Introduction

Masha Shpolberg and Lukas Brasiskis

He struts proudly across the North Pole
Changes the rivers' direction
Moves the high mountains
The common Soviet man.[1]

Part of the promise of socialism, along with gender and class equality, was the rapid modernization and industrialization of the lands that would eventually become part of the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc. First the Soviet government and, later, that of the satellite states worked to drastically transform the landscape of the region, forcing collectivized farming onto the population and encouraging large-scale infrastructure projects, including the construction of dams, canals, mines, and nuclear power stations, many of which ultimately proved disastrous. The capitalist period that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union saw many of these projects crumble and decay as political elites adopted new, ever more extractive approaches to natural resources.

This rapid transformation and the attendant changes in the way nature was conceptualized, produced, and experienced were inevitably captured on camera. From the earliest days of the Soviet Union, cinema served as a privileged site for the education of the then largely illiterate masses and the promotion of government policy. After Stalin's death in 1953, cinema was able to adopt a more critical stance, at times simply recording the status quo and at others interrogating it and even striving to articulate alternative ways of being in the world. Thaw-era films celebrated the spontaneity of the meteorological, finding in its liveliness an antidote to the set, monumental forms of socialist realism. Andrei Tarkovsky's films blurred

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the distinction between inner and outer space, luxuriating in the sensorial pleasures of the natural world, and offering it up as an escape from the political and the social into something transcendent that preceded—and was bound to outlast—the Soviet system. In later films by the likes of Alexander Sokurov and Aleksei German, nature seems to densify into something that refuses all signification, that is simply there: a precondition of human existence and, perhaps, a reminder of its finitude.

Moreover, the speed at which this industrialization took place meant that the ranks of the new, Soviet proletariat drew extensively on the former peasantry, as films ranging from *The Radiant Path* (*Svetlyi put'*, 1940) to *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears* (*Moskva slezam ne verit*, 1979) readily attest. This process was to be repeated in the Central and Eastern European satellite states once they were annexed in the aftermath of World War II. The working-class characters who populated both the silver screen and the theater thus did not resemble the multigenerational proletariat of countries like the United Kingdom or Italy, and the rise of the Village Prose movement in the 1970s spoke to the close ties many city dwellers maintained with the country. Finally, as Michael Cramer and Jeremi Szaniawski demonstrate in this volume, the popular imagination of Russia specifically, if not the entire region, can never be dissociated from its climate, geographic expanse, and vast natural resources.

Yet despite this complex and continuous engagement with the natural world, what we term "Eastern European ecocinema" remains critically understudied. Although rooted in the environmentalism of the 1970s, ecocriticism first coalesced as a methodological approach within the sphere of literary studies in the early to mid-1990s. As Ursula Heise and others have demonstrated, it concerned itself first with Romantic poetry and North American nature writing.[2] The consolidation of postcolonial studies during the same period led the pioneers of ecocriticism to turn their attention next to the literature of the "Global South"—and with good reason: as scientists and humanities scholars grew aware of the dramatic changes taking place in the earth's atmosphere, it became clear that it was the inhabitants of this part of the world who stood to pay the steepest price for the unmitigated activity of those who had colonized and enslaved them. A number of groundbreaking works have sought to reconcile the interest in ecocriticism with "the postcolonial turn," and have gone on to explore how climate justice may, and *ought*, to go hand in hand with social and economic justice.[3]

This shift in attention from what was once known as the First World to the Third World, however, has tended to overlook the Second. The collapse of communist regimes in 1989–91 meant that it was old news at the time these approaches were first taking off in Western academia.

Individual scholars have explored the landscape painting of Isaac Levitan or the exceptional nature writing of canonical literary figures such as Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, and Mikhail Prishvin.[4] To our knowledge, however, there has been no attempt thus far to apply a systematically ecocritical approach to the region's art, literature, or cinema. It is our sincere hope that this volume will spark more interest in the subject and that more volumes, monographs, and articles will follow.[5]

