Introduction

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Historical studies of the Soviet influence in Eastern Europe after World War II have undergone a radical transformation as a consequence of the fall of communism. This is due in part to the ability of historians from the region itself to ask fresh questions and offer new judgements on their own past, free from the strictures of Marxist-Leninist historical orthodoxy, party control, and the strict injunctions of state-sponsored censorship. Even more important is the loosening of state control over archival collections that document the Soviet role in the establishment of communist states during the period 1945–1965. This volume strives to benefit from both of these stimulants for original historical research.

This volume focuses on the first two decades of the postwar period. While individual essays regularly and inevitably begin their stories in the 1940s and follow them into the 1960s, the primary focus is on the 1950s, a period of rapid and rather abrupt changes in international relations, cultural policy, the economy and indeed, the film industry within the Soviet Bloc in general and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Czechoslovakia in particular. In the GDR, the decade was strongly influenced by the relationship with its Western alter ego, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). As the editor of a recent volume addressing the cinema culture of the GDR's Western counterpart phrased it, 'the long 1950s' marks the period 'between the founding of the two German states in 1949 and the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961'.[1] At the same time, it was a decade of ideological alignment between the

GDR and Czechoslovakia, squeezed between decades of tension, animosity and war atrocities at one end,[2] and the subsequent ideological estrangement of the 1960s at the other. Only two of the essays in this volume are explicitly comparative, whereas others address transnational phenomena like film festivals or international co-productions. Most of the essays are grouped into parallel pairs or thematic clusters offering perspectives on the two film cultures and industries at the centre of this volume. The first two essays, by David Bathrick and Jiří Knapík, aim to provide an overview of the rich historical context and orient the reader within the sphere of cultural policy, addressed by all the individual essays. In effect, and despite the fact that most of the essays are not comparative in their methods, the thoroughly researched topics collected here give readers a clear 'stereoscopic' overview and deep understanding of phenomena that so far have been analysed only within national frameworks, if at all. The perspectives in this volume, although situated outside the national context, thus offer insight into the two national industries, their indigenous specificities and respective relationships, and above all their position with regard to the USSR, which provided inspiration, influence and direction.[3] The essential advantage of this approach is that it rids 'national' histories of their nonreflexive conceptions of 'specificity' or 'special paths', thereby revealing structural similarities. Ultimately, though, specificity lingers in the re-evaluation of the individual national cultural traditions, political practices and economic and social structures enabled by this stereoscopic approach.

The GDR and Czechoslovakia

Although relations between the GDR and Czechoslovakia were not fully harmonious in the sphere of cinema in the 1950s, they were certainly very intimate and motivated by a number of mostly pragmatic interests that allowed the uneasy alliance to survive the era of Khrushchev's Thaw. While East German officials occasionally envied Czechoslovak production (they admired Czech comedies and fairy tales, which were popular with audiences too, particularly the fairy tales),[4] party officials and film industry leaders in both countries were alarmed by the pace of the 'October' reforms in their shared neighbour, Poland.[5] At the same time, the practitioners and leaders of both leading national film studios, Barrandov and DEFA (formally the Deutsche

Filmaktien Gesellschaft), gazed ambitiously towards the West. Within this mode of ideological distraction, the Czechoslovak and East German film industries often promoted their mutual cooperation and cultural exchange in the 1950s as proof that they were sufficiently active, loyal members of the Eastern Bloc.

At the same time, the relationship between the two countries was influenced by their specific geopolitical position as members of the so-called Northern Triangle, together with their rebellious Polish neighbour. The USSR understood Czechoslovakia, the GDR and Poland as a defensive bloc on the border of the FRG.[6] The unique position that the GDR and Czechoslovakia occupied in the eyes of the Soviets confirms that the political and social links between the two states in the postwar order did not arise from their geographical proximity alone but were also fostered by the Cold War strategy of Soviet hegemony.

