

SPRINGTIME FOR SOVIET CINEMA

Re/Viewing the 1960s

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Introduction

ALEXANDER PROKHOROV

Until recently, Soviet cinema of the sixties received relatively little attention, overshadowed, as it was, by Russian avant-garde film of the 1920s, the cinema of Gorbachev's perestroika, Russian pre-revolutionary film, and even Stalin-era cinema. This period of Russian cultural history, however, merits scholarly comment over and above traditional Cold War rhetoric. The years after Stalin's death came to be known as the Thaw (after the winter of the dictator's rule) and this timid melting of totalitarian culture revived, rehabilitated, and generated numerous artists in all modes of cultural production. Even though this work is devoted to film art, one has to mention literature because of Russia's quasi-religious reverence for the literary word. Famous poets and writers, such as Anna Akhmatova and Boris Pasternak, returned to literary life during the Thaw, while new talents, such as Joseph Brodsky and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, started their careers during these years.

Anti-monumentalism and understatement, typical of Thaw cinema, perhaps, provide one explanation why the films of the era went through a period of relative oblivion. In the last several years, however, a group of specialists in the Russian Institute of Film Art (NIIKINO), as well as Western scholars, have revisited the cinema and cultural politics of the Thaw. In Russia, Vitalii Troianovskii edited a collection of articles, *Cinema of the Thaw* (1996),¹ which broke the near-silence around Thaw film and eschewed stereotypical Cold War-era readings of the works. When many of these films were re-released in the Soviet Union during perestroika (1985-1991), they were still viewed as signs of political change, rather than assessed as artistic texts. Since then, the group of film scholars led by Troianovskii has redefined the status of Thaw films as cultural objects and examined them from the vantage point of cultural and cinematic, rather than political, paradigms. Soviet political history exists in Troianovskii's volume in a refreshingly mediated form, as attested in one of the articles included here in translation: Evgenii Margolit's "Landscape, With Hero." Margolit examines cinematic images of nature as manifestations of the era's values and analyzes the effects of celluloid landscapes on the formation of individual identity.

Thaw cinema has also attracted Western film scholars in the last decade. Josephine Woll published the first, and long overdue, survey of Thaw cinema.² The work introduces many films virtually unknown in the West, focuses primarily on film art and cultural history, and avoids the traditional

politicizing of Soviet film history. A 25-film series, *Revolution in the Revolution: Soviet Cinema of the Sixties*, shown last fall in New York, reintroduced to Western viewers the cinema art of such major filmmakers of the period as Mikhail Kalatozov, Andrei Konchalovskii, Kira Muratova, and Andrei Tarkovskii. The present publication likewise pays tribute to this undeservedly ignored period of cinematic history—the Soviet New Wave.

NOTES

1. Troianovskii's collection was the first volume in a series of three devoted to the cinema of the Thaw. The second volume, edited by Valerii Fomin, *Kinematograf ottepli. Dokumenty i svidetel'stva* (Moscow: Materik, 1998), includes archival documents about the film industry of the period. The third volume is forthcoming.
2. Josephine Woll, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2000).

*The Unknown New Wave:
Soviet Cinema of the 1960s*

ALEXANDER PROKHOROV

After World War II, European cinema saw several waves of renewed national traditions and outstanding filmmakers. Italian Neo-Realism, French New Wave, New German Cinema and the Polish School established themselves as canonical pages in international film history. By contrast, Soviet cinema of the 1950s and 1960s remained in relative oblivion until perestroika. Yet, during the first two decades after Stalin's death, Soviet filmmakers produced innovative works that revived the avant-garde spirit of the 1920s and revolutionized the visual and narrative aspects of film art. The sixties marked the high point of this unknown new wave.

The new Soviet cinema became possible because of political changes after Stalin's death (1953). Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Party Congress (1956) and the release of GULAG prisoners altered the general atmosphere in the country. This period of political and cultural changes came to be known as the Thaw. The label, which originates in the eponymous novel by the popular Russian writer, Ilya Ehrenburg, refers to the relative relaxation of control over culture during Khrushchev's rule. This relaxation led to the fragmentation of the unified, hierarchized universe of Stalinist culture. Fragmentation took different forms in various modes of cultural production, but remained a consistent trend of poststalinist culture and eventually led to the dissolution of the Soviet empire in the early 1990s. The chronological limits of the Thaw are usually marked by events in Soviet political history: the beginning of the Thaw is associated with the death of Stalin and the end—with Khrushchev's removal from office (1964) and Eastern Bloc's invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968).