The Historical and Geographical Frame

The region's all-too-recent agrarian past as well as the scope and ambition of the Soviet project mean that, once one begins looking at its cultural output ecocritically, one is spoiled for riches. Early Soviet cinema offers remarkably rich material for such an inquiry (one has only to think of the films produced during the first Five Year Plan, such as Sergei Eisenstein's *The Old and the New* [*Staroye i novoye*, 1929], Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *Earth* [*Zemlia*, 1930], or Dziga Vertov's *Enthusiasm: Symphony of the Donbass* [*Entuziazm: simfoniya donbassa*, 1931]). We have decided, however, to focus our attention on the postwar period. First, as Astrid Mignon Kirchhof and J. R. McNeill point out, the rise of environmental movements on both sides of the iron curtain is intimately tied up with the politics and policies of the Cold War.[6] Second, the detonation of the world's first atomic bomb on 16 July 1945 (known as the Trinity Test) is one of the events suggested by scholars as the beginning of the Anthropocene: a new geological period in which humanity—primarily through its mining of natural resources and pollution of the atmosphere—has itself become a geological force.[7]

The roughly two thousand nuclear arms tests carried out since 1945 have contributed to climate change in the most direct of ways.[8] Moreover, their specific effect on the atmosphere has provided one of the least controversial proofs of humanity's ability to influence the environment on a massive scale. While Soviet industrial and civil engineering projects of the 1930s, such as the White Sea–Baltic Canal, often had dire consequences on the local and even the regional level, it took the atomic bomb to make humanity aware of the fragility of the planet as a whole. Consequently, over the course of the Cold War period, atomic power progressively replaced pollution as the environmental movements' chief concern. In the Soviet case one sees this in the progression from a film like Sergei Gerasimov's *By the Lake* (*U ozera*, 1969) to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (*Stalker*, 1979) and Konstantin Lopushansky's *Dead Man's Letters* (*Pisma mertvogo cheloveka*, 1986). Likewise, on both sides of the iron curtain, major accidents—Three Mile Island in 1979, Chernobyl in 1986—became turning points in the

mainstreaming of environmental consciousness. And while these nuclear power plants responded entirely to civilian energy needs, the image of atomic power could never quite be dissociated from that of nuclear weapons. It is only logical that the beginning of the end for the USSR was marked by Gorbachev and Reagan's 1988 agreement on denuclearization.

Taking 1945 as our starting point thus highlights the importance of attending to the space formerly part of, or dominated by, the Soviet Union, all the while addressing some of the key debates surrounding the usefulness of "the Anthropocene" as a critical framework. In addition to signifying the beginning of the nuclear age, the year 1945, according to environmental historians J. R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, is the moment when "the Great Acceleration" becomes observable.[9] The authors use this term to refer to an exponential rise in human activity, including (among other things) population growth, natural resource use, and the production of greenhouse gasses. Since the idea of the Anthropocene has been introduced, a number of scholars have pushed back against it on the grounds that it transforms all of humanity (the *anthropos*) into a single force bearing equal responsibility, whereas in reality the segment of the population driving the Great Acceleration is not the same as the one that stands to suffer the most from it. This has led scholars Andreas Malm and Jason W. Moore to suggest "the Capitalocene" as an alternative term, one that makes the connection between the degradation of the environment and the capitalist socioeconomic order more explicit.[10]

We hope that this volume will complicate this discourse by providing examples of equally problematic approaches to natural resources by soi-disant communist and socialist states, and glimpses of the way cultural production, untethered from economic demand, might provide something like hope—or at least genuine critique. Thus far, too, scholars interested in the cultural dynamics that have enabled and reflected the Great Acceleration have tended to examine capitalism primarily as lived and experienced in the West. Part of what makes Eastern Europe such rich ground for this kind of analysis is its transition from a planned state economy to a free-market one in the 1990s. Continuing our exploration past the collapse of communism in 1989–91 and into the present day allows us to examine—as José Alaniz's chapter on Russian petro-cinema makes all too clear—the charms that fossil capitalism holds for populations caught somewhere in between the developing and developed worlds.