Any functional implementation of a geopolitical bloc, though, encounters fundamental barriers and contradictions. In the GDR and Czechoslovakia, these were rooted in the historical memory of the states and their citizens, as well as in the attitudes of party leaders in each state. The Czechoslovak population's resentful attitudes towards Germans and the resulting strain on political relations and cultural contacts with the East German state were not as strong as those in Poland,[7] but memories of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia as well as the postwar expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia still caused tensions and mistrust between these two allies.[8] Like their Polish neighbours, Czechs and Slovaks did not entirely buy into the imagined division between 'good' Germans in the socialist state (constructed on the myth of antifascism) and 'bad' Germans in the FRG, the alleged inheritor of the Nazi empire.[9]

The coalition had its own internal motivations and driving forces: in addition to sharing certain economic interests, the partners were unified in their resistance to the militarization of the FRG at the end of 1954. Unfortunately, another major point of convergence between the East German and Czechoslovakian socialist programmes was a negative one – a shared scepticism of the Polish 'October' and Władysław Gomułka's attempt to restore relations with Western nations. This pragmatic rapprochement – which survived until the mid-1960s, when the East German leadership grew to distrust the process of Czechoslovak liberalization – influenced the sphere of cinema culture via a bilateral exchange of movies (in both directions) and film practitioners (mostly from Barrandov to DEFA).[10]

A Closely Watched Alliance – the Sovietization of the Cultural Sphere

Along with analysis of the dynamics of the bilateral relationship between the GDR and Czechoslovakia, a proper evaluation of the cultural-political dimension of the region's transnational cinema culture in the 1950s necessarily demands consideration of a third entity, namely the USSR and its implied influence, typically labelled Sovietization.

With regard to its influence on the cultural sphere, Sovietization could be defined[11] as a process of export from the USSR of organizational principles, norms and values, which were implemented through orders and administrative measures, or by cultural policy and film production practitioners in the satellite nations. Sovietization has been investigated from various perspectives in the last two decades, notably in a thoroughly researched comparative study of the Sovietization of higher education.[12] Nevertheless, historical research on the film industries in the Soviet Bloc has not yet focused on the question of how far Soviet cultural functionaries or film industry leaders attempted, successfully or not, to implement their own standards and norms within the cinema culture of the socialist countries. Many of the essays in this volume point to obvious traces of such efforts, but they clearly were not part of a systematic endeavour, and their efficacy was strongly influenced by local functionaries' activities. Besides, Sovietization tendencies took widely varying courses in different countries due to specific local traditions in film cultures and industries as well as variable degrees of distrust towards Soviets. While Russophobia was strong and deep-rooted in postwar Germany, acceptance of Soviet culture was significantly greater in Czechoslovakia, where a strong sense of Germanophobia prevailed.[13]

Some scholars criticize the use of the term 'Sovietization', claiming it oversimplifies the complex processes of give and take between the Soviet Union and its East European subordinates.[14] They instead promote the concept of 'self-Sovietization', which shifts the emphasis to the many East European functionaries who willingly adopted and used Soviet models themselves without direct instructions or pressure. The concept of 'self-Sovietization' is used to describe the activities of people and organizations with a degree of structural independence from the regime and a seemingly obsessive interest in introducing Soviet methods and practices. John Connelly has fruitfully applied this conception (originally coined in the context of standard 'political' discussion of Sovietization in the GDR) in his study on the Sovietization of

universities in Central European communist countries.[15] However, he uses the term in a relatively narrow sense to describe the efforts of the 'compulsive Sovietizers' among communist functionaries. In the case of film industry and culture, this term can also describe (communist or noncommunist) activists who were fascinated by communist values and technology as well as by the communist emphasis on 'planning'.

As the detailed research contained in this volume implies, there was no systematic, successful Sovietization of film industry or cinema culture, even though discussions about the Soviet lead were intensive and the demand to follow the organizational principles was occasionally strong, as various industry reorganizations according to the Soviet model in the early 1950s demonstrate. The Soviets never invested sufficient resources to consistently implement a transfer of organizational principles, and in effect the most radical and active initiatives indeed came from ambitious promoters of 'self-Sovietization' – 'Learning from the Soviet Union means learning to win,' went the famous East German mantra. A representative example of this phenomenon would be the director of the 'creative unit for Soviet-Czechoslovak co-operation' who, in 1950, developed a proposal for reorganizing feature film production according to the Soviet model.[16] But as Petr Szczepanik's essay demonstrates, many features of the traditional production culture that had taken shape in the 1920s and 1930s and been consolidated during World War II survived into the 1950s. Both the Soviet film industry and the Soviet Ministry of Culture attempted to maintain influence on production and distribution throughout the Soviet Bloc countries, but the implementation of their interests and wishes was significantly dependent on the 'sensitivity' of the respective state functionaries. Their tendency to fulfil all the Soviets' demands and follow their signals was much weaker in cases when it contradicted their own local interests. This was especially obvious in the sphere of film distribution and exhibition, as the essays by Lars Karl and by Kyril Kunakhovich and Pavel Skopal illustrate with relevant examples.