In film, more than in any other mode of cultural production, the Thaw revived economic and stylistic experimentation after the film famine of the last years of Stalinist rule. In the late 1940s, when totalitarian control over culture reached a peak, the film industry, together with other cultural industries, became the target of party decrees. Among the biggest casualties of this period was Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible (Part Two)*, banned in 1946. The so-called anti-cosmopolitan (anti-Jewish) campaign also adversely affected the film industry, which underwent the period of *malokartin'e* (cineanemia) releasing only about ten to fifteen films per year. Most of the new films were nationalist biographical epics about

Russian heroes in the arts, science, and the military. The summit of this genre was a trilogy about Stalin—a Georgian by birth, but in the last phase of his rule the nation's major Russian chauvinist, who always emphasized his Russianness. Mikhail Chiaureli made three monumental films about the leader: *The Vow* (1946), *The Fall of Berlin* (1949), and *The Unforgettable 1919* (1951). The industry not only produced few films, but their uniformity offered a depressing self-portrait of the regime. This culture strived for the totality of its representational modes.

After the Twentieth Party Congress, Soviet culture experienced the shock of its first internal split: the country seemed to divide overnight into victims and executioners, Stalin's heirs (as Evgenii Evtushenko later called them), and the liberal children of the Twentieth Congress. This internal fragmentation did not confine itself to political life, but spread into economics (as the revival of a shadow economy, the so-called black market) and culture. In film, the splintering of Stalinist canon meant the creation of new cultural institutions, the appearance of new talents in the industry, and the welcome introduction of the new genres and films to the Soviet screen. Anti-monumentalism and a yearning for individual self-expression capable of restoring the revolutionary spirit lost under Stalin became the new values of the era.

As the loosening of ideological control stimulated unprecedented economic growth, the annual production of films increased 10-15 times. By the late 1950s all the studios of the Soviet Union were releasing about hundred films a year, and by the mid-1960s the production stabilized at an average annual output of 150 films (Segida and Zemlianukhin 6). Mosfilm, the major studio of the country, was completely rebuilt and in the 1960s Russia had one of the highest attendance rates per capita at movie theaters in the world. During these years, only vodka outstripped cinema in generating revenues.

Not only the number, but, more importantly, the style of films changed dramatically in these years. The directors of the older generation, such as Mikhail Kalatozov (1903-73), Grigorii Kozintsev (1905-73), and Mikhail Romm (1901-71), produced films that received international recognition. Kalatozov's *Cranes are Flying* (1957) received the highest award, the Golden Palm Branch, at the Cannes Film Festival (1958), an honor likewise conferred two years later upon Grigorii Chuchrai's *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959). Andrei Tarkovskii's (1932-86) first feature film *Ivan's Childhood* (1962) garnered the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival (1962). As a tribute to the increasing significance of Soviet cinema during these years, two film festivals were established in Russia in the late 1950s: the All-Union Film Festival in 1958 and the Moscow International Film

Festival in 1959.

During the Thaw, filmmakers replaced many party bureaucrats as the managers of the industry. Ivan Pyr'ev(1901-68), the film director who reconstructed the major Soviet studio, Mosfilm, was instrumental in expanding film production and hiring new talented directors, such as Grigorii Chukhrai, Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov, and many others. Pyr'ev contributed to the fragmentation of institutional power within the film industry by spearheading the establishment of the Filmmakers' Union, a non-governmental organization alternative to the state agencies controlling film production and distribution. He remained the head of the Union's Organizing Committee from 1957 to the end of the Thaw. Unlike the other Unions of creative workers, as, for example, the Union of Writers, which fulfilled the function of ideological control over its members, the Organizing Committee became a non-official trade union protecting filmmakers' interests in their dealings with state agencies (Taylor 1999, 144).

The All-Union State Cinema Institute (VGIK), the major Russian film school, occupied special place in the cultural politics of the period. The authorities always paid special attention to the ideological correctness of the professors and students in this institution. Some of the school's students who did not comply with the ideological canon, as, for example Mikhail Kalik, were expelled from VGIK and spent years in the GULAG camps. By the mid-1950s, however, the anticipated changes triggered by the denunciation of Stalin's cult stimulated greater artistic and political activity among the VGIK students. These students felt personally compelled to participate in the destalinization that was under way: a revolution within the revolution. There were often personal reasons to push forward the changes. During Stalin's rule, many of the students, such as Marlen Khutsiev and Lev Kulidzhanov, had lost their fathers in the purges. Till recently very little was known about Soviet students' unrest during the Thaw. VGIK students were among the first to confront publicly the authorities. In December 1956, VGIK students rioted after two of their friends were arrested. In spring 1963, during the meeting with Italian filmmakers, students protested a recent Party crackdown on the Soviet intelligentsia (Fomin 203-208).