Narrowing our scope temporally also allows us to broaden it geographically. In addition to marking the start of the Cold War, 1945 saw the progressive instauration of puppet regimes loyal to the Soviet Union across Central and Eastern Europe. In this volume, we make a concerted effort to consider the cinema of the former Soviet Union alongside that of East

Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and some of the Baltic and Balkan states. Our initial motivation for doing so was entirely personal and partisan. While it is understandable that Russia, as the largest country in the region, should receive the lion's share of scholarly attention, it continues to overshadow its neighbors. In this way, academic scholarship reproduces Russia's imperialist and colonialist practices. Hailing from Ukraine and Lithuania respectively, we are committed to a truly regional approach that de-centers Soviet and Russian cinema in order to give the cinemas of the former republics and Warsaw Pact countries their due. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, this has become all the more urgent. At the same time, we genuinely believe such an approach to be more generative. As Kirchhof and McNeill point out, environmental policy varied widely between the republics that constituted the Soviet Union proper and the satellite states.[11] So, too, did models of film production and censorship. Considering Soviet cinema alongside the cinema of these nations helps to check some of our assumptions about the region, allows new patterns to emerge, and sensitizes us to variations in style and form.

A comparative approach is just as productive when we consider the postcommunist period. While East and West Germany merged immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the other satellite states maintained widely varying ties to the former USSR throughout the tumultuous 1990s. In the 2000s, however, their fates began to differ. In 2004, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia acceded to the European Union along with Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In 2007, they were followed by Bulgaria and Romania. The result has been a fundamental divide between countries that have accepted the environmental policies and standards of Western Europe and those that continue to hold themselves to far less stringent standards. Considering the period from 1945 to the present day allows us to register some of this nuance, all the while providing us with an opportunity to examine cinema produced in the same place under two vastly different political and economic regimes.

That said, this volume represents a first look at the region's ecocinematic output and is not meant to be exhaustive. It is our hope that it opens new avenues for research and inspires other scholars to fill in the gaps present here. In putting the volume together, we were limited by both practical considerations such as length and scholarly ones—namely, the difficulty of securing chapters on some of the more understudied national cinemas, genres, and modes. We are particularly pained by the lack of a chapter that would take into account the robust cinematic tradition of Romania as well as our rather limited engagement with the cinema of both the Baltic states and the former Yugoslavia. Likewise,

we are aware of the debates surrounding the proper way to refer to this region, and agree with scholars arguing that Hungary, Poland, and the former East Germany belong to Central, rather than Eastern, Europe. In our discussions with colleagues about this, a consensus emerged that the countries roughly grouped together as "Central Europe" were defined by a shared Austro-Hungarian past. We have decided to adopt "Eastern Europe" for our title not out of any kind of ideological resistance, but rather to signal our desire to think instead across the Soviet Union-satellite state divide.

Wary of not spreading ourselves too thin, we have also chosen not to take on the former USSR as a whole. We were thus not able to give the cinema of the former Caucasian and Central Asian republics the attention they deserve—nor, for that matter, Siberia, a region with an identity stronger than that of many former republics. Both the Caucasian and Central Asian republics have a rich history of poetic cinema and poetic documentary, much of it celebrating the local landscape. Moreover, as Lida Oukaderova's chapter reminds us, many Central Asian republics specifically became the site of disastrous Soviet agrarian and environmental projects: one has only to think of the Virgin Lands campaign or the drying up of the Aral Sea. Finally, Siberia's harsh climate and seemingly endless expanse has attracted countless filmmakers from elsewhere, be it the European part of Russia (Andrei Konchalovsky, once again Sokurov) or Germany (Werner Herzog).[12] It thus raises the question of what counts as "Siberian cinema" and whether there can even be a "Siberian cinema" that is not, essentially, always an ecocinema.

The Siberian case also highlights the advantages of adopting a regional approach, be it on the intra- or inter-national scale. Ursula Heise has shown that ecocritical discourse tends to privilege either the "local" or the "global."[13] In restoring the middle term "regional," we hope to give due consideration to a sense of embeddedness that transcends the familiarity of the local but stops short of the disempowering vagueness of the global. Finally, we recognize that while environmental policy is administered primarily on the level of the nation-state, ecosystems know no borders. As Elena Past points out, "ecocriticism frequently concerns itself with geological formations and material agents (mountains, oceans, winds, mutable riverbeds, dirt, to name a few) that crisscross and complicate national boundaries. Environmental crises … disregard the limits of the nation state."[14] The same reflection leads Pietari Kääpä, coeditor of the seminal volume *Transnational Ecocinema* (2013), to "challenge the centrality of nations in ecological thinking."[15] Alice Lovejoy and Katie Trumpener's chapter in this volume on photographic and cinematic representations of the Ore Mountains demonstrates just how rich the payoff of such an

approach can be. Though it remains an exception in this regard, we hope the regional focus of the volume as a whole will encourage more transnational framings.

