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Monday 8½ the Sequel: Who Owns Communist Cinematic Production in Post-Communist Bulgaria?[1]

The Ownership of Cultural Production—Legal and Symbolic

In the period of Communist rule in Bulgaria, 1945-1990, cultural production was commissioned, funded, sanctioned, censored, and owned by the state.[2] Cinematic production—film—was no exception. The point of its symbolic ownership was hotly discussed in the Party-sanctioned media and in decrees that the high echelons of the Communist Party regularly sent to chart the course of everything: economics, politics, cultural life, and rhetoric. Film was supposed to be art for the people and engaged in service to the Communist ideal; filmmakers were to take moral and political ownership of its messages; and when the moral and political messages did not suit the Communist Party, filmmakers were to repent and take ownership of the messages as revised by the Party. In these conditions, censorship often made a mockery of the symbolic ownership of cultural production by depriving artists of developing an independent and unique voice. In this regard, the government control of the media, and film in particular, was darkly successful, despite the fact that politically sensitive audiences developed an acute ability to read between the lines and to sense what was a filmmaker's own work and what was grafted onto his or her work by censors, Communist art committees, and the larger propaganda machinery.

The point of cultural production's legal ownership, the kind that has to do with copyright, fees for airing films on television, and the like, was a moot point. All production and distribution facilities were financed and owned by the state, as were salaries and unions, independent only in rhetoric, in the filmmaking and film-critic community. The fact that there was no effective private ownership of anything in Bulgaria at the time is only part of the story. The more important part, for having longer-lasting effects, is that government control

of cultural production was darkly successful in yet another aspect: it taught generations of Bulgarians that national cultural production facilities cannot be privatized the way grocery stores, gas stations, cement factories, marine ports, or tobacco companies are privatized. In this sense, national cultural production was to remain national, a way for artists of the former "intelligentsia," or at least those of them who still cared to be public intellectuals, to capture the common and uniquely Bulgarian in art.

When it comes to cultural production, the symbolic and legal aspects of ownership are intricately and distinctively mixed. The privatization of cultural production facilities and the sorting out of the legal ownership of cultural production engendered debates of a different nature than those surrounding the contentious privatization of everything else in the country. A palpable sentiment in this debate was the notion that in the conditions of cultural separation and marginalization, as well as the vilification for being the uncivilized and insufficiently European "Other" by the West, national ownership of facilities would ensure that Bulgarian filmmaking would continue to be possible and would counter the massive influx of Hollywood productions and negative images in Western-European films. What is more, this privatization and the legal ownership battles over productions that were made before 1990 came to affect cultural production today. In this way, the legacy that Communist control over cultural production left for its legal ownership in post-Communist times also came to affect aspects of the national cultural identity forged after the fall of Communism.

In this article, I first review Communist policy on cultural production by way of setting the stage for a discussion of its legal and symbolic ownership today. Then I briefly revisit one way in which cinematic production from Communist times was used to address the national cultural identity that Bulgarians sought to forge in the post-Communist period: a film show on television, *Monday 8½*, to which an earlier work was devoted (see Petrova). Despite its tremendous popularity, judging by viewership and ratings, this film show has

since been taken off the air. I follow its fate as described in newspapers and industry magazines to use it as a case study of sorts of how the legal ownership of Communist cultural production continues to affect cultural production today. Finally, a concluding section takes a broader look at the privatization of film production facilities and the unique mix of legal and symbolic ownership arguments it has engendered in Bulgaria in light of their importance for national cultural identity.

Bulgarian Cultural Policy under Communism

This section traces Bulgarian cultural—and, in particular, film art—policy from 1941 to 1989. In this period of total Communist government control, the Communist Party took ownership of cinematic and all other official cultural production—legal, financial, and symbolic. The massive nationalization in Bulgaria in the 1940s established that the state would own all film production and distribution facilities. The leadership of the Soviet Union, which Bulgaria was to follow closely for half a century, established that film would become a tool of Communist propaganda. Movies had always been tremendously important to Soviet leaders. Lenin is rumored to have said that "cinema is the most important art" for reaching the masses with a message; later Stalin echoed this sentiment, stating that "Cinema is the greatest means of mass agitation. Our task is to make good use of it"[3] (quoted Ratchford 85). Under these conditions, legal ownership and control of the means of cinematic production ensured the continued symbolic ownership by the Communist Party of "the most important art."

State ownership of the film industry in Bulgaria began in 1941, when a film foundation was established and placed under the control of the Prime Minister. After the end of World War II, the Communist Party came to power and was soon to monopolize state rule until 1989, when Todor Zhivkov, president for 34 years, stepped down and the party

continued its political life as the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Between 1946 and 1949, the nationalization of all cinema production companies and equipment established a state monopoly over the production and distribution of films. In 1952, a special document, Decree 91 of the Council of Ministers, aspired to prescribe solutions for the comprehensive development of cinema in Bulgaria. It listed the subjects that films were to address: building a socialist society, the courageous leadership of the Soviet Union, national heroes from the period of the Ottoman Yoke, and the like. Knowledge of Marxism-Leninism became compulsory and Bulgarian film was called on to help spread its message to the people. The 1950s was thus a decade marked by a race to prove loyalty to Stalinist dogma, including in the management of cultural production (Yanakiev 14).