The VGIK students not only emerged as the new revolutionary force, but also matured early as original artists. Many of the films that became hallmarks of the era were their undergraduate projects, such as Larisa Shepit'ko's (1938-1979) *Heat* (1963) and Andrei Konchalovskii's (1937-) *The First Teacher* (1965). These debuts immediately received critical acclaim as major artistic achievements. The workshop of Mikhail Romm, a

scriptwriter, film director, translator, and VGIK professor from 1949, became a cradle of numerous cinematic talents during the Thaw. Among students enrolled in his workshop at VGIK were Andrei Konchalovskii, Andrei Tarkovskii, Larisa Shepit'ko, Gleb Panfilov (1934-), and Vasilii Shuksin (1929-79). The mini-studio within Mosfilm that Romm opened in the late 1950s to encourage experimentation among the young filmmakers was shut down in 1960, but fulfilled its function as a launching pad for numerous cinematic projects and careers (Woll 127). As Ian Christie put it, Romm launched the Sixties' New Wave (41).

The Lost War: Soviet Man vs. Nature

Two participants of Romm's mini-studio, German Lavrov and Daniil Khrabrovitskii, worked with Romm on his film, *Nine Days of One Year* (1961), with Lavrov functioning as Romm's director of photography (DP) and Khrabrovitskii coauthoring the screenplay. Romm's film narrates nine days in the life of a nuclear physicist, Gusev (Batalov), a talented, self-reflective intellectual sacrificing his own life in the name of scientific progress. That progress, however, is questionable in the film, portrayed as sickening obsession that slowly kills the protagonist. The invisible deadly power of nuclear radiation incarnates the perilous force of progress as the master-narrative of modernity. At film's beginning Gusev is warned that he cannot continue his scientific work because radiation will eventually destroy him, but he is unable to resist his impulse to think and work, and at film's end it is obvious that he will die.

The film's tragic view on progress constitutes the recurring motif of Gusev's inner monologues: he constantly returns to thoughts about humans' predilection for self-destruction. His field of research—nuclear physics—provides specific examples of the general sense of progress as a fatally flawed narrative. Gusev's colleague and friend, Kulikov (Smoktunovskii), echoes Gusev when he looks around the restaurant, where both are dining, and refers to those present as Neanderthals who merely deceive themselves that they have acquired wisdom in the last 30,000 years. Gusev's self-awareness undermines the unity of his consciousness: scientific progress may uncover order in the universe, but it hardly brings tranquility and order to Gusev's body and mind.

Romm and his DP, Lavrov, make profitable use of the *mise-en-scène* and camera to create an atmosphere reminiscent of *Frankenstein*. Although the allusion to the Hollywood film was not accessible to the Russian general public of the era (*Frankenstein* was not shown in the USSR), for the connoisseurs it could function as an eloquent symbolic reference in a film not conceived in the horror genre, but depicting the exemplary So-

viet contemporaries—the elite scientists. Josephine Woll links the film's visual style with German cinema of the 1920s: "Foreshortened angles and compositional contrast convey a sense of anxiety, like the disorienting painted sets of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*" (130). The film's expressionist mise-en-scène provides background for the inner monologues of the Hamlet-like, aloof scientist meditating on the meaning of progress.

Nine Days of One Year uncovered a forbidden zone of the Stalinist empire: the secret research centers of the Cold War era, where most of the new weapons were developed. Exposing the closed locales where utopia turned into tragedy became one of the recurrent gestures of the era. Khrushchev released millions of camp prisoners, and Solzhenitsyn published his dystopian *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and *GULAG Archipelago*. Romm presents the secret labs not as the locale where the science of the future is born, but as places of spiritual anxiety in the face of progress. The revelation of formerly unacknowledged zones of Soviet empire, such as camps, closed research centers, and secret military bases, created a sense of Soviet universe's fragmentation, instead of its expected reunification.