Defining "Ecocinema"

Since Scott MacDonald's groundbreaking 2004 article "Toward an Eco-Cinema," scholars have been debating what exactly the term means and how it differs from its older cousin, "environmental cinema."[16] MacDonald introduced the term "ecocinema" initially to describe what he saw as a small but stable trickle of noncommercial films concerned with "preserving 'Nature,' or more precisely," with providing "an evocation of the experience of being immersed in the natural world."[17] Though these films may revel in natural beauty, their tone is decidedly solemn: they operate under a double shadow of annihilation—ours as a species, and nature's as something vast and wild. MacDonald opens his piece by evoking the rapid shrinking of the wilderness and the increasing fragility of ecosystems. As human awareness of the danger has grown, so too have the stakes of these films; no longer content to merely celebrate the natural world or preserve it on film, they now actively seek to "retrain" our senses: "to use spectatorship as a way of expanding our attention span, refining our perceptions of natural process, and making deeper contact with dimensions of existence that have always sustained us."[18] Implicit in MacDonald's article is the hope that if only we might learn to see the world differently, we might act differently as well.

The examples MacDonald provides are all art films, more specifically works of "slow cinema" that privilege observational long takes and little to no narrative. As chance would have it, the first example he offers is an Eastern European one—Andrej Zdravič's film *Riverglass: A River Ballet in Four Seasons* (*V steklu reke*, 1997), discussed by Meta Mazaj in chapter 11. It is easy to imagine how this form encourages a more attentive approach to the natural world—one that teaches us to see it for its own sake, beyond the aesthetic pleasure or utilitarian value it might provide us. In this way, "ecocinema" pursues a very different aim, with a very different set of tools, than narrative-driven "environmental" films like *Erin Brockovich* (2000) or even documentaries like *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006).

MacDonald, in his article, sought to pinpoint a very specific type of film. Since then, however, scholars have tended to broaden the scope of "ecocinema"—in large part due to a radical expansion in the way the concept of ecology has been used and understood. Already in 2005, Pat Brereton remarked that "ecology has become a new, all-inclusive, yet often contradictory meta-narrative."[19] Ten years later, Nadia Bozak would

echo this view, explaining that "ecology, by its very definition, is unrestricted; it is impossible to say where nature stops and culture begins, or vice versa."[20] This has led scholars to reexamine everything, from films produced in studio lots to those brought into being entirely on a computer, in terms of their relationship to ecology, and to focus on the content as well as the resources consumed in the very act of production.[21] "It is very difficult to delineate a non-ecological type of cinema," Pietari Kääpä writes, noting that the category has come to include everything "from science fiction to urban crime thrillers, from westerns to fantasy."[22] Jennifer Fay has made the case for a genre as unlikely as film noir, arguing that in its rejection of futurity (of marriages, children), it teaches us the kind of radical pessimism we most need to learn in the age of the Anthropocene.[23] All of this has led scholars like Elena Past to conclude that ecocinema "is an interpretive approach, not a genre"—one that "can be used to describe the aesthetic style or narrative content of films."[24]

This is the inclusive, process-oriented vision of ecocinema that we would like to adopt in this volume. We are far less interested in adjudicating what "counts" as ecocinema than in learning to see films—all films—ecocritically. This volume includes analyses of fiction films and documentaries, works that rely on film stock and digitally produced video art. Following in the footsteps of Elena Past's *Italian Cinema Beyond the Human* (2019), Tommy Gustafsson and Pietari Kääpä's *Transnational Ecocinema* (2013) and Sheldon H. Lu and Jiayan Mi's *Chinese Ecocinema* (2009), we hope to simultaneously expand the canon of global ecocinema and the toolbox of attendant interpretive strategies.

Additionally, we believe that engaging with Eastern European ecocinema will deepen our understanding of each side of that term. The aforementioned rapid industrialization of the region, though genuinely embraced by many at first, increasingly came to be seen in the satellite states as a Soviet imposition. Attending to echoes of this shift in the region's cinema allows us to begin untangling the complex relationship between environmentalism, nationalism, and (anti-)communism. The region has also historically known a great deal of ethnic strife and continues to deal with widespread discrimination on the basis of race and sexual orientation. This has led many scholars in recent years to turn their attention to the reasons why, and the means by which, Eastern Europe constructs its "others." Ecocinema allows us to come at this question from a somewhat unusual angle by exploring these films' articulations of a much more radical otherness, and how we might still find ways of relating to it—or at least respecting it. Thus, while turning to ecocinema breaks new ground in Eastern European area studies, it also allows us to approach some of the discipline's traditional concerns from a new perspective.