This control relied on a particular, well-oiled mechanism. It would be set in motion against a potentially “dangerous” film by an editorial or an article signed by a figure not directly involved in cinema. In some cases, the article would provoke a debate about the film; in other cases, “measures” would be adopted, such as decrees and official decisions to ban the film from distribution and/or the filmmakers from access to equipment and facilities. A filmmaker banned from access to state-owned production facilities was effectively banned from making cinema; the only way back was public self-criticism and profound repentance. Such editorials and articles were usually published in the Party daily. The filmmaking and film-critic community would then be expected to follow the Party line in film industry publications, repeating the aesthetic and political analyses of articles commissioned by the Party, retracting film reviews, and being self-critical for not anticipating the Party reception of the film. In content and rhetoric, filmmaking and film criticism had to prove that they had learned the political and cultural lessons taught by the USSR (Yanakiev 14).

Another important step in Bulgarian cultural policy was taken after the death of Stalin in 1953 and the official denouncement of his personality cult by the Communist Party of the

Soviet Union. Bulgaria replicated this experience almost exactly in holding the April Plenum of 1956, which accused the head of the Bulgarian Communist Party and government of creating a cult of his own personality and demoted him to Minister of Culture and Education. This reflected the Party line that cultural policy was to be a direct function of political processes and that cultural production was to be controlled by the most loyal and trustworthy Communist leaders (Dimitrov 439-42). As the official historiography of the time captured these processes, the April Plenum "adopted a course of careful but radical elimination of shortcomings in ideological activity, in culture and science" (Dimitrov 440). In reality, this was justification for any censorship of ideas and works of art. The category of "shortcomings in ideological activity" was broad and elastic enough to cover any dissenting opinions and they were quickly censored to the dismay of those in the artistic community who had believed the rhetoric about liberating the intellectual life of the country from dated dogma.

While filmmakers and film critics concentrated on the good news of the April Plenum about the newly granted liberation of creative life, the events in Hungary in 1956 assumed higher priority for the Communist rulers of Bulgaria and of the rest of Eastern Europe. The Hungarian revolt (described by some authors as a full-fledged revolution) demanded, among other things, a multiparty democracy and freedom of speech and of the press. This workers' revolution succeeded for four days, before being crushed by the re-occupying Soviet tanks and heavy government persecution of thousands of people, including workers and prominent cultural figures (Liehm and Liehm 163-4). Politics and the conditions in filmmaking in the 1960s were marked by the contradiction between the violent crushing of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 and the thaw initiated after Stalin's death and the end of the personality cult. While Bulgarian filmmakers, many of whom had just returned from training abroad in other Communist-bloc countries, believed the thaw would allow them more space to develop

their art, the Bulgarian Communist Party tightened its control over cinematic ideology and production.

Thus, in 1957, shortly after the events in Hungary, a political campaign in Bulgaria denounced the reduced ideological vigilance of filmmakers and managed to oust or repulse the most accomplished professionals in filmmaking into a withdrawal from cinema. The blow to cinematic art was of such magnitude that film magazines had to start calling national screenplay competitions and running "popular how-to-write-a-script articles in order to help starry-eyed amateurs" (Yanakiev 15). Similarly, in 1958, Communist president Todor Zhivkov proclaimed the return to a single aesthetic model, charging that, "some filmmakers… deviated from the method of Socialist Realism and the realist traditions of our art and produced a series of failures. Evidently it is now the duty of the Central Committee and the Government to interfere in the work of Bulgarian cinematography" (quoted Yanakiev 15). This process set the pattern of keeping cinematic production in line with political developments: every time other countries in the Eastern bloc made an attempt at liberalization of some sort, this would trigger a closing of ranks in Bulgaria and even tighter control over cinematic production and censorship. Such policies effectively banned Bulgarian artists from participating in the cultural life of the rest of Eastern Europe, which, although Communist, was bound to produce political processes that Communist rulers did not want to see spread. This deliberate cultural particularism and parochialism was to leave profound marks on how Bulgarian art was created and on how its producers and consumers conceived of their participation in the life of a larger Europe.

More generally, every five or six years the Communist Party held a campaign to remind the filmmaking community of its proper place in the cultural and political life of the country. Such campaigns came complete with decrees and speeches on the state and development of Bulgarian cinema by Communist President Zhivkov; Party-sanctioned

publications setting the tone for the message and the rhetoric in depicting socialist life in film; and carefully directed criticism and censorship of select films and filmmakers to serve as a lesson for all filmmakers who imagined not toeing the Party line.