On the level of the plot, Romm establishes an important model, a set of discrete novellas that are knitted into a coherent narrative by the intellectual power of the protagonist. This dialectical struggle between narrative discreteness and the protagonist's desire for coherence became the narrative paradigm for cinema of the 1960s. In 1966 Romm would make his next film, *Ordinary Fascism*, where he plays the narrator whose voiceover becomes responsible for keeping the diverse visual material of the film together. A collage on modernity and its blind worship of reason and progress, *Ordinary Fascism*, formed a sequel to *Nine Days of One Year*.

The theme of a failed total war on nature—modernity's project ran amok—is also central to Kalatozov's *The Letter Never Sent* (1959). By the time he made the film Kalatozov was an international celebrity. A year earlier, his *Cranes Are Flying* won the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival. Kalatozov's DP, Sergei Urusevskii (1908-74), and the female lead, Tat'iana Samoilova (1934-), received special prizes for their outstanding performances. Kalatozov (originally Kalatozishvili) started his career in Georgia. His first poetic documentary, *Salt for Svanetia* (1929), brought him fame for the bold camera work evoking the style of constructivist photography and filmmaking. The confrontation between humans and nature constitutes the key theme of most of his films.

As in his first film, Kalatozov in *The Letter Never Sent* creatively reworks the semi-documentary narrative, in this case that of discovering Russian diamonds deposits in Eastern Siberia. A group of prospectors arrives into the middle of a virginal forest, searching for the diamonds—

the discovery which, in the words of a female character, Tania (Samoilova), will make them the happiest people on Earth. Although the prospectors succeed in finding diamonds, they fail to find happiness. A forest fire and Siberian snows gradually destroy all the characters, leaving behind only an unsent letter about the expedition. As does Romm's film, *The Letter* focuses on the scientist, Konstantin Sabinin (Smoktunovskii) who, by his own admission, is obsessed with a theory, positing that the diamonds are in the area where the expedition is searching. He believes that his opponent is nature itself, as invisible as the radiation in Romm's film. The viewers, however, are constantly aware of the nature's presence because Konstantin converses with his omnipresent opponent in his writing and in his inner monologues. Cinema scholar, Evgenii Margolit, also notes that nature is personified in the film through camera work (1996, 108). Urusevskii juxtaposes long shots (associated with epic point of view) of the eternal Siberian forest with extreme angled shots cinematically associated with human subjectivity. The last long shot of the film (that of miniscule human figures on the edge of an ice desert) dissolves any doubts about who has the last word and glance in the confrontation between human civilization and nature. The real tragedy, the critic contends, is in fact that nature is not fighting with humans; it simply does not notice them, does not distinguish humans among other forms of matter (Margolit 1996, 108).

The Letter questions the familiar narrative of human progress. Konstantin's reason inspires the expedition that leads nowhere: the prospectors lose their way in the forest and later perish amidst fire and ice. Konstantin renounces the value of his life claiming that it belongs not to him but to his scientific project. His wife, Vera (Faith in Russian), whom he meets only in his dreams, calls him possessed. The protagonist's obsession is projected onto the way in which the characters work while searching for the diamonds. The quest for diamonds is reminiscent of a rape scene. Their hectic digging satisfies their lust for destruction and by no means looks like a creative act. The searchers leave behind them only desolation and grave-like holes in the deflowered soil. Nature is fashioned into a murderous double of human reason. The sunlight, which is usually associated with the cult of reason, is replaced here by an enormous forest fire, which kills the diamond searchers. The Soviet bright future to which the diamonds would contribute remains a mirage, existing only in Konstantin's delirious dream as he slowly freezes. Before the film's release, the editors made Kalatozov revive the protagonist at film's end, but this imposed closure hardly changes the general atmosphere of the picture.

During the Thaw, film privileged visual expression over narrative and

sound. Directors of photography often were more important than the directors in constructing film's meaning. If much of the visual expressivity in Romm's film hinges on the camera work of German Lavrov, then in *The Letter*, Urusevskii's camera work dominates all other aspects of the films. A student of the famous Russian constructivist artist Aleksandr Rodchenko (1891-1956), Urusevskii was the last Russian constructivist to inherit from his teacher a fascination with modernity and machine-driven civilization, yet nonetheless shared with his coauthor Kalatozov a tragic view of modernity's project. Urusevskii favors diagonal patterns as the dominant feature of his highly unconventional shots. Fast-paced montage, multiple superimpositions, complex panoramic shots, and subjective camera angles make his films a unique visual experience.

