It seems that stripping was seen by its opponents as an attack on the home, strictly and broadly defined. Strip mining sometimes literally threatened houses, but it could also alter a whole community, causing economic and social hardship in the long-term. Non-residents of Appalachia could also see the problem in terms of community, using the idea of citizenship as meaning ownership of the natural heritage of the whole country, and the idea of the nation as a community of shared interests in which the plight of people threatened by surface coal mining was important for all Americans. Future studies of the history of strip mining will hopefully build on Montrie's efforts, expanding on its social dimensions and on how environmentalism was conceived by different social groups.

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Peter Hegedus, *Inheritance: A Fisherman's Story* (First Run / Icarus Films, 2003).

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the West moved quickly to prove that laissez faire economics could transform the moribund satellite states of Eastern Europe from decrepit relics of Cold War exploitation into profitable members of the global capitalist system. Western companies rapidly filled the vacuum left by Soviet withdrawal. For such companies, the benefits of investment were enormous: the communist system had left an industrial infrastructure, built without expensive mechanisms to ensure environmental protection or worker safety, a mass of cheap labour ignorant of the value of their work in a Western context and eager for employment, as well as an almost complete absence of environmental legislation to hinder their efforts.

Such conditions were inherently profitable – they were also fraught with the potential for catastrophe. In early 2000, a premature thaw caused an earthen dam to break near a gold mine operated by an Australian and Romanian conglomerate. The flooding waters cascaded through the company's nearby (and poorly constructed) waste ponds releasing 100,000 tons of cyanide into the Tisza River. What followed was the worst environmental disaster in Europe since Chernobyl. The documentary *Inheritance: A Fisherman's Story*, portrays the consequences of this disaster through the eyes of one Hungarian fisherman, Balazs Meszaros.

Less concerned with the impact of the disaster on the environment, the documentary focuses its attention on how it transformed one man's relationship to the river and his place in the local community. We watch Balazs, a stubborn

and naïve yet intelligent fisherman, go through a period of denial and exasperation, followed by an attempt to understand how and why the event took place, eventually channeling his passion for fishing the river into a quest for social justice. We see him come to the understanding of what the river meant to him and a realization that he too is part of a system both dependent upon and subject to forces outside of his control.

It is, perhaps, the nature of documentary to be myopic. Yet, this film leaves out important contextual information on the state of the environment prior to the fall of the Soviet regime. For a half a century factories in the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact nations released millions of tons of chemical toxins and nuclear waste into the environment. Specifically, Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, and Hungary poured tons of pollutants into the Tisza and its tributaries. None of this is mentioned. This is unfortunate, because it leaves the viewer with the impression that Western-style corporate avarice is completely responsible for a disaster which polluted a supposedly "pristine" environment. The important role played by the lingering effects of an ubiquitous environmental indifference in Eastern Europe is completely discounted. The filmmaker, instead, has chosen to portray all of his subjects as victims: the Hungarian government, the river itself, the fish, and the fisherman. Cast as an innocent, almost noble peasant, the fisherman has lived in harmony with the environment – his life completely entwined with the river – only taking what he needs to maintain his livelihood. With ample evidence of Hungary's poor environmental record and the global impact of over-fishing such a portrayal is disingenuous. While far from benign, Western corporate influence is hardly the sole determinant of environmental degradation in Eastern Europe, or anywhere else around the globe for that matter.

The most troubling aspect of the film, however, is how the filmmaker (one presupposes the role of a documentary filmmaker as that of observer) crosses the line to become an agent in the story itself. The eradication of the fish in the river has completely destroyed Balazs' economic power. Unable to pay his bills, or come up with money to feed himself or his girlfriend, he is only able to pursue his quest for understanding and justice as a consequence of the financial assistance of the filmmaker. To be fair, the filmmaker professes his own reservations about this. Yet, one wonders if this assistance was given merely to enable Balazs to finish what he started out of sympathy, or to ensure that the documentary could come to its "logical" conclusion. There is little doubt that Balazs' rapid transformation from a subsistence fisherman into a Western-style environmental activist would have been rather unlikely without this financial and intellectual intervention.

At one point, Balazs becomes obsessed with preserving a stork which was electrocuted on the power lines near his home. Eventually, with funds from the Hungarian government, he is able to get it stuffed and mounted in a plastic

case, whereupon he offers it to the local elementary school so generations of children can study it. Whether conscious or unconscious, the vignette is an allegory for Balazs' relationship with the filmmaker. Balazs is, like the stork, also a victim of a changing Eastern European world introduced to Western technology, Western ideas of progress and economics, and most importantly Western ambivalence; he, too, is a curious subject to be preserved in plastic for later study.

One hopes that Hungarian schoolchildren will have access to this film, because despite its flaws, it provides a critical look at an environmental catastrophe that has gone largely unreported and unexamined by the West. Ultimately, however, it may have more to say about Eastern Europe's embrace of Western values and the process of popular disenchantment with the promises of capitalism than it does either about the consequence of environmental disaster on the life of one unfortunate man, or about Western "globalization." For poor subsistence fishermen, like Balazs and his neighbors, who for generations scraped out an existence from the Tisza, their real inheritance is not the river, but the capitalist system. As the disaster reveals, in terms of its relationship to the environment, that system has not proven superior to the communist one it replaced.

As Stalin, a man as vicious to his country's physical environment as to his own people, once quipped, "A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths is a statistic." As is evident in this documentary, much the same may be said about how we choose to document and interpret the accidental, or purposeful, poisoning of the environment: the destruction of one man's way of life is a tragic loss worth lamenting and documenting, but the deaths of millions of fish – an entire aquatic ecosystem – are mere statistical data to be used by scientists and environmental crusaders alike. In that regard, this documentary could serve as a valuable and illuminating tool, particularly for those teaching environmental history, to introduce students to the inherent complexity of telling stories about the landscape.

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