Meanwhile, Bulgarian cultural policy followed that of the Soviet Union closely and strictly.[4] In 1950, 87.2 percent of the screen time in Bulgarian movie theaters was ceded to Soviet films (Yanakiev 15). In the 1960s, editorials in film publications proclaimed that if Khrushchev criticized the accomplished Soviet filmmakers so sharply, then Bulgarian cinema, by assumption inferior to that of the Soviet Union, was obviously in need of ideological and artistic reevaluation, too. When Khrushchev disparaged all avant-garde art, Zhivkov criticized filmmakers and critics for losing their grasp of the correct class positions, aping foreign models, and partaking in decadence and pessimism (Liehm and Liehm 238). This deliberate treatment of Bulgarian cultural production as inferior and always in need of guidance, ideological and stylistic, from the Soviet Union, constituted a mechanism of control. Where coercion, intimidation, and oppression did not work (and they rarely failed), banning filmmakers from access to facilities and their films from distribution was always available as an option.

Besides ensuring that the Soviet experience in politics and cultural production was faithfully followed, the Bulgarian Communist Party also ensured that Western cultural models did not contaminate socialist art. For instance, the *auteur* notion of the French New Wave of the 1960s saw cinema as a rich, varied, and sensitive medium for the personal expression of film directors (Cook 431-79; Hicks and Petrova 183-6; etc.). But this freedom of individual artistic expression in form and content threatened to create too many spaces for political contention and too many metaphors, difficult to censor, for expressing it. Therefore, it had to be banned. While the French New Wave produced chain reactions in both Western and Eastern Europe, and indeed around the world, Bulgarian cultural policy actively enforced

cultural isolation and provincialism. Communist Party approval of films for production and distribution depended on subject matter and faithful patriotic (that is, Communist) intentions, not on artistic quality. As a result, while the technical resources available to filmmakers increased, the type of cinematic production they generated was severely confined to films catering to popular interest, offering simple-minded entertainment, and strictly limited to the domestic market. This policy, initiated as a response to the New Wave in cinema, is perhaps the prime example of depriving Bulgarian filmmakers of the symbolic ownership of their art by depriving them of the outlet for their individual artistic voice.

On 21 August 1968, the armies of the Warsaw Pact, including that of Bulgaria, invaded Czechoslovakia with tanks and half a million troops. Czechoslovak Communist Party hard-liners had written two letters to the Kremlin asking the Soviet Union to employ all measures to prevent an imminent threat of a counterrevolution. They saw the threat in the face of Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, who was too taken with the thaw after Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin. Dubcek had initiated economic reforms, as well as an end to censorship and to limitations on the travel of people, ideas, and cultural influences. After about a month of Soviet-bloc occupation, a new government of Communist hard-liners was installed in Czechoslovakia and it became one of the most repressive regimes in the Eastern bloc. The invasion was followed by policies of "normalization," or exile, repression and suppression, silencing, and accommodation. In culture and in cinema, "normalization" strove to erase the international success of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the 1960s. While such successful films proved difficult to disown, they were marginalized and reduced to a select few that would be referred to and revived only occasionally (Hames 103-108). The Prague Spring left a lasting legacy for cultural policy in Eastern Europe. The free flow of ideas and people that Dubcek had initiated was not an experience to be replicated. With film singled out as the most potentially

dangerous art, during the next decade Bulgarian cultural policy sought to establish even firmer control over cinema.

The 1970s saw the complete success of Communist cultural policy in subjugating cinema: an organization of the Communist Party was embedded in the Union of Bulgarian Film Workers. The purpose of the new structure was to transfer the influence over filmmakers to their own circles, to temper the pressure by applying it from within. This does not mean, however, that such pressure decreased. In 1976, at a colloquium on "Contemporary Bulgarian Cinema" in Sofia, Gideon Bahman from the United States said: "Bulgaria is a small quiet country. And the most it can do is make small quiet films." Marcel Martin from France supported this advice, arguing that such films would stand a better chance on the festival circuit and for commercial distribution (quoted Yanakiev 19). But what the visitors probably did not understand was that such advice clashed with both the general and the immediate agendas that Bulgarian Communist leaders had for cinema. In terms of general directions, grand film productions as a tool of propaganda had been firmly embraced as far back as the 1950s. Following these Westerners' advice to make Bulgarian films more attractive to foreign circuits was the unspeakable: in the early 1960s, Communist President Todor Zhivkov himself had declared that any filmmakers' attempts at abstract humanism in film were attempts to "make their films better liked in the West," which was tantamount to treason. In terms of immediate agendas, Bulgaria was about to commemorate its 13th centenary in 1981, complete with celebrations of its Communist victory. This included grand, Hollywood-sized historical film productions to capture (the Communist version of) Bulgarian history on film. With the economy faltering in the 1980s and affecting the state-owned film industry as well, these grand cinematic productions left state coffers empty for film and other cultural production for years to come.