Peaceful Coexistence: The Individual and The Community

In the 1950s a new generation of filmmakers entered the industry. Free from schooling of the Stalin-era studio system, they came to film art on the wave of expanding film production of the 1950s. Two of these debutants immediately became celebrities: Grigorii Chukhrai (1921-) and Marlen Khutsiev (1925-). Chukhrai, a student of Mikhail Romm (1953), returned Russian cinema to international acclaim. His *Forty First* (1956) and *Ballad of a Soldier* (1959) won prizes in Cannes and Venice, and, together with Kalatozov's *Cranes are Flying*, symbolized for the international public the revival of art cinema in Russia.

Marlen Khutsiev (1925-), like Kalatozov, was born in Georgia, studied at VGIK in the workshop of Igor Savchenko (1952), and, like many young directors of the Thaw, started his cinematic career in the provinces. He made his first feature film, *Spring at Zarechnaia Street* (1956), with Felix Mironer at Odessa Studio in Ukraine. This film, in the opinion of many critics, established many important conventions of the Soviet New Wave including, to name just the few most obvious, synchronizing film's plot with the annual cycle of seasons, romance between a sensitive man and an emotionally rigid woman, and the extensive use of visual pathetic fallacy. Khutsiev's films of the 1960s, *Lenin's Guard* (1962) and *July Rain* (1967), marked the summit of his creative career and became cult films of Russia's 1960s generation. The young liberal intelligentsia considered them the new generation's self-portrait. Khutsiev's ability to reflect the sensibilities of the era profoundly influenced Russian cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. Khutsiev himself conceived of his films as reflecting the values of the period: the equal importance of the individual and the communal point of view, self-reflexivity of the new generation, and neoleninism as the sign of return to the ideals of the revolution (190-192); hence the title.

For Khutsiev's generation, neo-leninism meant a return to the purity of ideals betrayed by Stalinism. Like its counterparts in Warsaw and Prague, the Russian liberal intelligentsia of the time believed in the possibility of socialism with a human face, and associated this model of socialism with Lenin's name.

Lenin's Guard focuses on the maturation of three friends who live in the Moscow neighborhood called Lenin's Guard (*Zastava Il'icha*). Khutsiev presents this trio's coming of age as three unique and emotionally complex experiences. The film legitimates the right to an individual truth, which does not necessarily contradict the communal truth but may differ from it. As one critic puts it, the hero of the sixties lives for the community, but remains an individual (Troianovskii 75). The notion of individual values different but parallel to communal values emerges as a distinct feature of Khutsiev's artistic practice. His belief in the coexistence of the two can be deduced from the telling title of his interview published in 1996: "I Never Made Polemical Films."

Khutsiev comes closest to what French New Wave critics would call an *auteur*. He worked within the framework of the Soviet studio system, which to a large extent was modeled on Hollywood (Taylor 1991, 193-216), but his films retained the imprint of their maker's individual signature. Khutsiev represents this parity between the artist and the system on the meta-level of his artistic style. He retains all of the major tropes of the Stalinist studio style, but gives them an individual touch. One of the visual icons of Stalinist cinema was the New Moscow as the sacred center of post-historical utopian civilization. The films of Grigorii Alexandrov, Ivan Pyr'ev, and Aleksandr Medvedkin, together with the architecture and fine arts works of the period, epitomized the epic image of Moscow (Clark 119-129). Khutsiev keeps Moscow as the central setting of his films, but completely redefines the city space. The anti-monumentalism and spontaneity of Khutsiev's city, in part, reflects the fashion for Italian neorealism in the Soviet culture of the period. Abandoning totalitarian Stalinist Moscow, Khutsiev creates a benign urban space as seen through the eyes of his heroes. Rather than the centerpiece of the artificial Stalinist utopia, Moscow becomes a metaphor for the natural flow of life. Indeed, Margolit notes that imaging the organicity of urban life was one of Khutsiev's major discoveries (1996, 112). Not by accident, Khutsiev's heroes listen to the songs of Bulat Okudzhava, for whom Moscow streets flowed like rivers.

For Khutsiev, in *Lenin's Guard* the fragile balance of communal and individual constitutes the spirit of the time (Khlopliankina 42). Two scenes in the film highlight this equation: the May Day Parade and the Poetry Reading at the Polytechnical Museum. In both of these scenes

Khutsiev chooses to present the city crowd as a union of distinct and diverse individuals. As many critics have pointed out, this urban crowd dramatically differs from the uniform human mass of official Stalinist festivities (Chernenko 15, Margolit 1996, 113). Both scenes in *Lenin's Guard* depict the crowd as individuals who voluntarily participate in public events and celebrate both their personal and the communal values.