Though the concept of Sovietization might seem worn and actual intentional Soviet influence was often lacking or ineffective, the current moment is a propitious one to revisit the many dimensions of the imposition of Soviet-style institutions, culture, politics and 'life itself' in the East European film industries that fell under Moscow's sway after World War II. This volume's contributors focus on topics suited to the task. International film festivals could serve Soviet global ambitions and ideological interests, as Jindřiška Bláhová shows in her research on the festival in Karlovy Vary. Meanwhile, other festivals (or even the

same one, a few years later) were instead shaped by the political and representative interests of their host country, as Andreas Kötzing's research on the Leipzig Documentary and Short Film Festival reveals. The essays by Mariana Ivanova and Pavel Skopal show that while some co-productions were made under compulsion from Soviet representatives demanding cooperation between the socialist countries, others were shot with partners from capitalist countries in projects undertaken by film studios ambitious to gain access to better technical equipment, skilled practitioners, higher profits or international prestige. Yet at the same time, Mariana Ivanova's story of DEFA's 'undercover' co-productions with a West German film producer vividly illustrates the specificity of the East German film industry in comparison to Czechoslovakia – a specificity based on DEFA's shared past with, yet present political distance from, West German filmmakers.

Two Film Industries – Comparison and Transfer

The process of Sovietization is not analysed here (or elsewhere) within the conceptual framework of cultural transfer, for an obvious reason: transfer studies emphasize cultural exchange between two entities that are relatively equivalent and commensurable, which was not the case with the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. Nevertheless, the application of the notion of transfer to the supposedly one-way process of cultural flow from a centre of power to peripheries can reveal the possible simplifications entailed by the model of Sovietization – as well as that of Americanization.[17]

A history of cultural transfer follows a relationship between two entities (e.g. nations, regions, cities, institutions) and focuses on phenomena that cross the borders (technology, sport, a model of a social state, etc.), highlighting the role of various mediators, such as booksellers, publishers and universities[18] – and in this case we could add filmmakers, cultural functionaries and movies. These processes come into being through migration as well as through personal meetings or the study of texts originating in the other culture.[19] No such history of cultural transfer between the GDR and Czechoslovakia in the sphere of cinema has yet been written,[20] and it would be beyond the scope of the current volume. Such an approach would inevitably demand a significantly different perspective from that adopted here. Rather than focusing on mutual influences, this volume attempts to highlight structural and functional similarities between the respective film

industries and the cultural policies related to their respective position within the Soviet Bloc. But the existence of obvious conceptual differences between the approach of transfer studies on the one hand and comparative studies on the other does not mean that they are entirely incompatible. Indeed, they can be quite complementary:

> Without explicit comparison, historical studies of transfers and of entanglements are in danger of becoming airy and thin. On the other hand, comparative studies are not damaged, but improved by considering connections between the units of comparison wherever and whenever they exist.... Such connections – i.e., mutual perceptions and influences, transfers and travels, migrations and trade, interaction, relations of imitation and avoidance, shared dependence from one and the same constellation or common origin – may contribute to explaining similarities and differences, convergences and divergences between the cases compared.[21]

The present volume aims to take a step in this direction, that is, towards a better understanding of the Soviet bloc film industries from a transnational perspective, hopefully providing a foundation for future research on cultural transfer.

