and the Avant-Garde: Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military* as an insightful model for the study of experimental media in the region. Lovejoy's work invokes both Michael Zryd's call to avoid simplistic and romanticized notions of "the avant-garde as anti-institutional" and Jan-Christopher Horak's call to study experimental films "not only according to their aesthetic achievements, but also in terms of the myriad contexts of their institutional frameworks and reception."[8]

6 David Andrews, *Theorizing Art Cinemas: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde and Beyond* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013); Kathryn Ramey "Economics and Culture of the Film Avant-Garde: Networks and Strategies in the Circulation of Films, Ideas and People," *Jump Cut*, no. 52 (Summer 2010); David E. James and Adam Hyman, eds., *Alternative Projections: Experimental Film in Los Angeles, 1945–1980* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015) and David E. James*, The Most Typical Avant-Garde*: *History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Michael Zryd, "A Report on Canadian Experimental Film Institutions, 1980–2000," in *North of Everything: English Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, William Beard and Jerry White (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 392–401.

7 The approach we describe as textual is exemplified by Gregory Zinman's recent study of the history of direct, manual interventions onto the celluloid filmstrip, *Making Images Move: Handmade Cinema and the Other Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020). Such scholarship significantly deepens our understanding of certain formal preoccupations, such as filmic abstraction, and we hope that future scholars will continue to do close readings of individual films that offer iconographic, structuralist, psychoanalytic, and other analyses of both Eastern European regional trends and global trends in experimental filmmaking—indeed, such analyses abound in this book too. Based on the essays found in this book, some possible fruitful areas of further thematic research in individual films include aforementioned filmic abstraction, a preoccupation with deconstructing or refiguring language, and representations of urban life, labor, and "Otherness," among others. Expanding makers' and viewers' capacities of perception and rethinking and activating the viewer's role, shifting it from passive to more consciously active, are two additional concerns that emerge across the case studies in this book and deserves further exploration.

8 Zryd and Horak cited in Alice Lovejoy *Army Film and the Avant-Garde: Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015), 209, note 49.

As our volume shows, this approach is particularly fruitful when applied to research on the constraints and possibilities that were offered by state-socialist systems. Whether the infrastructural opportunities that institutions under state socialism offered were used as intended, subtly subverted as covers for illicit activity, or overtly attacked as too rigidly adhering to the state's oppressive tactics, they all were regularly activated in the creative process, shaping filmic form and content, as well as production and distribution practices. Degrees of "institutionalization" within a state-socialist context, then, should not be understood merely with regards to degrees of "subversiveness" or "conformity." This approach often surfaces in Western-centric discussions on this topic; for instance, Duncan Reekie's decrying of the institutionalization of experimental film scenes in the United States and the United Kingdom that resulted in the loss of a countercultural tradition.[9] In Eastern Europe, the institutional apparatus that undergirded much of the output discussed in this book was an unavoidable reality tied, in most cases, to the very possibility of accessing technologies necessary to produce moving images. As the next section of the introduction discusses, then, within a state-socialist context, we understand the relationship between "underground" and "independent" films in Eastern Europe not as standing in opposition to, but as being complexly entwined with state cultural apparatuses and institutions.

Why and How to Define a Regional Identity?

Another set of this book's fundamental methodological questions and goals revolves around its focus on a particular region as it existed in a strictly bounded period of time. Here, we wanted to add to what we consider a growing and significant body of recent scholarship within what Anglophone academia calls area studies. On the one hand, this recent scholarship grants the basic assumption, as old as the Cold War era, that state socialism in the Soviet sphere of influence engendered distinctive forms of culture production that set Eastern Europe apart from other parts of the world. On the other hand, there is an emerging understanding among scholars that the forms such cultural production took were very different—far more complex, varied, and malleable—than popular Cold War narratives, particularly those produced in the West, led us to believe. The goal of the edited volume

9 Duncan Reekie, *Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 2.

Amsterdam University Press

in aggregate, then, is to identify and analyze the structural conditions that existed in Eastern Europe that made the existence and, in some cases, the flourishing of alternative film cultures possible.

