Screen Industries in East-Central Europe II: Cultural Policies and Political Culture

This collection of articles has its origins in the second annual conference on film and television industries in East-Central Europe (SIECE), which was held at Masaryk University in Brno from 23 to 25 November 2012. The conference, which is now in its third year, investigated the broadly defined issues of policies and politics in relation to the region’s modes of production, distribution, exhibition, and delivery, and to the communities of industry personnel that have worked therein. More specifically, the conference called for “empirical and theoretical studies considering the ways in which policy and political agenda have shaped the structure and everyday practices of actual media institutions, and how, in turn, policy and political agenda have shaped media texts and cultural experiences of those texts”.

The SIECE II conference was supplemented by a one-off international workshop “Theorizing Screenwriting Practice: An East-Central European Perspective”. This workshop was organized by the EU funded FIND Project, and brought together scholars of film and television, practicing screenwriters, and other media professionals to discuss changing practices, institutional frameworks, and the social status of screenwriting in contemporary screen media.

Of the forty-five presentations delivered at both the conference and the workshop, we selected four empirical studies that focused on historical issues in various East-Central European countries, as well as their relations to each other and to Western Europe. Each

3) Project FIND (“The Partnership Network of Universities and Film Industry”) is funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) via the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports — The Education for Competitiveness Operational Programme (ECOP), see <www.projectfind.cz>.
4) The remaining presentations and discussions are accessible as audio and video recordings on project FIND’s website: <www.projectfind.cz/?q=node/66>.
of these essays therefore considers developments in national film and television industries, and their transnational dimensions. Thus, Francesco Di Chiara looks at how post-1945 co-productions between Yugoslavia and Italy contributed to the professionalization of the Yugoslav film industry. By focusing on the work of the Czech émigré director František Čáp in Slovenia, Di Chiara offers a new perspective on the cross-border passage of Italian neorealism, following its transformation into a popular genre. From there, Stefano Pisu reveals hitherto unexamined historical relations between the cinemas of the former state-socialist nations and those of the West. Pisu explores the political backdrop against which the USSR and other Soviet-bloc countries irregularly attended the Venice International Film Festival, showing how this festival led to a surprising convergence of cultural and aesthetic concerns and Cold War geo-politics. Thomas Beutelschmidt’s contribution expands the perspective of this collection by investigating relations between the film and television industries of the GDR. His meticulous archival research reveals hitherto unknown aspects of these intermedial links as they developed under the specific conditions of a state-socialist regime. The last article, written by Petr Szczepanik, is an example of an emerging field of screenwriting studies, one that spotlights opportunities for new directions in the study of East-Central European screen industries. Instead of analyzing screenplays in narrative or ideological terms, Szczepanik focuses on the politically-based transformation of screenwriting practices and conventions that took place in post-1945 Czechoslovakia.

This modest collection must inevitably leave aside many important issues relating to the political dimensions of this region’s screen industries, including some topics which were discussed at the conference and at the workshop. These included national systems of funding and the recent adoption of collaborative screenwriting models in regional television production. Nevertheless, I maintain that this issue underscores the importance of the annual SIECE conference for developing intellectual exchange in the field and for promoting original research that originates from, or that focuses on, Eastern and Central Europe. The present issue would not be possible without the extensive assistance of our partner editor Richard Nowell. A selection of the presentations delivered at the 2013 conference in Olomouc will be included in the fall 2014 issue of Iluminace.