The essays collected here illustrate how the regimes used cinema culture for self-presentation in two directions: externally to the West, and Internally to their own citizens. The intensity of the centrifugal or centripetal tendencies of the regimes shifted constantly, as indicated by the essays dealing with the prestige co-productions of DEFA; Barrandov's pragmatic co-production alliances; the international film festivals in Karlovy Vary and Leipzig; and the exhibition of movies from the other side of the Iron Curtain, whether as part of the regular distribution network or presented in film clubs, some of which arose as an alternative distribution sphere organized 'from below', as Fernando Ramos Arenas illustrates in his study on the Leipzig University Film Club. The essays in this volume provide insight into the role of institutional networks and cinema infrastructure and their influence on the intended construction of a specific socialist film culture. Christin Niemeyer and Lukáš Skupa each present a story of children's cinema as a kind of production that the government and party authorities promoted as ideologically significant, although production efficiency was influenced by the varying degrees of institutionalization in this branch of moviemaking. Thomas Beutelschmidt reveals the contradictions inherent in the relationship between the two institutions that represented the two mass media most highly valued by top GDR functionaries: the DEFA film studio and state television broadcaster

Deutscher Fernsehfunk. Václav Šmidrkal's comparison of the military film studios in the GDR and Czechoslovakia vividly depicts significant differences in both the use of the studios' film facilities and the artistic ambitions of the personnel in accordance with the attitude and goals of the army leadership. While the case of military film production is obviously a paramount example of a 'cinema in service of the state', all the essays inevitably deal with the influence of state demands, intentions and ideological programmes. Equally inevitably, however, these essays based on meticulous archival research reveal tensions and contradictions rooted not only in the varying intentions of the individual participants, but also in the different temporalities of various processes and structures. Lucie Česálková's essay on so-called "custom made film production" offers an illustrative example: while this production was obviously and quite directly intended to 'serve the state' and its planning, the contrasting temporalities of moviemaking and the production of consumer goods created situations whereby movies promoted items that were not in fact available on the market. Consequently, this type of film production was often, in effect, rather a disservice to the state.

This volume offers generalizations as well as a better understanding of specificities. The East German and Czechoslovak film industries are well suited for this purpose because they were among the most prolific in the Soviet Bloc and followed two different yet related traditions. What is distinctly, and fully intentionally, missing from the book is an aesthetic history of textual objects and their interrelations. Some of the essays deal with textual features of individual movies, but they do not place aesthetic concerns at the centre of their research and always locate the 'text' within a wider nexus of research questions concerning institutions, political discourses, film industry strategies or cinematic reception. A good number of books in English focus on individual, mostly 'representative' DEFA movies, on the history of the DEFA studio in the 1950s, or on the distribution of Western movies in the GDR, and at least a word or two has been published on Czechoslovak production of the relevant period.[22] We intend to follow a rather different research programme, however. From our point of view, the history of East German and Czechoslovak cinema is not a history of ideologically charged regime prestige projects, works of creative talent marred by 'them', or a few 'hidden gems' to be revealed and newly interpreted. We see it rather as part of a broader history of institutional structures, international diplomacy, state economies, personal networks, education, marketing strategies and consumption. This volume aspires to contribute one small grain to the mills of cinema history.

Notes

1. Sabine Hake, 'Introduction', in John Davidson and Sabine Hake (eds), *Framing the Fifties: Cinema in a Divided Germany* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), p. 2.

2. For excellent books in English that deal with Czech-German relationships from the viewpoint of national policy, national self-determinacy or national behaviour, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2008), Nancy Wingfield, *Flag Wars and Stone Saints: How the Bohemian Lands Became Czech* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009).

3. Two recent volumes, though focused solely on the East German studio, put DEFA into a transnational perspective; see Michael Wedel, Barton Byg, Andy Räder, Skyler Arndt-Briggs and Evan Torner (eds), *DEFA International: Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013) and Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage (eds), *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

4. See Volker Zimmermann, 'Medzi kooperáciou a konfrontáciou. Kultúrnopolitické vzťahy medzi NDR a Československom v 50. a 60. rokoch 20. Storočia', in Dušan Kováč, Michaela Marek, Jiří Pešek and Roman Prahl (eds), *Kultura jako nositel a oponent politických záměrů. Německo-české a německo-slovenské kulturní styky od poloviny 19. století do současnosti* (Ústí nad Labem: Albis, 2009), pp. 321–348.