The last several years of scholarship saw the emergence among cultural historians of the socialist period of two closely related theoretical concepts that help frame the larger goals of this volume: the "second public sphere" and "the gray zone." The former was most elaborately articulated in the essay collection edited by Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak, *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere: Event-Based Art in Late Socialist Europe*.[10] In the simplest definition that the coeditors of the volume offer in their introduction, the "second public sphere" is "a (pseudo-)autonomous arena of communication and opinion sharing, a network and cultural production of individuals and groups, which existed in addition to a dominant public sphere, with which it was interconnected." "The differentiation of public spheres in actually existing socialism is important," the coeditors go on to note,

> not only because it enables us to question the idea of a state regarded as a 'control freak' and to understand the atmosphere in which a given artwork was produced or presented. To reconstruct the exact functional mechanisms of public spheres in the late socialist era, we need to rethink the categorical distinctions between official and unofficial or legal and illegal.[11]

The other term, "the gray zone," is central to a document titled "New Exploratory Phase in Research on East European Cultures of Dissent: Joint Review Report" (NEP4DISSENT), released in the fall of 2019 as the outcome of a European Cooperation in Science and Technology grant and based on the responses of a large pool of scholars across European institutions to a state-of-the-art survey concerning research on cultures of dissent. In explaining the motivations behind their work, the report's authors write:

> Although the most spectacular forms of dissent in […] former socialist countries are well known, we believe that after the period of growth and

10 Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak, eds., *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere: Event-Based Art in Late Socialist Europe* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2018). For an introduction to the book's main ideas, see Andrea Bátorová, "Interview with Katalin Cseh and Adam Czirak about the Second Public Sphere in the Former Eastern Bloc," October 23, 2014, *Art Margins Online*, https://artmargins.com/interview-with-katalin-cseh-and-adam-czirak-about-the-second-public-sphere-in-the-former-eastern-bloc/.
11 Cseh Varga and Czirak, *Performance Art*, 7, 5.

> consolidation in the decades after 1989, this field of study and the related domains of cultural heritage have failed to achieve its full significance. This state of affairs results from, (1) the persistence of Cold War-era conceptual distinctions which are biased toward direct political and contentious activities, and so overshadow the indirect cultural challenges to state socialism; (2) the confinement of research within national and disciplinary silos; and (3) the difficulties in coping with the heterogeneity, ephemerality, and linguistic diversity of the cultural legacy of this period.[12]

The authors thus consider how much broader cultural histories, including those of experimental cinema, can be incorporated into more nuanced and ambiguous contemporary understandings of dissent under state socialism and introduce the term "gray zone" as operative to the work of two of the project's working groups (Working Group 2: Culture in the Grey Zone and Working Group 3: Alternative Cultures).[13] Concerning the term "gray zone," the authors write:

> Understanding resistance as an act of negotiated autonomy and as an exploration of the ambiguous realm between the official culture of former socialist countries on the one hand, and openly dissenting cultural activities on the other, defines the research scope of Working Group 2: Culture in the Grey Zone. It examines the dilemmas confronting the members of academic and artistic communities who, without engaging in open dissent, cultivated ties to both organized opposition and transnational scientific and artistic networks; while frequently playing a mediating role in introducing subversive, often Western ideas, trends, and theories into the arts, humanities, and social sciences as well as to everyday cultural practices. This research will enable a better understanding of the dual roles played by these individuals and groups, namely, that of simultaneously legitimizing and subverting official culture, and engaging in East-West dialogue. [This research] also takes into consideration the circumstances

12 Maciej Maryl, Piotr Wciślik, Muriel Blaive, James Kapaló, Zsófia Lóránd et al., "New Exploratory Phase in Research on East European Cultures of Dissent: Joint Review Report: Report prepared by the participants of the COST Action CA16213" (NEP4DISSENT) (Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2019). Available online at https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02144983, 8–9.

13 Particularly relevant to our book is the work of the project's Alternative Cultures working group, whose broad topics of research range "from club culture, avant-garde art, fan communities, and resourceful venues; to media, such as fanzines, do-it-yourself fashion, foreign news reporting, experimental film, and mail art." Ibid., 11.

> affecting the life choices of the grey zone artists and scholars: the existence of organized cultural opposition outside of the official realm, the degree to which such professions are dependent on state patronage, and the extent of cultural isolation from the West and the relationships with Western institutions promoting cultural freedom, among others.[14]

In addition to identifying the "gray zone" as the space where much of the cultural dissent in state socialism happened, NEP4DISSENT articulates several other key ideas that are important to this book, as well. It identifies "spaces, communities and networks, and their relationships" as major areas of investigation—an idea consonant with this book's emphasis on filmmakers' embeddedness in larger social networks and sites of production, reception, and critical exchange in considering the forces that shaped experimental cinema in Eastern Europe.[15] The report also notes the deeply problematic "sharp distinctions between official culture […] and oppositional culture […] that has often been taken for granted." "This dualistic perspective obscures what should be seen rather as the interplay between imposed cultural exclusion, instances of negotiation, and conscious dissent. Taken together, this interplay shaped the space in which alternatives to official cultural values could emerge."[16] While we as editors did not proscribe the use of terms "official" and "unofficial" in this book—terms that we believe still retain significant use value for many of the authors—we hope the book as a whole complicates for its readers any easy dichotomy between them.

