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East-Central Europe is as much a geographical area as it is a political idea: its spatial coordinates have shifted extensively in alignment with the logistics of the different ideologies which, over time, have placed the delineation of the region at the core of their program. According to Joachim von Puttkamer (2015), “[w]ith its primary interest in the productive and destructive dimensions of cultural entanglements in imperial and post-imperial contexts, a historiography of East Central Europe has emerged which goes beyond political biases and has a cultural studies orientation”.

We believe that a communication studies-informed methodology should complement this approach, in order to decipher the implicit *lingua franca* that has developed from the “forced ‘togetherness’” (Iordanova 2013) of these otherwise fragmented ethno-cultural milieus, achieved either through external coercion or through the necessity of small states to shape proximity alliances. A *lingua franca* which is, quite paradoxically, preponderantly non-linguistic and exists despite the fiercely maintained lingual diversity of the region. Assuredly, the complicated pacification process of the area, especially since the shattering of the Soviet Bloc, requires concepts that broaden the spectrum between the monolithic extremes of communication and non-communication, mainly those of *incommunication* (frustration over the perceived failure to communicate or the mistaken belief of having been understood), *miscommunication* (failure to communicate ideas or intentions successfully) and *acomunication* (hierarchised communication that disregards the other’s intellectual and identitarian autonomy), as defined by Wolton (2013) or Dacheux (2015).

Much of East-Central European cinema after 1989 seems to thematize the issue of communicational barriers. Failed communication in these films may stem from main characters’ different perspectives over the meaning and the practical implications of the same word (as in *Politist, adjective*, Corneliu Porumboiu, 2009), or, on a larger scale, from interpersonal misunderstanding that only serves as a mirror for past trauma (as in Jasmila Žbanić’s *Grbavica*, 2006) or for intercultural conflict (as in Valeska Grisebach’s *Western*, 2017). It can also be based on the cacophonous discussions of a group of so-called revolutionaries trying to decide whether, in 1989, the Revolution actually took place in their small town (as in *12:08 East of Bucharest*, by Corneliu Porumboiu, 2006), or on propaganda-induced hatred between sharers of a same culture and of a same language, that even a life-or-death situation cannot defuse (*No Man’s Land*, Danis Tanović, 2001). It can develop in (quasi)total silence, as in Belà Tarr’s *The Turin Horse* (2011) or emerge in the interstices of

profuse conversation, as witnessed in Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada* (2016). It can flow through sign or whistled language (Myroslav Slaboshpytskiy's *The Tribe*, 2014, and Porumboiu's *La Gomera*, 2019, respectively), as well as through the postmodern collage of slogans and quotes that constitute the characters' speeches in Radu Jude's *Scarred Hearts* (2016).

The above-mentioned situations are but mere examples of a rich repertoire of miscommunication in East-Central European Cinema; but what lies behind them? If we posit, with Casetti (2004), that films are sites of production and circulation of discourses, which can be interpreted as symbolic constructions referring to a cluster of meanings conveyed by a specific society at a moment of its existence, then what are the meanings transmitted by this cinematic reflection on communication blockage? What are the main cinematic discourses developed around miscommunication issues? To what extent do they create a common imaginary for this part of Europe? In other words, given issues such as the failure to achieve full integration into the Western world, ghettoization of ethnic minorities, inequalities due to insufficient social protection measures, mistrust arising from civilizational or economical differences within and across East-Central European states, or gender inequality, to what extent do they constitute a common frame for this part of Europe, overcoming what Laqueur (2011) described as the lack of cultural solidarity between the continent's regions, possibly in order to form no less than a "community of conflict"?

We would like to invite scholars from the fields of film, media and communication studies, but also of linguistics, literary studies, political studies, anthropology, etc., to a joint reflection on East-Central European contemporary cinema. More precisely, we want to explore issues related, but not restricted, to:

- communicational barriers
- typologies of abortive communication
- (audio)visual representations of communication failures
- impact of collective and/or individual trauma on communication
- (in/a/non)communicating across spaces and borders
- gender, ethnic or racial discrimination as undercurrents of communication failure
- interspecies non-communication as reinforcement of the anthropocentric paradigm
- political dimensions of the refusal to communicate
- national waves and alternative modes of cinematic expression
- creative solidarity networks across East-Central Europe

### **Venue**

The conference will take place on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September, 2023 at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA) in Bucharest (30A Expozitiei Blvd.).

**Abstract**

Authors wishing to contribute to the conference program are kindly invited to submit an abstract of maximum 300 words and a short bio note at the following address: [snspace.unatc.conference@gmail.com](mailto:snspace.unatc.conference@gmail.com).

**Important dates**

Abstracts and bio note submission: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Decision date: July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023

**Keynote speakers**

Dina Jordanova, Emeritus Professor, Department of Film Studies, University of St Andrews, Scotland

Anikó Imre, Professor of Cinematic Arts, University of Southern California, USA

**Scientific committee**

Andrei Gorzo, UNATC, Romania

Ewa Hannah Mazierska, University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom

Eva Näripea, Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonia

Eszter Polonyi, University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia

Andrea Virginás, Sapientia University, Romania

Gábor Gergely, Lincoln School of Film, Media and Journalism, United Kingdom

Dominique Wolton, CNRS, Paris, France

**Organizing committee**

Liri Chapelan, UNATC, Romania

Denisa-Adriana Oprea, SNSPA, Romania

**Conference fee**

50 euros (free of charge for (doctoral) students)