

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

Research program

Stakes of the research program

The renowned film *Que viva México!* (*Да здравствует 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:

- Mathieu Lericq (Associate Professor, Université Lyon 2)
- Eugénie Zvonkine (Professor, Université Paris 8)

Scientific committee:

- Martin Barnier (Université Lyon 2)
- Naïma Berkane (Sorbonne Université)
- Birgit Beumers (University of Passau)
- Claire Demoulin (Université Montpellier 3)
- Dina Iordanova (University of St Andrews)
- Mikolaj Jazdon (Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań)
- Tadeusz Lubelski (Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków)
- Dario Marchiori (Université Lyon 2)
- Damien Marguet (Université Paris 8)
- Ewa Mazierska (University of Lancashire)
- Nedjma Moussaoui (Université Lyon 2)
- Dominique Nasta (Université Libre de Bruxelles)
- Andrea Pócsik (Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest)
- Katalin Pór (Université Paris 8)
- Marie Rebecchi (Aix-Marseille Université)
- Małgorzata Radkiewicz (Uniwersytet Jagielloński, Kraków)
- Irina Schulzki (FernUniversität in Hagen)
- Irina Tcherneva (CNRS)
- Luc Vancheri (Université Lyon 2)
- Eva Zak (Adelphi University)

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.

Alix Beeston, Stefan Solomon (eds.), *Incomplete: The Feminist Possibilities of the Unfinished Film*, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2023.

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.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle, *Films à lire. Des scénarios et des livres*, avec Mireille Brangé, Les Impressions Nouvelles, 2019.

Jean-Louis Jeannelle, « Pour une histoire du cinéma au négatif », *Acta fabula*, vol. 15, n° 9, « La bibliothèque des textes fantômes », 2014.

Christian Janicot, *L'Anthologie du cinéma invisible : 100 scénarios pour 100 ans de cinéma*, Jean-Michel Place, 1995.

Alexander Kluge, "Das Unverfilmte kritisiert das Verfilmte", *Geschichten vom Kino*, Suhrkamp, 2007.

Élodie Lélou, *Journal de bord d'un tournage inachevé. Le dernier film de Théo Angelopoulos*, Art 3 Plessis Édition, 2017.

Tadeusz Lubelski, *Historia niebyła kina PRL (Unexisting History of PRL cinema)*, Znak, 2012.

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.

Philip Widmann (ed.), *Film Undone. Elements of a Latent Cinema*, Archives Books, 2024.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR (ONLINE)

Theme of the international seminar - Season 1 (2026): **Unshot Film Scripts**

Stakes of the international seminar 2026 :

The international and interdisciplinary seminar seeks to explore the phenomenon of film scripts that were left undone. Sessions will focus on film projects whose screenplays have been preserved in archival collections but for which no footage was ever produced. Through discussions, the seminar aims to encourage the scholarly community to examine cases from various periods (1920-1930, 1930-1945, 1945-1968, 1968-1990) and from diverse regional contexts (Central Europe, Balkan contexts, Soviet countries). Each participant of the seminar is asked to develop a case study in a 30–35-minute talk.

Zoom link: <https://univ-paris8.zoom.us/j/94563455349?pwd=ElEaNEoHhJwjqbOPwflBlJgvuqbyUZ.1>

Meeting ID: 945 6345 5349

Password: 727854

— Thursday 29 January 2026, 4-6pm

- Birgit Beumers (University of Passau)
- Claire Demoulin (Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier)
- Mathieu Lericq (Université Lyon 2)
- Eugénie Zvonkine (Université Paris 8, IUF)
Methodological and Epistemological Framework of the Seminar

— Thursday 19 February 2026, 4-6pm

- Nina Sputnitskaya & Maksim Kazyuchits:
Andrey Tarkovsky: from *Antarctida* to *The Nutcracker*, towards a history of his unmade films

— Thursday 19 March 2026, 4-6pm

- Dustin Condren (University of Oklahoma):
Imaginary Cinema: The Unrealized in the Oeuvre of Sergei Eisenstein
- Dina Iordanova (University of St Andrews):
The Short Filmography: Ruined Talents in non-Russian Language Soviet Cinema

— Thursday 16 April 2026, 4-6pm

- Mikołaj Jazdon (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan):
Kazimierz Karabasz and his *Empty Zone* (1965). About an unrealized film script and a halted film production
- Tadeusz Lubelski (Jagellonian University, Cracow):
The Donkey Playing the Lyre: An Unfinished Film by Wojciech J. Has

— Thursday 07 May 2026, 4-6pm

- Irina Schulzki (University of Hagen):
Speculative Histories of the Unfinished: Muratova's *Princess Mary* (1975)
- Andrea Pócsik (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest):
An unfinished lifework. Works begun and completed in Gábor Bódy's oeuvre in West-Germany