Notably, neither the sources cited above nor the book in your hands seeks to deny or diminish the reality of marginalization, persecution, or censorship that befell participants and culture makers active in the second public sphere or the gray zone. But the scholarship presented here adds significant nuance to our understanding that most artifacts produced on the margins of state-socialist culture did not face direct censorship or persecution, and that, despite the long-standing self-perception of the makers of alternative culture as being completely outside "the system" in which they lived, a retroactive look suggests that it is vitally important for

14 Ibid., 10. For an excellent example of scholarship that explores these ideas in practice, see the recent special issue of *Third Text*. Guest edited by Reuben Fowkes, the issue is titled "Actually Existing Artworlds of Socialism" (vol. 32, no. 4, July 2018). For an example of an exhibition project that delved into the complexities of Eastern European artists' interactions with the most repressive parts of the state-socialist apparatus, see Kata Krasznahorkai and Sylvia Sasse, eds., *Artists & Agents: Performance Art and Secret Services*, exh. cat. (Leipzig: Spector Books, 2020).

15 Ibid., 32.

16 Ibid., 14.

Amsterdam University Press

us as contemporary researchers to understand how individuals were, in fact, entangled in the system and still found room for maneuver within it.[17]

We believe that the particular sociocultural circumstances in state-socialist Eastern Europe—a peculiar mix of tacit, and sometimes generous, support from socialist states that was combined with often unpredictable periods of intense official hostility—for which the terms "second public sphere" and "gray zone" serve as shorthands, make a compelling case for the regional focus of this book. We also believe that this book's transnational perspective provides insights that stand-alone national histories cannot—a point on which NEP4DISSENT insists, as well, arguing for comparative and transnational approaches to the study of alternative cultures as an essential counterbalance to the national historical narratives that have dominated the region's historiography since 1989.[18] In this regard, this book is one of a number of recent publications, mostly in art history, that embrace a similar perspective, looking for overarching patterns that defined experimental culture in the region while not losing sight of the real and significant discrepancies between different national situations. These include *Cinema, State Socialism, and Society in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, 1917–1989: Re-Visions*, edited by Sanja Bahun and John Haynes (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2014); *Art beyond Borders: Artistic Exchange in Communist Europe (1945–1989)*, edited by Jérôme Bazin, Pascal Dubourg Glatigny, and Piotr Piotrowski (Budapest: Central European Press, 2016); *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War*, edited by Christopher B. Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Düll (London: Pallgrave Macmillan, 2017); *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, edited by Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (New York: Routledge, 2018); and Klara Kemp-Welch's *Networking the Bloc: Experimental Art in Eastern Europe*

17 It's rare to find frank published acknowledgments that, as scholars, we may find ourselves at odds in our assessments with the lived experience and opinions of the living subjects of our research, an admiration and respect for whose work often inspires our scholarship in the first place. An exchange that at least acknowledges the possibility of this discrepancy can be found in a recent essay by Klara Kemp-Welch about the Hungarian artist and experimental filmmaker Dóra Maurer. "If it was a paradox that it was the state's emphasis on amateur art that had given experimental artists access to a new audience, then it also took Maurer's remarkable combination of verve and pragmatism to make the most of the creative opportunity. But she did not see these activities as forming part of a 'gray zone': she and Erdély were barely reimbursed their travel expenses for directing the workshops. Asked whether in those days she had made a clear division between official and unofficial art, she replied that she had; asked whether she had seen these two positions as fluid, her answer was just as clear: 'NO!'" Klara Kemp-Welch, "*Esprit de Corps*: Collaborative Activities 1971–7," in *Dóra Maurer*, ed. Juliet Bingham, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2019), 15.

18 NEP4DISSENT, 14.

1965–1981 (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), a book that is so far unique as a sustained, meticulous mapping of specific interpersonal exchanges by individuals and groups who took part in cross-border exchanges.