The Communist government made good use of its ownership of filmmaking facilities. Censorship mechanisms existed and functioned almost without a glitch for decades. Dissent was either co-opted or, where that did not work, eliminated by shelving films and banning filmmakers from access to equipment, facilities or simply the right to work in cinema. Some films reached audiences re-edited and mutilated by the censors of the state; others were delayed in release and distribution, effectively separating them from the time of their highest aesthetic and social significance. Total state control and censorship of cultural life succeeded in one of its most fundamental and perhaps most contradictory goals: enforcing cultural parochialism while accepting the absolute cultural hegemony of the Soviet Union. The silver lining of being "the most important art" in a totalitarian state was that however broke the country was, the Communist Party always found the means to commission and fund films. Despite limitations in technical advancements, thematic freedom, and stylistic expression, Bulgarian cinema emerged from Communist rule with a treasure trove of truly classic films. What happened to them after 1990? Who owns them and who keeps the key to the treasure trove?[5]

Monday 8½ Then….

Looking for an older, classic Bulgarian film to rent or buy in Sofia is something of a high-brow exercise and often a futile one. Video rental stores are well stocked with Hollywood and other Western fare; the handful of Bulgarian films they offer is usually from the 1990s and usually in the crime-drama and action genres. Going to the movies, an increasingly expensive pastime, is much the same: save for the occasional and rather rare filmfest that brings some older Bulgarian films to the circuit, it is a Hollywood-dominated scene.

Between 1998 and 2001, there was one major exception to the no-Bulgarian-films rule, and it was on national television. A film talk show, *Monday 8½*, presented and then aired old and very old Bulgarian films—some coming out of semi-neglect, others out of total oblivion—and the show attracted both seasoned professional cineastes and newly captivated aficionados. The films *Monday 8½* revived were made in Communist Bulgaria between 1944 and 1989, then censored either by being banned from release and distribution or by being severely re-edited to excise sequences that the Communist Party had found offensive or suspicious. Every film was preceded by a half-hour talk show, which presented cultural policy and the conditions in filmmaking in Communist Bulgaria, told the stories of the censored films, and situated them in the flow of European and world cinematic production of their time. On the show, film directors, screenplay writers, actors, and film critics—a veritable who's who of the Bulgarian cineaste community—talked about their experiences and the meaning of making cinema under total Communist Party control of national cultural production.

Monday 8½ held tremendous appeal for both audiences and Bulgarian National Television (BNT) on which it aired. Its immediate attraction for the television station was in terms of programming time. The show made and kept a date with audiences, every Monday at 8:30 pm, to take them to a night at the movies—to old Bulgarian movies, that is, that they could not see anywhere else. This worked well because before *Monday 8½* this time slot had been reserved for Television Theater, somewhat along the lines of the best examples of Exxon-Mobil Masterpiece Theater only commissioned and financed by the state in Bulgaria. Once Television Theater was dead, national television programming had an important prime-time gap to fill and *Monday 8½*, with its old Bulgarian movies, stepped up to the plate and did a wonderful job, too (Chernev 9).

The show was equally liked by audiences. It consistently won some of the highest ratings on television, as well as the 1998 national award for most original television show, and its viewership in prime time survived the birth of two private, nation-wide television stations. Its appeal spanned generations, from those who wanted to reminisce about forgotten films and loved actors, to those who had never seen these films or heard of the machinery of censorship that suppressed them. Its managing editor, Maia Daskalova, told me in various interviews in January and May 2001 about the feedback she had received from different audience segments. *Monday 8½* attracted teenagers interested in the part of the program that "tells them about life in Bulgaria in the past century and allows them to meet artists and ponder problems about which it would be difficult to learn from other sources." The twenty-something audience watched the program for its analysis of issues of the past, of which they only had a glimpse of as children. Their parents used *Monday 8½* to reminisce about forgotten beloved actors and films, about places where the filming was done, and about their own life under Communism. The audience group of those over sixty years of age, "which cannot accept the conquest of Western/American cinema, is more sentimentally and nostalgically inclined toward everything Bulgarian, including *Monday 8½*," Maia Daskalova pointed out.

Besides countering claims that Bulgarian cinema was dead and that it had never produced anything worthwhile, there was a larger agenda as well. In the 1990s, Bulgarian cinema lost its funding from the state and, unable to secure alternative sources of funding, dropped in production numbers to only eleven films in the four years during which *Monday 8½* ran and only 25 films in the entire 1991-2001 decade. Filmmakers and actors sought international exposure so as to continue making cinema, although none achieved great fame. The facilities of the film studio in Boyana, just outside of Sofia, were frequently rented out or at best employed for co-productions with Western European film studios, which came to

make use of the highly qualified but cheaper production work force, especially since European Union accession had made facilities and labor in countries like Poland and Hungary more expensive. A major reorganization of the distribution system in Bulgaria dropped Bulgarian films from cinemas; without showcasing, they also dropped from audiences' attention. For instance, statistics report that in 1960, there were 1,515 movie theaters around the country; by 1975, they had grown to 3,689. By 1999, however, there were only 191 movie theaters. In a similar vein, the most watched Bulgarian film, *Witty Petar* (*Hitar Petar*, 1960) directed by Stefan Surchadzhiev, was reportedly seen by 6,407,476 movie-goers (not a small feat in a country of just over 8 million people); by contrast, in the early 1990s, Bulgarian film projections were attracting barely 5,000-6,000 viewers (The Bulgarian Cinema online).[6] At the same time, Hollywood quickly secured access to Bulgarian audiences and inundated the distribution network.