At the same time, the region offers a much richer vision of what ecocinema has been and what it can be. As David Ingram has put it, the central problem of ecocinema is that "environmental problems such as global warming, ozone pollution, industrial pollution … are usually slow to develop, not amenable to fast solutions and are often caused by factors both invisible and complex."[25] This makes them hard to capture on film, particularly given the relatively short time frame of most productions. It also makes them hard to address within "the commercial formulae of Hollywood."[26] While the invisibility and complexity of these forces remained a challenge on both sides of the iron curtain, Eastern European cinema during the communist period was not subject to the same economic constraints—and, consequently, to popular tastes. The state-sponsored system, while censoring any political disaccord, made it possible for filmmakers to occasionally tiptoe away from an anthropocentric model of storytelling in the direction of what Paula Willoquet-Maricondi has termed an "ecocentric" one: a cinema that accords an equally important place to flora, fauna, and the elements as it does to humans.[27] This has led to a greater diversity of approaches. Finally, the sudden shift from a socialist model to a capitalist one in the 1990s allows us to track some of the same processes that have shaped the representation of nature in the West but in far more brutal and condensed form. For all these reasons, we believe that excavating Eastern European ecocinema will transform not only our understanding of the region's cinema and cultural heritage more broadly, but also our understanding of ecocinema as such.

The Structure of the Volume

This volume is structured in roughly chronological order, with slight modifications to allow for thematic clusters. Part I, titled "Industrializing the Bloc: Cinema of the Socialist Period," explores the production and administration of nature in the extended postwar period. Alice Lovejoy and Katie Trumpener's chapter opens the volume with a searing description of Cold War colonialism: the establishment of Wismut, a Soviet uranium mine in East Germany, and filmmakers' attempts to address its legacy on screen. Broadening out to consider the entire mineral-rich region of the Ore Mountains, they show how resource extraction tends to blur borders—particularly in places like Eastern Europe where those borders have been continuously redrawn. Their analysis of the way the region was portrayed—first as a land of opportunity and later as a land of devastation—draws on a wide array of nonfiction media including newsreels, documentaries, and photo essays produced between 1950 and 1993. Comparing representations across time

and media, Lovejoy and Trumpener uncover the sedimented layers of the region's geological, political, and cultural history.

Lida Oukaderova's chapter argues that this period represents a watershed moment in the Soviet attitude toward nature—almost literally so, given the ubiquitous rain, puddles, and streams in Thaw-era films. Through close readings of four fiction features, including Mikhail Kalatozov's *The First Echelon* (*Pervyi eshelon*, 1955) and *The Unsent Letter* (*Nieotpravlennoye pis'mo*, 1960), Oleksandr Dovzhenko and Yulia Solntseva's *Poem of the Sea* (*Poema o morye*, 1958), and Larisa Shepitko's *Heat* (*Znoi*, 1962), Oukaderova demonstrates the progressive emancipation of nature from "the state's ends-oriented gaze." Where Oukaderova's chapter focuses on the shifting relationship to nature in films very much focused on the Soviet present, Natalija Majsova examines the u-/dystopian dimension of a genre very much privileged in the USSR: science fiction. Working through a range of examples from the early 1960s until the early 1980s, Majsova outlines what was possible in terms of imagining human/nonhuman relations and points to the correlation, even in this most experimental of genres, between anthropo- and androcentrism. Scholars of ecocinema and science fiction who are not specialists of Eastern Europe will also be delighted by the chapter's analysis of Roger Corman's reedited, American versions of the Soviet *Planet of the Storms* (*Planeta bur'*, 1962). The three chapters in this section thus allow us to trace the major shift that took place in the perception of nature and the relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds from the late 1950s through the 1960s across three major filmmaking modes: nonfiction, realist fiction, and science fiction.