A particularly important benefit of the transnational aspect of the book is that it allows a plethora of critical voices, both historical and contemporary, from the region itself to take center stage in reflecting on shared experiences. This makes it possible for Eastern European experimental cinema to be theorized by those familiar with its particularities in lieu of turning to ill-fitting frameworks produced by Western theorists for different contexts. As the book demonstrates, a number of filmmakers in the region—Tomislav Gotovac (De Cuir Jr.) and Slobodan Šijan (Bošković) in Yugoslavia, Gábor Bódy (Gelencsér) and Miklós Erdély (Gurshtein) in Hungary, George Săbău in Romania (Selejan), and Józef Robakowski (Mojsak) in Poland, to name some—served as their own theorists all along and had a significant impact on defining the theoretical concerns of others around them. The book's authors also invoke other thinkers from the region whose ideas we know historically to have been important in their own countries and which, in a transnational perspective, gain the ability to illuminate larger regional trends, as well. Oskar Hansen, whose theory of Open Form was highly influential on several generations of interdisciplinary artists in Poland, is but one example of such a figure (Mojsak). We hope that, with time, scholars will do more to understand the key critical voices that shaped and analyzed Eastern European experimental cinema, perhaps through publications of collected translations of primary sources of the kind that exist for visual art but not yet for experimental film in the region.[19]

Notable Sites of Experimentation

The studies of experimental filmmaking in postwar Eastern Europe gathered in this book consistently touch on a number of key institutional sites and

19 Examples of compendia of primary sources include Laura Hoptman and Tomáš Pospiszyl, eds., *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern European and Central European Art since the 1950s* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002); Ana Janevski, Roxanna Marcoci, and Ksenia Nouril, eds., *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018); and tranzit.hu, ed., *Art Always Has Its Consequences: Artists' Texts from Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia 1947–2009* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011). There are also prominent living theoreticians of experimental film, such as Hrvoje Turković in Croatia, whose work we discuss in the "Co-Editors' Introduction" to the *SEEC* special issue, whose writings are yet to be translated into English and would benefit the emergence of a regional perspective.

social formations that defined the who, where, how, and why of this sphere of cultural activity. Some of these were the more marginal parts of their countries' national cinema apparatuses. Examples include smaller state-run film studios (Shpolberg, Gurshtein), film and art schools (Mojsak), and international film festivals and events, which at times required nominations for participants through a given country's official cultural channels (Simonyi) and which were places that allowed already active experimental filmmakers to connect to a larger community of practitioners and bolster their own legitimacy back home.

As noted at the beginning of this introduction, spaces that encouraged intermedial and interdisciplinary work, ranging from official institutions to informal gatherings, were particularly fruitful sites of filmic experimentation, which often arose out of social experimentation with existing norms of cinematic production and reception (for the most evocative example of the latter, see Tomáš Glanc's description of apartment film festivals in Prague).[20] This was particularly true of filmmakers' relationship with visual art (Mojsak, Kuźmicz, Gurshtein), but as Seth Howes's East German case study demonstrates, sound and music could also become central to experimental filmmaking. Howes not only provides an analysis of form and content of a select group of films but also foregrounds issues of media exhibition and consumption through the ways experimental filmmakers "reincorporated their films into live performances, musical and otherwise—thus ensuring that their films were shaped by, and then used to shape, broader practices of making and exhibiting" multimedia and intermedia art. As he notes, an important effect of this was to destabilize the disciplinary divisions state authorities used to administer and ideologically contain creative output under socialism.

> [S]uch approaches challenged the hierarchical disciplinary structure that governed education in music, filmmaking, dance, or art at East German academies, and which also supplied the rationale for creating distinct professional unions with mandatory membership in order to discipline activities in each field.

Artistic interdisciplinarity more broadly was thus a key way to resist and evade the state's attempt to discipline its art into a certain order.

20 For an important recent contribution to the history and theorization of cinema in relation to intermedia and experimentation across disciplinary boundaries in the West, see Jonathan Walley, *Cinema Expanded: Avant-Garde Film in the Age of Intermedia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

Amsterdam University Press

Yet another case study that identifies a fascinating site of interdisciplinary activity at the juncture of film and literature is Aleksandar Bošković's analysis of Slobodan Šijan's paracinema in the *Film Leaflet* fanzine, which explored the "cine-apparatus" in sophisticated visual ways but without any actual projected images. Freely combining, reassembling, and appropriating wide-ranging content across media, from the lowbrow to the popular, Šijan's fanzine articulated a "new language" of film thought along with a practice of critical inquiry into cultural reproduction that sheds light on the playfulness and intellectual range of Yugoslav film culture of the 1970s. Finally, Sonja Simonyi's chapter also illuminates the centrality of interdisciplinarity for experimental work across the region as a whole and highlights its flip side—the difficulties of showcasing it that arose out of the differences in art administration in the East and West, as well as infrastructural limitations on the ground at art and film institutions in Amsterdam, where the events she discusses took place.