Furthermore, the end of the Cold War and of isolationism and enforced parochialism hardly meant the end of divisions on the mental and cultural map of Europe. In the flow of information from West to East, the Balkans have a long tradition of being represented as an exotic and fascinating place, but also obscure and pathologically different—different from the "normalness" of Western Europe. Film and literature about the Balkans abound with travelogue-type works, depicting a journey into the picturesque but dark, indecipherable, poor and violent Balkans. In these works, either an outsider dismayed at what he sees here or a Westernized local who returns home directs a traveling, voyeuristic eye to the Balkans, to marvel at their Otherness and evaluate it through the gaze of his Western(ized) Normalness. In the 1990s, no less than during the entire 20th century, the Balkans in general and Bulgaria in particular were left outside the confines of Europe—politically, economically, physically (via strict travel restrictions such as those imposed by the EU's Schengen agreement in 1993), and culturally.

This cultural exclusion as insufficiently European has been deeply internalized and appears in Bulgarian filmmaking both as a symptom and as a topic of reflection (Iordanova 29-70; Petrova 29-32). This internalized exclusion, which perpetually drives Bulgarians to compare themselves critically to Europeans, to knock on Europe's door for admission, and to feel insufficiently civilized and European to be let in, amounts to a national inferiority complex, evident not only in cultural and cinematic production, but also in political decisions and rhetoric and in popular street-wise musings on "where we belong." In the 1990s, when Western European arguments on exclusion were stepped up, Eastern Europe no longer existed as an entity to counter them, and Hollywood inundated film circuits, the internalization of exclusion and inferiority worried many people.

Enter *Monday 8½*. Besides seeking to revive the forgotten gems of Bulgarian filmmaking and counter the claim that Bulgaria never had and never would have a national cinema, the show recognized that regardless of whether audiences met their immersion in the clip culture of MTV and in foreign cinematic production with enthusiasm or with nostalgia, all viewers shared the experience of having their cultural identities renegotiated on a daily basis. They were all too familiar with the rhetoric about Bulgaria's joining the West in its democracy, economic development, and values, and about Bulgaria having to "catch up" in order to be admitted as a member of this conceptual "West." They were also all too familiar with black-humor folkloric jokes about "us" and "them," which could be used as a popular indicator of the nation's self-esteem ("we" are lazy, sly, corrupted, violent, and prone to look for quick and easy gains; "they" are hard-working, organized, and civilized), reflecting a deeply internalized sense of pathological difference from an ideal "Europe." In showing films that depict and comment on a reality already appropriated and subsumed under the label of Otherness in those films made through an outsider's gaze, *Monday 8½* took its viewers on a journey of rediscovery, which emphasized not pathological differences from civilization

and development, but the complex picture of political, economic, social, and cultural factors that formed the identity rejected by Europe as the inferior Other. This rediscovery was, then, also an act of reclaiming images, representations, and conceptualizations, an act of remembering and resisting. *Monday 8½* implicitly addressed the problem of the persistent cultural inferiority complex, which unmatched foreign cultural production threatened to deepen. As producer, Maia Daskalova claimed that the show was "a unique attempt to look at recent history without partiality, resentment, and bitterness, but with insight and understanding." It was a unique project of reclaiming and redefining the collective memory of Bulgaria's Communist history as part of its national identity. The program was also a project that counteracted efforts to appropriate the representation of Bulgaria's recent past and, thus, to impose an inferior-outsider identity for its present.[7]

Although the program was light-hearted and entertaining, it also attempted to position itself as providing instruction about cultural and film history. It challenged accounts in the inherited, official Communist history textbooks through oral histories from respected Bulgarian artists. In this sense, although its material was derived from the past, the program addressed the present. *Monday 8½* was not just an evening at the movies. It was a project of collective cultural identity renegotiation. In showing these censored films, in discussing the conditions under which they were made, and in treating them as snapshots of Bulgaria's collective history and identity with links to deeper social, political, and cultural processes, *Monday 8½* aimed to incorporate them into Bulgaria's new collective post-Communist identity.

