

Cinema Left Undone: A Secret History of Central European and Soviet Films (1920-1990)



International seminar (online)

Year 2 — 2026-2027

Lost and Recovered Film Projects: Fragments, Afterlives, Retakes

Link: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/387398014503443?p=dMaw1g0e0Fzhlp95lL>

Meeting ID: 387 398 014 503 443

Passcode: MZ7u5dV2

— Thursday 15 October 2026, 4:30-6:30pm

- **Pavle Levi** (Stanford University):
Dušan Makavejev's *Murderers on the Yugoslavia Express* (Speculative Archival Reconstruction of a Latent Film)
Discussant: **Naïma Berkane** (Sorbonne Université)

— Thursday 12 November 2026, 4-6pm

- **Natascha Drubek** (University of Regensburg, Apparatus):
Unfinished Business: Lost Films, Archival Reuse and Exploitative Productions from Eisenstein's *Mexico* to *DAU*

- **Evgeni Margolit** (Independent researcher): — presentation in Russian
Unrealised projects by Fridrikh Markovitch Ermler in the 1930's : More about Shakhov, but not only about him / Неосуществленные замыслы Эрмлера 30-х -
Еще о Шахове, но не только о нем
Discussant: Eugénie Zvonkine (Université Paris 8)

— **Thursday 10 December 2026, 4-6pm**

- **Eva Zak** (Adelphi University, New York):
Brought to the Surface: Esfir Shub's *Moscow Builds the Metro*, 1934
- **Garance Fromont** (Université Paris Cité, CEFRES):
Chytilová vs Censorship : the case of the truly provocative and unfinished *Tomato Matylda* (1963)
Discussant: Mathieu Lericq (Université Lumière Lyon 2)

— **Thursday 28 January 2026, 4-6pm**

- **Irina Tcherneva** (CNRS/CERCEC):
Deliberately and natively unfinished: Soviet footage of war crimes on the Eastern Front, 1942–1945
- **Gawan Fagard** (Université Libre de Bruxelles):
The Fountains of Gods: an unrealized film project by Andrei Tarkovsky and Alexander Kluge
Discussant: Birgit Beumers (University of Passau)

— **Thursday 25 February 2026, 4-6pm**

- **Dominique Nasta** (Université Libre de Bruxelles) and **Alina Popescu** (University of Bucharest):
Unfulfilled Cinema under Communism in Romania: A Censorship Overview and Selected Case Studies
Discussant: [to be determined]

— **Thursday 18 March 2026, 4-6pm**

- **Małgorzata Radkiewicz** (Jagiellonian University, Cracow):
Unfinished film projects. Polish Cinema at the Outbreak of the Second World War
- **Alante Kavaïté** (Université Paris 8, filmmaker):
Vytautas Žalakevičius's Unfilmed Screenplays and Their Cinematic Legacies
Discussant: Irina Tcherneva (CNRS/CERCEC)

Research program

Stakes

The renowned film *Que viva México!* (*Да здравствуем Мексика!*), directed by Sergei Eisenstein in 1932, was never completed due to political censorship. Grigori Alexandrov released an edited version of the film in 1979, more than thirty years after Eisenstein's death. What might this film, envisioned by one of the most internationally acclaimed filmmakers of his generation, have looked like in its intended form? We may never know with certainty, but archival documents and surviving images allow us to extrapolate and speculate. This unfinished film is emblematic of a broader phenomenon: the existence of film projects that never came to completion.

During the communist/Soviet era, many film projects launched in the Soviet contexts and in Central and Eastern Europe remained unfinished. The reasons are varied: strict ideological constraints, (un-official) political censorship, state repression, internalized self-censorship, accidental death of the director, etc. Great directors such as Oleksander Dovzhenko, Andrey Tarkovsky, Kira Muratova, Sergei Paradjanov, Miloš Forman, Jerzy Skolimowski, Krzysztof Kieślowski and Larisa Shepitko come immediately to mind, alongside countless lesser-known creators whose scripts were written but never filmed.

Just as many international researchers have reflected on the possibility of such a 'history of cinema in negative' (Jeannelle, 2014), this seems particularly important in the specific field that this seminar intends to study. These forbidden and impossible projects have an impact and permeate the histories of cinema and cinematographies, and must be studied and mapped. Furthermore, while some unrealised screenplays by famous directors have been published and discussed, researchers' interest remains largely 'author-centred'. It seems important to also consider the place of lesser-known screenwriters and directors faced with such difficulties and frustrations to reveal how these episodes in filmmaking influence and alter working relationships and reveal how professionals perceive themselves and their work in the socialist context.

The transdisciplinary research program investigates both the conditions under which film projects were developed and the diverse factors that prevented their completion (or led to their completion under unexpected conditions). Approaching an *impossible* history of cinema from a decolonial perspective, the project seeks to map the secret continents of Central European and Soviet cinematographies from 1920 to 1990.

Scientific coordination:

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Institutions:

Université Lumière Lyon 2 (PASSAGES XX-XXI)
Université Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis (ESTCA)
Institut Universitaire de France
UMR Eur'ORBEM (Sorbonne Université / CNRS)

Bibliography:

Carole Aurouet (dir.), *Le cinéma invisible*, Lille : Invenit, 2024.
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Alison Castle (ed.), *Stanley Kubrick's Napoleon: the greatest movie never made*, Taschen, 2011.
Félix Guattari, *Un amour d'UIQ : scénario pour un film qui manque*, edition by Silvia Maglioni et Graeme Thomson, with the collaboration of Isabelle Mangou, Amsterdam, 2012.
James Fenwick, Kieran Foster et David Eldridge (dir.), *Shadow Cinema: The Historical and Production Contexts of Unmade Films*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020.
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Marguerite H. Rippey, *Orson Welles and the unfinished RKO projects: a postmodern perspective*, Southern Illinois University Press, 2009.
Eugénie Zvonkine, *Un scénario sans film : 'Regardez attentivement les rêves' de Kira Mouratova et Vladimir Zouev*, L'Harmattan, 2019.
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