Part II, titled "Environmental Crisis and the Nuclear Imaginary," forms a thematic cluster that extends this analysis into the 1980s. Already in 1965, Susan Sontag pointed out that the "disaster film" had become a staple of American cinema. It is one of the most striking contrasts of the Cold War period that the fallout of nuclear war, and environmental disaster more broadly, could not be addressed directly in the Soviet bloc. As historian Miriam Dobson puts it, "imagining the destructive power of atomic weapons was antithetical to the forward-looking spirit of the communist project."[28] Most of the anxieties generated by the nuclear age were fed into science fiction where, as Majsova's chapter demonstrates, they were conveniently displaced onto other planets, legible as stand-ins for the earth in some hypothetical distant future only to the intellectual elite.

This section examines the rare exceptions to the rule. Barbora Bartunkova's chapter focuses on the Czechoslovak New Wave gem *The End of August at the Hotel Ozone* (*Konec srpna v hotelu Ozon*, 1967)—the earliest Soviet bloc representation of an Earth devastated by nuclear war. Eliza Rose shifts to Poland to analyze another highly unusual film, Piotr Andrejew's

Tender Spots (*Czułe miejsca*, 1981), which takes place after some unnamed event has left water scarce and the air contaminated. As a radio voice-over explains, it is humanity's twilight hour, with enough resources left to support human life only for another ten years.

What these two films share, alongside the Soviet *Stalker* (1979), *Dead Man's Letters* (1986), and, somewhat unexpectedly, the Polish hit comedy *Sexmission* (*Seksmisja*, 1984), is that they all start *after*. The disaster, if invoked at all, is represented as an ellipsis, a cut from the foreboding countdown that opens *Hotel Ozone* to the world many years hence. Where the Hollywood genre serves largely as a hook on which to hang special effects and striking imagery (leading David Ingram to describe these films as "perversely attractive"), its Eastern European counterpart eschews both the spectacle and the attendant melodrama.[29] Its protagonists are not individual survivors, heroes who prove their mettle by rescuing others, but condemned men and women who must adapt or perish. History ends not with a bang but with a drawn-out groan.

In all but the Soviet films, the collapse of civilization results in a return to matriarchy, often with women the sole survivors. Both Bartunkova and Rose attend to these provocative shifts in gender dynamics, interrogating whether they truly are as progressive as they first seem. In this way, they participate in the rich, ongoing conversation between ecocriticism and women's and gender studies.[30] Masha Shpolberg's chapter completes this section by considering what Eastern European cinema had to do when faced not with the threat of nuclear disaster but with the event itself. Olga Briukhovetska and Johanna Lindbladh have written compelling accounts elsewhere of the way the Chernobyl disaster has been narrated in Eastern European fiction film.[31] In her chapter, Shpolberg turns instead to two little-known documentaries produced in the days immediately following the disaster. She examines the way in which these draw on the conventions of the essay film, one of the first filmmaking modes to explicitly tackle "unbearable" or "unrepresentable" subject matter, as well as the unique affordances of analog technology in the face of "an invisible and inaudible enemy," as one of the films puts it.

Part III presents another thematic cluster focusing on animals as creatures caught between the natural realm and the social order. Natalija Arlauskaitė justly remarks that up until recently, stray cats and dogs were a fairly common sight in Eastern European cities. She proposes the term "animals-out-of-place" to describe encounters that take place neither in the sanctioned "wild" nor in domestic settings but rather on city streets. She then traces the meanderings of these figures through a number of Lithuanian documentaries produced from the mid-1960s to the present day, paying particular attention to the philosophical and ethical implications of the

camera framing. In his exploration of recent Hungarian films, Raymond De Luca, in turn, tackles one of the central questions posed by Paula Willoquet-Maricondi in her seminal edited volume *Framing the World* (2010): "how can film bring about concern for and identification with the nonhuman without anthropomorphizing it, essentially inviting us to cross species lines in order to connect and empathize?"[32] Reminding us that "celluloid, the very stuff of film, is processed with animal cartilage and bone" and thus "the history of cinema is contingent upon broken animal bodies," De Luca attempts a process of restitution, analyzing the animals' role in the films while refusing to sacrifice them once more—this time to allegory.