…and *Monday 8½* Now

How did a film show with such tall orders to follow come into existence, and how did it get access to the treasure trove of Bulgarian films produced under Communism to show to

viewers in post-Communist times? The idea belonged to Evgeni Mihailov, the head of the Boyana Film Center, and to its board of directors (Petkova 5). *Monday 8½* was made in and by Boyana Film (where Maia Daskalova is also employed); it was owned by the Film Center and sold to Bulgarian National Television (BNT), where it aired. In the deal, BNT got a package: a half-hour talk show, complete with archival television footage that it often purchased from BNT itself, plus a film to follow the show. BNT also got the viewership and awards that *Monday 8½* garnered throughout its existence. The arrangement worked well until August 6, 2001, when amidst high ratings, enviable viewership, and new ideas about what else to show, it was abruptly cancelled by BNT. The explanation of this paradoxical decision, about which the producers and crew of *Monday 8½* had to find out from the daily newspapers, takes us in search of the key to the treasury of Bulgarian films made before 1990.

However successful *Monday 8½* was, it was not free from the messy contingencies of the ownership of Communist cultural production in post-Communist Bulgaria. *Monday 8½* absorbed all access to the available stock of Bulgarian films and all the showcasing of these films on television not only because it was so well made and made such a good use of available Bulgarian cinematic production, but also because of the issues surrounding copyright and the unregulated and unclear legal and financial relationships between television stations and the owners of Bulgarian films. The rights to these films belong not to the filmmakers, who receive a percentage in royalties, but to the producers. For films made before 1990, the producer—and today, owner—is Boyana Film Center. *Monday 8½* was a Boyana Film Center show; it used the film studio's own stock of films, and did not need to pay itself or enter into complicated legal negotiations with itself in order to show the films on television. The rest of the stock of Bulgarian films, comprising far fewer films than what Boyana owns, belongs to Bulgarian National Television (BNT). Thus, BNT has neither

legal, nor financial troubles showing these films on television, and when it does not do so very frequently, this has to do with their quality and not with ownership issues (*Media Sviat* 34).

The case of documentaries is much more complicated. Films made before 1990 are owned by the documentary film studios that used to function at the time: “Vreme” (“Time”) for educational and documentary films; “Ekran” (“Screen”) for made-for-television films (usually shot in 16 mm); “Globus,” “Spektur,” “Interfilm,” etc. After 1990, however, these film studios, except perhaps for “Vreme,” disappeared from media and film radars, together with their film stocks. What is happening to these films today?

In a legally clean case, they end up as part of the stock of a state organization called Bulgarian National Film Archive, charged with the responsibility to “acquire, restore, preserve, and store film and film-related archival artifacts of national and world culture; all kinds of audio-visual documents with documentary, historic, and cultural significance; to organize the film libraries by cataloging them and preparing supporting documentation; to use the libraries for science and research; to screen films on education and cultural events,” as its website states. Yet it is a well-known fact that as a state organization, the Bulgarian National Film Archive lacks the resources to fulfill this mission. For years it has been embroiled in efforts to secure storage space and money for its archives—efforts that have not resulted in much. One result, however, is that renting a film from the National Film Archive to air is prohibitively costly and simply unaffordable, and television stations, including BNT, avoid doing so, especially given that the high price does not guarantee the technical quality of what they would rent.

In a not-so-clean case, it is unclear where films made before 1990 end up or who owns them today. The studio “Ekran” provides a good example: it both belongs to and does not belong to BNT, the result of an unregulated and vague series of moves in sorting out

organization and ownership, moves that resemble the mice playing while the cat is away. As a result, private television stations interested in airing Bulgarian films made before 1990 do not quite know whom to turn to for rights to these films. When they do know to whom to turn—Boyana Film Center or the National Film Archive—renting films costs too much, especially since it is much cheaper for television stations to fill air-time with inexpensive imported programs. How do television stations deal with this situation? BNT turns to its own studios; more recently, it has also used films that it has co-produced. In recent years, BNT has stepped up the production of its own documentaries and feature films, as well as its co-producing efforts, developing a stock of newer productions to which it can have easy—and cheap—access in the future. Private television stations, by comparison, simply do not deal with this situation. They do not produce or co-produce films due to unclear future regulations of cultural production and its ownership, questionable aesthetic and production values, and a limited interest on the part of their audiences, which does not justify the effort or the expense (*Media Sviat* 34).

Where does this messy situation of unregulated and unclear ownership leave us? When BNT cancelled *Monday 8½*, Apostol Penchev, the head of cinematic production at BNT, initially explained that the show had exhausted its potential. BNT, however, later stated that their parting with Boyana Film also had to do with money. According to BNT Programming Director Nevena Andonova, 8,500 leva (or about $5,500 by July 2006 conversion rates) per show was too high a price for BNT to pay Boyana Film for *Monday 8½*. Furthermore, Boyana Film acted as an agent, or middleman, for access to Bulgarian films. Instead of using this middleman, BNT had now decided to purchase access directly, from the National Film Center (NFC). And finally, BNT would use the programming time formerly occupied by *Monday 8½* for film premiers, striving to devote the majority of these to Bulgarian films. Where the national film industry did not supply enough films for BNT to

show, the television station would show popular plays, Andonova stated (Spassova and Aneva 30).