Of particular note in this book is the extensive exploration of Eastern European amateur filmmaking, a long neglected field of film studies that has become an expanding arena for research in recent years under the umbrella of such initiatives as the Orphan Film Symposium. In Eastern Europe, amateurism was embraced as nowhere else, often lending conceptual legitimacy to filmic experimentation that happened in other spheres, such as visual art, as when the artists running the Permafo Gallery in Wrocław proclaimed that it does not recognize the division into "professionals" and "amateurs" in creative practice (Kuźmicz). Indeed, amateurism, which was encouraged across most of the European state-socialist sphere as an edifying and wholesome field of creative expression for the masses, is the foremost sphere of "minor" film cultural activity that emerges as central to experimentation across the different national contexts discussed in this book.[21] Yet the ways in which it served experimentation differed considerably from one national context to the next. In Yugoslavia, amateur experimentalism was highly developed, institutionalized, and publicly interwoven with networks of avant-garde art and film culture, whose key figures, both celebrated ones such as Tomislav Gotovac (De Cuir Jr.) and lesser known ones such as Tatjana Ivančić (Belc), started out or worked

21 Two important recent publications include *Film History* (vol. 30, issue 1; Spring 2018), "Special Issue: Toward a Global History of Amateur Film Practices and Institutions," guest edited by Masha Salazkina and Enrique Fibla-Gutierrez; and the forthcoming volume by Masha Salazkina and Enrique Fibla-Gutierrez, eds., *Global Perspectives on Amateur Film Histories and Cultures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021).

exclusively within the amateur context. Belc's essay on the amateur filmmaker Tatjana Ivančić is particularly notable here, because it addresses a filmmaker's gender and her culture's misogyny as forces that shaped Eastern European experimental film scenes—a topic that we as editors felt was vital to include and that requires the kind of scholarly attention in our subfield that it has increasingly been getting in other areas of cultural studies pertaining to both Eastern Europe and other parts of the world.

In the case of the kinema ikon group in the Romanian city of Arad (Selejan), the infrastructure of officially sponsored amateur filmmaking was, by contrast, unambiguously subverted. kinema ikon took advantage of the available technological tools to produce clandestine experimental work that fell fully outside of the expected and accepted parameters of amateur production. In Hungary, in turn, experimentation on film by creatives from diverse backgrounds, while developed independently from the official amateur cinema scene, was, nevertheless, resolutely tied to nonprofessionalism during a veritable takeover of an official film site, the Balázs Béla Studio, originally established for professionals (Gelencsér, Gurshtein). Last, an important aspect of amateurism concerns ways in which it could engender social activism through film. The Bulgarian case study included here exemplifies to what extent amateur filmmakers could seize their platforms, which were supported and embraced by the country's professional filmmakers' union, for social engagement and activism (Iliev and Lambrinova). Evidently less policed, the amateur scene in Bulgaria was, at least in one key instance, able to serve as a catalyst for a reckoning with the taboo issue of industrial-scale pollution, ultimately leading to public discussion and governmental action. The impact of amateurism in the larger social sphere can also be traced, in less obvious but important ways, in specific films by kinema ikon (Selejan) and Tatjana Ivančić (Belc), as well as in the work of Čaroděj in Czechoslovakia (Glanc) and in the participation of artist-filmmakers in the jazz and punk scenes in East Germany (Howes), cases in which amateur filmmaking helped cohere whole subcultural communities and create alternative parainstitutions in places where co-opting state-funded institutions and resources was not an option. Today, when the internet and the availability of a video camera to virtually anyone with a phone has dramatically transformed the global landscape of moving image production, Eastern Europe's embrace of amateur filmmaking decades earlier seems positively prescient and worthy of further exploration as notable cultural heritage.

Amsterdam University Press

What's Next?

This book does not address as an explicit topic of research the current locations and state of preservation of Eastern Europe's socialist-era experimental film legacies, though a reader interested in pursuing this research further can glean a lot of useful information from the essays' footnotes. As coeditors of the book, we hope that this volume will inspire future researchers to extend and expand the knowledge gathered in these pages. The last section of the introduction is meant to offer practical guidance for anyone trying to figure out where to look next. We also hope this book might draw attention to the value of Eastern Europe's experimental film legacies and to the need for continued and increased efforts that would ensure their long-term survival.