5. 'October' refers to the Polish 'thaw', a period of political reform between October 1956 and early 1958 initiated by the appointment of Władysław Gomułka as First Secretary of the Party after he had been expelled from the Polish United Worker's Party and imprisoned.

6. See Beate Ihme-Tuchel, *Das „nördliche Dreieck": Die Beziehungen zwischen der DDR, der Tschechoslowakei und Polen in den Jahren 1954 bis 1962* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1994).

7. Sheldon Anderson, *A Cold War in the Soviet Bloc: Polish-East German Relations: 1945–1962* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), pp. 5–6.

8. See e.g. Volker Zimmerman, 'Proměnlivá spojenectví. NDR a její vztahy k Československu a Polsku v padesátých a šedesátých letech 20. století', in Christoph Buchheim, Edita Ivaničková, Kristina Kaiserová and Volker Zimmermann (eds), *Československo a dva německé státy* (Prague: Kristina Kaiserová and Albis International, 2011), p. 86.

9. See e.g. Ihme-Tuchel, *Das „nördliche Dreieck"*, p. 48.

10. See Pavel Skopal, 'Reisende in Sachen Genre – von Barrandov nach Babelsberg und zurück. Zur Bedeutung von tschechischen Regisseuren für die Genrefilmproduktion der DEFA in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren', in Michael Wedel, Barton Byg, Andy Räder, Skyler Arndt-Bryggs and Evan Torner (eds), *DEFA international: Grenzüberschreitende Filmbeziehungen vor und nach dem Mauerbau* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2013), pp. 249–266.

11. We use 'Sovetization' as an analytical term. Nevertheless, it has its own long history: used by Soviet leaders as early as the 1920s to describe the consolidation of Soviet power over the non-Russian republics, it was then more widely applied by critics of the Soviet regime in the 1950s. See Konrad H. Jarausch and Hannes Siegrist, 'Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung. Eine vergleichende Fragestellung zur deutsch-deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte', in Jarausch and Siegrist (eds),

Amerikanisierung und Sowjetisierung in Deutschland 1945–1970 (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 1997), pp. 20–21; E. A. Rees, 'The Sovietization of Eastern Europe', in Balázs Apor, Péter Apor and E. A. Rees (eds), *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on the Postwar Period* (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), pp. 1–3.

12. See John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Michael David-Fox and György Péteri (eds), *Academia in Upheaval: Origins, Transfers, and Transformations of the Communist Academic Regime in Russia and East Central Europe* (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2000).

13. Muriel Blaive, *Promarněná příležitost. Československo a rok 1956* (Prague: Prostor, 2001), pp. 280–282.

14. For a brief account of the debate, see Norman Naimark, 'The Sovietization of Eastern Europe, 1944–1953', in Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol. 1: *Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 195–197.

15. It is important to note that in the standard political debate on Sovietization as the establishment of communist regimes, this notion has met strong criticism for implying that the USSR's role was not vital to the result. Indeed, 'self-Sovietization' must be understood as just one, and definitely not the most important, mode of the whole Sovietization process. Connelly, *Captive University*, pp. 45–46.

16. Národní filmový archiv, Prague, f. Filmová rada, k. R9-SI-4P-9K, 1950–1953.

17. See e.g. Russell A. Berman, 'Anti-Americanism and Americanization', in Alexander Stephan (ed.), *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: The German Encounter with American Culture after 1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 11–24.

18. Philipp Ther, 'Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks: Toward a Transnational History of Europe', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds), *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 204–225.

19. See Hartmut Kaelble, 'Between Comparison and Transfers – and What Now? A French-German Debate', in Haupt and Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 33–34.

20. However, small steps have been taken in this direction; see Skopal, 'Reisende in Sachen Genre – von Barrandov nach Babelsberg und zurück'.

21. Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, 'Comparison and Beyond', in Haupt and Kocka, *Comparative and Transnational History*, pp. 20–21.

22. Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*: *Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949–1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Seán Allan and John Sandford (eds), *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946–1992* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1999); Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Rosemary Stott, *Crossing the Wall: The Western Feature Film Import in East Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012); Anke Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Two volumes address Czechoslovak cinema of the 1950s to a significant degree: Mira Liehm and Antonín Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Soviet and Eastern European Film After 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) and Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

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