Who got short-changed in this new deal? Evgeni Mihailov, the head of Boyana Film, stated that they are prepared to compete with BNT. The show crew expressly prepared a new concept paper for a new film show. It would retain the hostess of *Monday 8½*, actress Paraskeva Djukelova, would not copy the old *Monday 8½*, and would be aired on one of the private television channels, either bTV or NTV, with which the show producers started negotiations. Evgeni Mihailov also explained that after canceling the show on 6 August 2001, BNT would actually pay a lot more than 8,500 leva for filling two hours of programming time (the half-hour talk show and the film). With *Monday 8½*, BNT used to pay $8.40 per minute of film, 55 percent of which was given to "Filmautor," the non-profit created by filmmakers (directors, script writers, projectionists, and producers) of audio-visual production to manage collectively copyright and related rights. The price, however, would increase because under the provisions of the new copyright law, starting in 2001 royalties have to be paid not only to authors (filmmakers), but also to performers. In addition, the National Film Center (NFC) would also charge BNT for transferring the films from film stock to a video carrier, which would cost no less than $1,000. Before being transferred, though, the copy would need to be restored and cleaned—for an additional charge. To Andonova's argument that the talk show itself cost BNT too much, Mihailov responded that when they used BNT archival footage in the show, they were charged 1,000 leva (or about $650 by July 2006 conversion rates) per minute and there were about twelve minutes in each show, which made the price per show a bargain for BNT. The *Monday 8½* crew of fifteen people received a combined fee of 1,700 leva (or about $1,100 in July 2006) per show. Having made this calculation, Mihailov stated that he did not intend to beg BNT to keep *Monday 8½* on the air (Spassova and Aneva 30).

In brief, the short-changed side in the deal was neither Boyana Film Center, nor the *Monday 8½* crew, nor even BNT, which still has its own studios, productions and co-productions to draw cheaper programming material from. Short-changed were audiences: all those viewers of different ages who had come to expect a date and a movie every Monday night, a date with the stars of the Bulgarian cineaste community and a night at the movies with a film they could not see anywhere else. Sorting out legal and symbolic rights to cultural production bequeathed by a totalitarian state in which everyone and no one owned everything and nothing is a messy business. However, when it means effectively monopolizing and then denying access to this cultural production and its legacy, it becomes a sad business as well. To be certain, the heritage of cultural and cinematic production needs a custodian of its artifacts to be properly preserved and cared for—this much we learned from Communism, under which common property also meant common neglect of it. The privatization of cultural production facilities and the battles over rights and ownership of cultural production are not purely financial and legal; we have yet to find a trusty guardian for their symbolic and identity aspects.

On the Ownership of Cultural Production and the Production of Ownership

The 1990s were a period of scrambling in Bulgaria: to reorganize the Soviet-style planned economy into a capitalist-market one; to develop a multiparty system and democratic governance; to renegotiate the welfare system; to convince Europe and ourselves that we belong in “Europe”; to rewrite or “correct” history textbooks hijacked by Communist propaganda; to reorganize the educational system; to privatize everything… in fact, to rethink all aspects of life and all attendant identities. In the 1990s, many media channels, cultural production facilities, distributors, and exhibition facilities also changed hands, a high number of them becoming either foreign-owned, or foreign-controlled. In cinema, this was also a

period of major change, marked by the loss of secure state funding and distribution, the impossible competition with Hollywood standards and resources, and the realization that Bulgarian cinema had better chances as a Balkan or "small quiet" project than as a viable part of a European cultural agenda.

Another problem that needed to be sorted out was the legal ownership of cultural production made in the 1944-1990 period. Who was to own and profit from the rights to films made in formerly state-owned and state-financed film studios? Where had these studios gone? How was the bankrupt state to pay for the preservation of this heritage? And how would audiences have access to these films while film studios, film repositories, and television stations sorted out the dilemma between their moral responsibility to preserve these artifacts and make them available to the people, on the one hand, and the pressures of a market economy in a bankrupt country where culture took one of the last spots on the list of priorities, on the other?

Today, more than fifteen years after the end of Communism left Bulgarian cinema in a sort of limbo, we are still searching for answers to these questions. It was only in November 2004 that Parliament and the Agency for Privatization started accepting offers, mostly foreign, to sell Boyana Film, the one name in national cinematography that every Bulgarian can identify and associates with Bulgarian filmmaking. And only in 2006 was a deal signed. When the decision to sell the film center was announced, public opinion, weary of numerous other botched privatization deals, corruption, and the lack of transparency, was understandably suspicious and distrustful. During the 1990s every single privatization deal was accompanied by a series of debates about the distribution of resources and about the underlying national political philosophies. These debates are especially heated when the privatized facilities and means of production are those intended for cultural production, and more acute still in a country that seems to be battling a national cultural inferiority complex

vis-à-vis the countries of the European Union, the developed West, and the conceptual "Europe."