The internet has made access to previously obscure films possible on a scale that was inconceivable when the state-socialist era ended in 1989–91. Anyone interested in a particular film mentioned in this book should first do a web search and check a film's availability online, because that's a continuously shifting terrain. That said, as of summer 2020, the vast majority of the films discussed here cannot be found on publicly accessible websites. In many cases, they can only be accessed through in-person viewing in the countries of their origin, and it often requires a fair bit of effort for a researcher to figure out where a particular cache of films might be found. The conceptual and medium in-between-ness and cultural marginality of experimental films that makes them so interesting as works of art has also meant that they have often not found self-evident homes in the official institutions of heritage preservation and public exhibition as those existed prior to 1989 or as they exist in Eastern Europe today. Contemporary preservation and distribution are further complicated by a frequent lack of legal clarity as to who holds ownership and copyright of these works.

Insofar as these films survive, it is through an uneven patchwork of preservation efforts and sites that vary from place to place. The NEP4DISSENT report mentions access to original archival sources connected to postwar Eastern European cultures of dissent as an overarching problem

> due to their heterogeneity, linguistic diversity, and the ephemeral nature of the documents and artefacts which form this unique legacy [as well as] uneven quality of the metadata, resulting from the uneven investment in this particular realm of cultural heritage in general.[22]

22 NEP4DISSENT, 15.

Amsterdam University Press

All of this is certainly true for experimental filmmaking, for which even regional coverage by "digital cultural heritage infrastructure for knowledge discovery and popularization" is a far-off dream.[23] This is to say nothing of the deeper philosophical issue that, as the state-socialist era recedes further from living memory, the particular conditions that shaped its art will become increasingly less comprehensible even in the countries of origin. There are no efforts that we know of related to experimental cinema that offer museological or archival methodologies for preserving and presenting coherent historical contexts (of intimate communities of makers, unusual exhibition venues, means of producing critical dialogue, etc.) in addition to film-based artefacts themselves.

Notable nation-specific efforts by major state-funded institutions to preserve experimental and amateur films include the research collection of the Center for Audiovisual Studies at the storied Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU) in Prague, which has an extensive online database of unofficial, amateur films from the socialist era (http://cas.famu.cz/research-collection/) and has begun to digitize such films in the last several years; the archives of Communist-era amateur films at the Yugoslav Kinoteka and the Academic Film Center at the Students' City Cultural Center in Belgrade; and especially the Filmoteka—a web-based archive of artist films and other experimental media work—built by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw (https://artmuseum.pl/en/filmoteka). Thanks to the latter, works by filmmakers discussed in Łukasz Mojsak's and Marika Kuźmicz's essays, for example, are easily accessible. Other art museums in the region, such as the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade or the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Ljubljana, also have holdings relevant to the history of experimental cinema, though they are not currently accessible online.

Films being deposited in an official, state-supported archive is, of course, not always an unequivocal good. The total transfer in recent years of the contents of the Hungarian Balázs Béla Stúdió (BBS) archive from the Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle), where it had a public outpost since 2006, to the Hungarian National Film Archive (Magyar Nemzeti Filmarchívum) exposes the complexities of archiving the socialist-era past in the present moment. The transfer has reduced access to the BBS material, though the online database of the BBS archive (http://bbsarchiv.hu/) remains a useful starting point. Similarly, Petra Belc notes in her essay that, while the archive of the Croatian Film Clubs Association (Hrvatski Filmski Savez) in Zagreb is

23 Ibid.

Amsterdam University Press

valuable in exploring the legacy of Yugoslav amateur filmmaking, it, at the same time, still reproduces the biases of the past, in doing less to promote scholarship and presentations of work by female filmmakers who were also underappreciated in their own time.

As Sonja Simonyi's contribution to this volume demonstrates, there also exist surprising opportunities in archives outside the region, for example, in Western Europe, that can be mined for sources on transnational networks of intellectual and cultural exchange during the state-socialist era. This contribution is doubly valuable because it unearths a valuable archival resource not previously discussed in any publications and because it traces concrete ways in which exchanges conducted in Western Europe became a starting point for collaboration between filmmakers from different Eastern European countries—a fact that belies the Cold War assumption that recognition in the West was the pinnacle of Eastern European artists' dreams. Western institutions have also more recently acquired collection materials related to Eastern European experimental cinema, as when the Museum of Modern Art in New York acquired a full set of Slobodan Šijan's *Film Leaflet* for its library collection in 2018.[24] There are, however, no concerted efforts by individuals or institutions interested in Eastern European experimental filmmaking to locate and centralize information on archival resources in repositories outside the region.