The chapters brought together in part IV, "From Communism to Capitalism: Privatization and the Commons," address one of the most painful aspects of the post-1989 transition: the plunder of the region's industrial infrastructure, previously publicly owned lands, and natural resource deposits. The result, especially in countries that did not join the European Union later on, has been unabated resource extraction by powerful elites and flagrant flouting of environmental policy. José Alaniz goes straight to the heart of the matter in a chapter exploring the "oil ontology" of post-Soviet Russian cinema. Alaniz examines how both mainstream representations, such as music videos, and more experimental ones, ranging from art cinema to protest art, try to give audiovisual and narrative form to this traditionally invisible and amorphous yet critical fluid. Dina Iordanova, in turn, considers what remains of the commons—in this particular case, a hard-to-reach part of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The first part of her chapter provides an overview of a subgenre of Bulgarian socialist films featuring a romantic escape from urban life to the sea. The second part focuses on *The Last Black Sea Pirates* (*Poslednite Chernomorski pirati*, 2014), a documentary about a ragtag group of eccentrics who choose to live without modern conveniences on this remote beach—and whose future is threatened by plans to erect a luxury resort there.

Finally, part V, "Toward an Eastern European Ecocinema," is dedicated to chapters that make the case for distinctive national traditions of ecocinema within Eastern Europe. Meta Mazaj's chapter begins with an overview of the filmic and photographic experiments carried out by the well-known Slovenian OHO Group during the socialist period. Mazaj goes on to connect these experiments with the more recent work of pioneering ecocinema filmmaker Andrej Zdravič, the performance artist Maja Smrekar, and art cinema director Sonja Prosenc. In this way, Mazaj sketches a history of Slovenian artists' and filmmakers' engagement with the environment from the late 1960s to the present. Kris Van Heuckelom adopts a similarly transhistoric approach, tracing the motif of the forest as a quintessentially Polish landscape from the nineteenth century to the present day,

and demonstrating how it has informed one of the most unusual films of the 1990s, Grzegorz Królikiewicz's *Trees* (*Drzewa*, 1995) as well as Agnieszka Holland's more recent *Spoor* (*Pokot*, 2017). Michael Cramer and Jeremi Szaniawski demonstrate that the figuration of nature—whether as transcendent or abject, epic or prosaic—is central to the work of the four greatest Russian auteurs of the post-Soviet period: Alexander Sokurov, Aleksei Balabanov, Aleksei German, and Andrey Zvyagintsev. Finally, Lukas Brasiskis considers the ways the elemental can be harnessed for social and political critique in recent artists' cinema from Slovakia and Croatia.

Though we have tried to ensure the broadest possible coverage in terms of geography and filmmaking practices, this edited volume can only be a start. The chapters included here primarily offer close readings of individual films that have either not received much attention before or have not yet been considered from an ecocritical point of view. We see ample room in the future for an approach that might emphasize institutional practices or take into account the role played by distribution networks and sites of reception. At the same time, we hope that the chapters collected here begin to build up an alternative canon of Eastern European ecocinema—one that reveals new and exciting ways of thinking about the triangulation of the environment, the cinematic apparatus, and human perception.

Masha Shpolberg is Assistant Professor of Film and Electronic Arts at Bard College. Her teaching and research explore global documentary, Russian, Eastern, and Central European cinema, ecocinema, and women's cinema. She is currently at work on a book titled *Labor in Late Socialism: The Cinema of Polish Workers' Unrest*, which explores how filmmakers responded to successive waves of strikes by co-opting, confronting, or otherwise challenging the representational legacy of socialist realism. In addition to this volume, she is also co-editor, with Anastasia Kostina, of *The New Russian Documentary: Reclaiming Reality in the Age of Authoritarianism*, a volume forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press. She holds a PhD in Comparative Literature and Film and Media Studies from Yale University.

Lukas Brasiskis is a film and media researcher and curator, with a PhD in Cinema Studies from New York University. He is an adjunct professor at NYU and CUNY/Brooklyn College and an Associate Curator of Film and Video for e-flux. His interests include eco-media, the politics and aesthetics of world cinema, and the intersections between philosophy, moving-image cultures, and the contemporary art world. His texts were previously published in journals such as *Found Footage Magazine*, *The Cine-Files*, *Screening the Past*, and *Senses of Cinema*. He is a co-editor of *Jonas Mekas: The Camera Was Always Running* (2022).