The divided public opinion on the privatization of the Boyana Film Center was emblematic. Some maintained that it was high time to kick filmmakers—with inflated artistic egos, spoiled by secure state funding and distribution—out of their sinecures and to force Bulgarian cinema to rise to the standards of quality and viewership set by Hollywood. A film center with an owner interested in making money from the distribution of competitive productions would produce more and better films. Others argued that Bulgarian cinema had its capable filmmakers and cinematic gems, and that it was the incompetent management of the Film Center that was to blame. The common thread in all opinions was that people cared deeply and often brought examples from classic, pre-1990 Bulgarian filmmaking into their arguments.[8] These arguments regularly started with one or another specific problem: the lack of transparency, the corruption and the nepotism that tainted this privatization deal like many others; the price of the prime-location land on which the Film Center sits; the capabilities and intentions of the film company that ended up buying it. They regularly ended with broader comparisons of Bulgarian filmmaking and cultural production with those of the "West" and with musings on the general direction that the country was going to take—old Soviet-style models or competitive Western practices; selling out or selling for good reason—emblematic of the fact that producing ownership of the means of cultural production is and is not like any other process. Aspects of symbolic ownership, identity formation and negotiation—of which Bulgaria still has to do a lot—are intricately and often emotionally mixed in with its legal and financial aspects,

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[2] Cultural production, especially the kind that truly captures the pulse of a society, encompasses not only officially sanctioned and commissioned pieces, but also the underground, non-official production that is critical of the Communist Party—articles, book-length manuscripts, jokes and stories, and everything else produced and distributed by samizdat, the ingenious underground distribution system by which government-suppressed literature and other cultural production was copied (sometimes by hand) and distributed throughout the Eastern bloc. Designed to evade censorship, samizdat cultural production also evaded ownership of this production. The point of distributing these works clandestinely and often anonymously was precisely to avoid taking ownership of them should the powers that be get a hold of them and mete out the harsh punishment that awaited anyone caught possessing, copying, or distributing censored materials. This, it can be argued, made these works truly shared and national, unlike officially sanctioned cultural production, which was

by and for the people only in rhetoric. The symbolic ownership of samizdat works, taken not only by authors, but also by those who shared in it by sharing in the risk and trust involved in distributing clandestine copies, is a most interesting topic when it comes to the ownership of cultural production. Unfortunately, however, because of the high cost and easy control of production facilities, film was never a major part of the samizdat system, and audiences in Bulgaria and throughout the bloc relied on the state for the production and release of films. Therefore, in this article, I am only concerned with officially sanctioned cinematic production and its symbolic and legal ownership after 1990.

[3] On a different occasion, Stalin also stated: "Ideas are more powerful than guns. We would not let our enemies have guns, why should we let them have ideas," fueling the notions of total control over ideas and information, and the closing of ranks of the 1950s that affected cultural policy throughout the Eastern bloc.

[4] So much so that the goal was also to replicate the grandeur of the Soviet Union and its filmmaking as well: the film studio in Boyana is said to be a smaller replica of the grand Olexandr Dovzhenko Film Studios in Kiev

[5] A logical question here is: how did Bulgarian cinema end up with a treasure trove of cinematic gems under such unfavorable and restricting conditions of filmmaking during Communist rule? There is a substantial body of literature acknowledging the achievements and exploring the specifics of making "good cinema" under the "bad conditions" of censorship and cultural isolationism and satellitism, and of their implications for identity issues and the small-nation mentality in cultural production. However, my agenda in this article is different. As a sociologist trained in political economy, I am interested in putting the focus on legal ownership and then bringing in the issues of symbolic ownership. I am also more interested in shining a light on the state: on the way in which before 1989 it was mainly concerned with symbolic ownership, having "taken care" of the legal aspects, but after 1989 it has effectively washed its hands of symbolic "stuff" and only seems to care about legal issues. Thus, this article is also the beginning of a larger project that would examine more systematically the interplay between legal and symbolic aspects of ownership unique to cultural production.

[6] Statistics available online, from Cinema.bg, "the Bulgarian cinema site," at http://www.cinema.bg/index.htm. Besides some useful statistics, the site also offers indices on Films; People; Film Festivals; Digest; Bibliographies; Institutions; and Laws as they pertain to Bulgarian cinema.

[7] For a more complete analysis of *Monday 8½*, its claims, approaches, and arguments, and the stories of some of the films it showed, see Petrova.

[8] The analysis of the privatization of Boyana Film in political-economic terms and of the debates that surrounded the process—in terms of public opinion, the symbolic ownership of cultural production, and the larger process of national identity (re)negotiation—is beyond the scope of this article and the subject of a separate work, which I hope to write in the near future.