In addition to state-supported institutions, some important work has been done by private nonprofits in the region to promote preservation and scholarship of experimental filmmaking. This includes the activities of the Arton Foundation in Poland, run by one of the contributors to this volume, Marika Kuźmicz, and the private Marinko Sudac collection in Zagreb, which contains a number of Yugoslav moving image works searchable online (https://avantgarde-museum.com/hr/). Experimental filmmakers have also in some cases taken archival and historiographic matters into their own hands, as in the case of the Tomislav Gotovac Institute in Zagreb, which preserves the late artist's legacy, or the case of the kinema ikon collective in Romania, whose members have worked to preserve, classify, and digitize their own work on the internet (http://www.kinema-ikon.net/2010_ki/filmexp.html). Though partial, the information found through such resources is a starting point for researchers. In Bulgaria, Vladimir Iliev, another contributor to this book and a long-time amateur filmmaker, wrote and published the only existing history of Bulgarian amateur cinema and

24 For more on this, see https://post.moma.org/who-is-shooting-over-there-slobodan-sijans-fanzine-film-leaflet-1976-79/

Amsterdam University Press

experimental practices, an excerpt from which appears in this book in English for the first time.

As we write this in 2020 and survey the landscape of how the legacy of experimental filmmaking under state socialism has fared in the last thirty years, we wonder if it might not be time to consider parallels between the present moment and the object of our study, the past. If alternative cultures of the socialist period teach us anything, it's that culture workers should strategically use the resources of the state when and if they are available while also developing grassroots parainstitutions as needed to create communities of shared concern around issues and activities that the state would not knowingly embrace and support. The continued existence of the Artpool Art Research Center, privately run from 1979 until 2015, when it became part of the Central European Research Institute for Art History (KEMKI), and, to a lesser extent, the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives (originally funded by George Soros), both in Budapest, are a testament to the staying power of institutions that emerged from below to address blind spots in official record keeping. Today, as some of Eastern European culture's biggest players—Poland and Hungary—revert to evermore authoritarian right-wing politics and cultural policies, histories that reveal the complexities of socialist-era culture might have to be increasingly protected and promoted by people who take matters into their own hands and draw on the lessons of ingenuity demonstrated by the protagonists of this book. The same seems to have been true all along for other countries in the region (e.g., Bulgaria and Romania), which continue to contend with a general lack of resources for cultural preservation. In the meantime, those of us based outside the region (of the fourteen contributors to this book, seven are based in Eastern Europe while the remaining half live and work in the United States and Western Europe) must also continue to do our best to produce scholarship that makes complex, vital, and relevant a past whose contestation and discussion remain so important to the political present.

Bibliography

András, Edit, ed., *Transitland: Video Art from Central and Eastern Europe 1989–2009.* Budapest: Ludwig Museum, 2009.

Andrews, David. *Theorizing Art Cinemas: Foreign, Cult, Avant-Garde and Beyond.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013.

Bátorová, Andrea. "Interview with Katalin Cseh and Adam Czirak about the Second Public Sphere in the Former Eastern Bloc," October 23, 2014, *Art Margins Online.*

https://artmargins.com/interview-with-katalin-cseh-and-adam-czirak-about-the-second-public-sphere-in-the-former-eastern-bloc/.

Bošković, Aleksandar. "Who Is Shooting Over There: Slobodan Šijan's Fanzine Film Leaflet (1976–79)," in *post: notes on art in a global context*. New York: Museum of Modern Art. Accessed April 21, 2021. https://post.moma.org/who-is-shooting-over-there-slobodan-sijans-fanzine-film-leaflet-1976-79/.

Cseh-Varga, Katalin and Adam Czirak, eds. *Performance Art in the Second Public Sphere: Event-Based Art in Late Socialist Europe*. London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Fowkes, Maja and Reuben Fowkes, guest editors. "Actually Existing Artworlds of Socialism." *Third Text* vol. 32, no. 4 (July 2018).

Gaal-Holmes, Patti. *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Gurshtein, Ksenya, ed., *Artists, Amateurs, Alternative Spaces: Experimental Cinema in Eastern Europe 1960–1990.* Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2014. https://www.nga.gov/features/experimental-cinema-in-eastern-europe.html.

Gurshtein, Ksenya and Sonja Simonyi, guest editors. "Experimental Cinema in State Socialist Eastern Europe." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* vol. 7, no. 1 (2016).

