East European Film Bulletin

EDITORIAL

Editorial

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Remember when year-end lists included 10 titles? Sometimes, in a good year, you would have seen them all, you would remember a film you had already forgotten or be reminded of those you intended to see but did not find the time to. You would get annoyed by easy choices or exhilarated by the inclusion of difficult ones. You would debate, imagine your own choices, ask friends about theirs, muse about the meaninglessness of rankings and comparisons, and look forward to what the next year would bring.

Today, year-end lists have mutated into data dumps, with journals routinely publishing best-of lists that make you wonder whether the movies are just getting better and better, or whether critics spend an unhealthy amount of time watching them. In 2010, the British Film Institute still had the discipline to name the top twelve films of the year. That number hit 25 in 2017, 40 in 2018, and 50 in 2024. This year the BFI asked 121 contributors to vote, generating 433 nominations, and published them all. For an average of 90 minutes per film, that makes around 650 hours, or, twenty-seven days spent 24/7 at the movies. Subtract the time it would take the dedicated moviegoer to create a spreadsheet and remove duplicates, plus the hours for food, sleep, and toilet breaks, and you end up with the average PTO in the U.K.

If, for some reason, the BFI list is not your cup of tea, head over to *Film Comment*. There, you can find rankings for Best Undistributed Films and Best Shorts alongside lists for Best Restorations, Best Scenes, Best Performances, and Best NYC Repertory Screenings. The main list of twenty films serves as a kind of best of the best of the Individual Ballots and podcast tie-ins. Or, consider *Screenslate*, which adds to the noise with categories for “First Viewings” and “Discoveries” spanning the top-ten lists of 323 polled people from the film world. You do the math. Even *Elle* and *Men’s Health*, which only started to regularly feature best-of lists in 2021 and 2023 respectively, have joined the race. *Elle* climbed from nineteen in 2021 to 34 in 2025; *Men’s Health* from 28 in 2023 to 71 in 2025. No wonder my gym buddy has been missing from the bench press. He is probably at the movies.

Seen in this light, the *New York Times*, stubbornly clinging to a top ten, appears almost heroic and makes you be nostalgic for the times when deconstructing best-of lists was still a fairly straight-forward sport, numerically at least. It also marks a considerable risk. Not only because your average readers, that is, those not working in and around the film industry, may actually read the list until the end, but also because limiting the list to digestible digits increases the implied list of exclusions. In other words, it may make people angry, which, in our age of scandal, provides a first glimpse into understanding the inflationary reflex behind the mega-lists. If the best films now include complete selections of the festival calendar, everyone ends up being the best in one way or another. While this resembles participation trophy culture, what it really reveals is that list-makers may have too much skin in the game to form a proper opinion. That is, they include those films that have been professionally relevant for them, and exclude those that have not. But since everyone has a say, we end up with an archive of the year's festival season.

In other words, critics and filmmakers just talk to each other, instead of helping the humble moviegoer form an informed opinion. Now why do they have to do this publicly, instead, for example, over a beer or by email? Because opinion has become a form of high-brow virtue signaling. The most accomplished list-makers repeat the festival darlings and add a rare gem to the collection that shows how their taste is even more refined than that of their peers. For journals to publish these lists is a form of editorial impoverishment, not only because it sacrifices line, but also because it admits defeat in front of the content creation frenzy. More than shaping readers' opinions, the absurd size of the best-of lists, sub-lists, and sub-sub-lists can only be processed by algorithms. And so, the final goal is not even virtue signaling, but survival in the attention economy where content is written for machines that neither watch films nor care who wins.

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This month's issue features Daniil Lebedev's Notes on Documentary Cinema in Russia, a close study of the origins and currents of documentary filmmaking in the country today. Savina Petkova discusses Hana Jušić's *God Will Not Help* about a cultural meeting in the Croatian mountains. In our Interviews section, you will find a conversation with Jušić about the idea behind her sophomore feature. At the Ji.hlava International Documentary Film Festival, Natalia Ashurovskaya saw Robin Kvapil's *Change My Mind* about the evidential (in)effectiveness of facts, and Martin Kollár's *Chronicle*, an ode to observation. Finally, Anna Batori contributed a piece on Nikola Ležaić's *How Come It's All Green Out Here?*, which deals with Yugoslavia's past through an all-too-muted father-son relationship.

We hope you enjoy our reads.
Konstanty Kuzma & Moritz Pfeifer

Editors

Note: Due to delays in our publication schedule, this issue was published in the month of January 2026.