Notes

1. Lyrics by Vasili Lebedev-Kumach from the popular 1937 song "The Common Soviet Man." Original Russian: "По полюсу гордо шагает / Меняет движение рек / Высокие горы сдвигает / Советский простой человек." Translation by Masha Shpolberg.
2. Heise, "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn."
3. For more, see Adamson, Evans, and Stein, *The Environmental Justice Reader* (2002), Martinez-Alier, *The Environmentalism of the Poor* (2004), and Huggan and Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010) as well as Monani, Arreglo, and Chiu, "Coloring the Environmental Lens."
4. Richard Fleck goes so far as to anoint Prishvin the "Russian Thoreau." See Fleck, "Mikhail Prishvin."
5. Recent years have seen increasing attention to Russian environmental history, reflected in Josephson et al., eds., *An Environmental History of Russia*; Oldfield and Shaw, *The Development of Russian Environmental Thought*; Breyfogle, *Eurasian Environments*; Peterson, *Troubled Lands*; and Moon, Breyfogle, and Bekasova, eds., *Place and Nature*. Another work reexamining Eastern European history from a similar angle is Olšáková, *In the Name of the Great Work*.
6. Kirchhof and McNeill, *Nature and the Iron Curtain*, 3.
7. Zalasiewicz et al., "When Did the Anthropocene Begin?" Other proposed dates for the beginning of the Anthropocene link it to the Industrial Revolution (particularly the invention of the steam engine in 1780s) or the rise of European world empires in the early 1600s. (For more, see Crutzen and Stoermer, "The Anthropocene"; Biello, "Mass Deaths in Americas"; Steffen et al., "Planetary Boundaries"; and Lewis et al., "Defining the Anthropocene."

   Bruno Latour articulates the stakes of these debates well, explaining that the farther away in time we locate the origins of the Anthropocene, the more diffuse the responsibility becomes. If we locate it in 1945, we point to a particular political and economic model that has only grown stronger after the collapse of the Three Worlds system. If we locate it further away in the late 1700s or early 1600s, the culprit begins to look more like human nature than a particular social, political, and economic regime. See Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 138–139.
8. "A Tally of Nuclear Tests." For a detailed history of nuclear testing, see Miller, *Under the Cloud*.
9. McNeill and Engelke, *The Great Acceleration*.
10. Malm, *Fossil Capital*; Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*; and Moore, ed., *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?* Donna Haraway contends that the "Anthropocene" and "Capitalocene" both too easily lead to defeatism and suggests yet another term, the "Chthlucene" (from the Greek *chthonios* for that which lies in the depths the Earth), for the present epoch in which humans will need to learn to "make kin" with other life forms because they act on the world together. See Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.
11. Kirchhof and McNeill, *Nature and the Iron Curtain*, 3.

12. For a comprehensive introduction at least to the image of Siberia on screen (if not necessarily Siberian ecocinema), see Sitnikova, "The Image of Siberia."
13. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, 3–13.
14. Past, *Italian Cinema Beyond the Human*, 3.
15. Kääpä, "Transnational Approaches to Ecocinema," 27.
16. MacDonald, "Toward an Eco-Cinema."
17. Idem., 108.
18. Idem., 111.
19. Brereton, *Hollywood Utopia*, 11.
20. Bozak, *The Cinematic Footprint*, 15.
21. Bozak's *The Cinematic Footprint* (2011) and Hunter Vaughan's *Hollywood's Dirtiest Secret: The Hidden Environmental Costs of the Movies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019) embody this latter approach.
22. Kääpä, "Transnational Approaches to Ecocinema," 27.
23. Fay, *Inhospitable World*, 97–127.
24. Past, *Italian Cinema Beyond the Human*, 3.
25. David Ingram, presentation at the conference "Arts and Ecology: Toward an Eco-cinema," Bristol, UK, 28–29 September 2005, as quoted in Willoquet-Maricondi, *Framing the World*, 49.
26. Ibid.
27. Willoquet-Maricondi, *Framing the World*.
28. Dobson, "Building Peace, Fearing the Apocalypse?"
29. Ingram, as quoted in Willoquet-Maricondi, *Framing the World*, 49.
30. For more, see Belmont, "Ecofeminism and the Natural Disaster Heroine"; Sturgeon, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*; and Gaard, "New Directions for Ecofeminism."
31. Briukhovetska, "'Nuclear Belonging,'" and Lindbladh, "Representations of the Chernobyl Catastrophe."
32. Willoquet-Maricondi, *Framing the World*, 50.

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