Hoptman, Laura and Tomáš Pospiszyl, eds. *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern European and Central European Art since the 1950s.* New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2002.

Howes, Seth. *Moving Images on the Margins: Experimental Film in Late Socialist East Germany.* Rochester: Camden House, 2019.

James, David, and Adam Hyman, eds. *Alternative Projections: Experimental Film in Los Angeles, 1945–1980*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

James, David. *The Most Typical Avant-Garde*: *History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Janevski, Ana, Roxanna Marcoci, and Ksenia Nouril, eds. *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018.

Janevski, Ana, ed. *As Soon as I Open My Eyes I See a Film: Experiments in Yugoslav Art in the 60s and 70s*. Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art, 2011.

Kemp-Welch, Klara. "*Esprit de Corps*: Collaborative Activities 1971–7," in *Dóra Maurer*, edited by Juliet Bingham, 10–15, exh. cat. London: Tate Publishing, 2019.

Krasznahorkai, Kata and Sylvia Sasse, eds., *Artists & Agents: Performance Art and Secret Services*, exh. cat. Leipzig: Spector Books, 2020.

Kuc, Kamila and Michael O'Pray, eds. *The Struggle for Form: Perspectives on Polish Avant-Garde Film, 1916–1989*. London: Wallflower Press, 2014.

Kuźmicz, Marika and Łukasz Ronduda, eds., *The Workshop of the Film Form*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017.

Levi, Pavle. *Cinema by Other Means*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

AUP Amsterdam University Press

Levi, Pavle. *Jolted Images: Unbound Analytic.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.

Lovejoy, Alice. *Army Film and the Avant-Garde: Cinema and Experiment in the Czechoslovak Military.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.

Maryl, Maciej et al. "New Exploratory Phase in Research on East European Cultures of Dissent: Joint Review Report: Report prepared by the participants of the COST Action CA16213" (NEP4DISSENT). Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 2019. https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-02144983.

Piškur, Bojana and Tamara Soban, eds., *Vse to je film!: Eksperimentalni film v Jugoslaviji 1951–1991 / This Is All Film!: Experimental Film in Yugoslavia 1951–1991*, exh. cat. Ljubjana: Moderna Galerija, 2010.

Ramey, Kathryn. "Economics and Culture of the Film Avant-Garde: Networks and Strategies in the Circulation of Films, Ideas and People," in *Jump Cut*, no. 52 (Summer 2010), n.p.. https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc52.2010/rameyExperimentalFilm/index.html.

Reekie, Duncan. *Subversion: The Definitive History of Underground Cinema.* London: Wallflower Press, 2007.

Ronduda, Łukasz and Florian Zeyfang, eds. *1, 2, 3…Avant-Gardes: Film/Art between Experiment and Archive*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2007.

Salazkina, Masha and Enrique Fibla-Gutierrez, eds., *Global Perspectives on Amateur Film Histories and Cultures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021.

Salazkina, Masha and Enrique Fibla-Gutierrez, guest editors. "Toward a Global History of Amateur Film Practices and Institutions." *Film History* vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring 2018).

Sasvári, Edit, Hedvig Turai, and Sándor Hornyik, eds., *Art in Hungary 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond.* London: Thames & Hudson, 2018.

tranzit.hu, ed., *Art Always Has Its Consequences: Artists' Texts from Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia 1947–2009*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2011.

Walley, Jonathan. *Cinema Expanded: Avant-Garde Film in the Age of Intermedia*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2020.

Zinman, Gregory. *Making Images Move: Handmade Cinema and the Other Arts.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020.

Zryd, Michael. "A Report on Canadian Experimental Film Institutions, 1980–2000," in *North of Everything: English Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, edited by William Beard and Jerry White, 392–401. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002.

AUP Amsterdam University Press

About the Authors

Dr. **Ksenya Gurshtein** is the curator of modern and contemporary art at the Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas. She holds a PhD in the history of art, and her academic research focuses on postwar conceptual, experimental, and neo-avant-garde art in Eastern Europe. Her scholarship and criticism have appeared in scholarly journals, popular magazines, exhibition catalogs, and online.

Dr. **Sonja Simonyi** is an independent scholar working on the visual cultures of socialist Eastern Europe. She completed her dissertation in 2015 at New York University on the Western genre in socialist Eastern European cinema. Her work on both popular and experimental cinema has appeared in a number of edited volumes as well as the journals *Film History* and *Third Text*.

AUP Amsterdam University Press