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Review of The BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema

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evolving from support for *perestroika* to support for market reform, albeit for idiosyncratic reasons, by 1991. Since Crowley and Christensen cover very similar ground, a dialogue between their work is sorely missed.

Regarding the second point: what is needed most now is a more rigorous exploration of how the communist system (not only in the Soviet Union) constituted workers and how the category of 'worker' constrained or altered labor protest. Christensen accepts the categories of "working class" which the Soviet regime furnished. To some extent, workers did too. But Crowley's work – and the work on Poland as well – shows workers restructuring politics by refashioning these identities.

There may indeed have been missed chances for genuine democracy in the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras. Christensen is on safe ground when he attacks shock therapists who seem to believe Russia is in the best of all possible worlds. But the path toward an alternative history of communism's collapse must lead through comparative work across the region. As scholars of the post-Soviet space follow the lead of their East Europeanist colleagues, they will benefit from the work done by Paul Christensen.

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The BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema. Edited by Richard Taylor, Nancy Wood, Julian Graffy, and Dina Iordanova. London: BFI Publishing, 2000. vii, 288 pp. \$65.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

This publication of the British Film Institute is a useful, one-volume reference work on the cinema of Russia/USSR and Eastern Europe intended for teachers, students, and filmgoers. The twelve contributors, all of them specialists on the regions about which they write, include Ania Witkowska (Poland); Birgit Beumers, Julian Graffy, and Richard Taylor (Russia and the Soviet Union); Dina Iordanova (Eastern Europe generally, with special emphasis on the Balkans); Peter Hames (Czechoslovakia); Ron Holloway (Bulgaria); Andras Balint Kovacs (Hungary); Matthew May (Romania); and Stojan Pelko (Yugoslavia). The editors identify four categories of entries: historical surveys of the cinemas of the countries under discussion; film personnel, including directors, writers, and actors; institutions such as film studios and festivals; and critical essays on genres, movements, and other themes (e.g., Czech New Wave, *Glasnost* and the Cinema, Holocaust Film, Women in East European Cinema). In addition, the book begins with separate introductions to the cinemas of Eastern Europe and Russia.

Of the approximately 360 entries, about 40 percent are devoted to Russian/Soviet topics. Material about Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia occupies another one-third. Directors (many of whom are writers and/or actors as well) account for well over half of the entries in the book. The average length of an item is under a page, although the critical essays and especially the country overviews often run several pages. The formatting of items on personalities makes immediately apparent their national origin and occupation. In addition, these entries are followed by brief filmographies, enabling the text to dwell on principal achievements and relevant contro-

versies. The writing is clear and concise; given the number of contributors, this is certainly a tribute to the editors. At the same time, while the country entries provide a good background for understanding the more specific items in the book, a reader must come prepared to absorb details quickly.

Using as a completely arbitrary criterion my survey course on Russian history and film, I found the *Companion* to contain pertinent information on every one of the directors discussed in class. Presumably, the book would be similarly useful with respect to the East European cinemas. Moreover, the entries on creative personnel who eventually ended up in Western Europe or the United States usually make at least brief mention of their later careers in those places. The book is also admirably up-to-date, giving due attention to filmmaking since the "fall of the Wall." Perhaps it is inevitable in a volume of this kind, but – contrary to the editors' assertions – it is not entirely clear why certain topics made the cut while others did not. Actor Nikolai Batalov certainly deserves his place here (which he receives), but is he any more deserving than Aleksei Batalov, who goes uncited? Similarly, if the effort to include composers had been serious, the selection from the Soviet side ought to have included more than Prokofiev and Shostakovich. The topics of some of the critical essays, too, seem to have been arbitrarily selected. A succinct bibliography concludes the book. The cross-referencing of entries is commendable, but the absence of an index or topical/regional breakdowns of the contents – even a simple alphabetical listing – makes the volume less accessible. Perhaps the editors thought that, given its manageable length (under 300 pages), readers would be able to find their way by means of some preliminary browsing. In short, the *Companion* could have been more user-friendly, especially for the students who are supposed to be part of its target audience.

Nevertheless, the *Companion*, a one-of-a-kind publication, will find a welcome place on the shelf of anyone who teaches, or enjoys watching, the films of Eastern Europe and Russia.

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