The spontaneous everyday and the artificial utopian coexist in harmony in the film. In this respect it is worth noting that the Poetry Reading at the Polytechnical Museum was dramatized for the film: Evgenii Evtushenko, Bella Akhmadulina, Bulat Okudzhava, and several other poets performed in front of extras and two of the film protagonists, Sergei (Popov) and Ania (Vertinskaia). The scene, however, looked so spontaneous that later, in the 1980s and 1990s, it was shown on TV as a documentary footage of the era. In this respect Khutsiev's film functions in Russian culture not unlike Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1926) and *October* (1928). The fictitious episode of the massacre on the Odessa steps in the former and the storming of the Winter Palace in the latter became perceived as the documentary footage of historical events in Russian popular consciousness. Khutsiev, too, seamlessly connects the scene of Sergei's daily life with the famous dream sequence, in which the protagonist encounters his father, who was killed during World War Two. The viewer hardly notices the transition from Sergei's being in his apartment awake to his crossing the border of reality and stepping into the world of the war years, where he meets his father as a man younger than the protagonist is in the film's present.

Khutsiev owes much of his success to his scriptwriter, Gennadii Shpalikov (1937-74), who at the time of his collaboration with Khutsiev was just a student at VGIIK. Khutsiev broke with his initial scriptwriter, Felix Mironer, because the latter favored a strong plot-driven narrative, the model from which the director wished to depart. Shpalikov invented precisely what Khutsiev was looking for: a new type of script, one that downplayed narrativity and emphasized atmosphere and characters' emotional ties. Ian Christie notes that the new cinematic style of Khutsiev and Shpalikov influenced numerous films of the sixties, including Georgii Daneliia's *I Walk Around Moscow* (1964), Mikhail Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys* (1964), and Kira Muratova's *Brief Encounters* (1967) (42).

Lenin's Guard had a complicated production history. In 1963, at a meeting with the intelligentsia, Khrushchev attacked the film for failing to reflect how Soviet youth "continued the heroic traditions of earlier generations." The Soviet leader was particularly irate with the scene in which Sergei asks the apparition of his father how to live and receives no answer.

Khrushchev was furious: "Everyone knows that even animals don't abandon their young . . . Can anyone believe that a father wouldn't answer his son's question? . . . The idea is to impress upon the children that their fathers cannot be their teachers in life" (cited in Woll 147). The officials perceived the film as a threat to the hierarchy of Soviet society, which in Soviet literature and film of the era was symbolically represented via a generational hierarchy. Since the film also assumed an unconventional stance on the peaceful coexistence of an individual and a community, the press vilified both the director and scriptwriter. Khutsiev was ordered to re-edit his own film, and the censored version was released in 1965 under the title *I Am Twenty*. Even this handicapped version of the original brought Khutsiev the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival (1965). Only in 1988, during Gorbachev's perestroika, the film was re-released in its original version and under its original title, without any cuts or re-editing.

Khutsiev's next film, *July Rain* (1967), continues the atmospheric cinematography pioneered in *Lenin's Guard*. The film's plot may be retold in a single sentence: the female protagonist of the film, Lena (Uralova), decides to leave her boyfriend, Volodia (Beliavskii). What interests Khutsiev is the theme of separation as a metaphor for the historical period. The filmmaker chooses a slightly different set of characters: young Muscovites are not everymen, as in *Lenin's Guard*. The new heroes' mode of entertainment and relatively affluent life style reveal them as the elite intelligentsia, compartmentalized and alienated from the rest of society. The film lacks scenes of joyful communal experiences, similar to a May Day parade in *Lenin's Guard*. Instead, the characters find consolation in intimate parties and picnicking away from civilization. The picnic episode in *July Rain* became as famous as the poetry reading scene in *Lenin's Guard*. The conversation at the campfire consists of several monologues by people who hardly hear one another. Everyone is interested in his or her own thoughts, and the seemingly communal gathering exists only as an external tribute to the tradition, as an excuse to enjoy one's own loneliness in public. For many, this famous scene epitomized the disappearance of the Thaw, with its hopes and utopian illusions.

Woll notes that Khutsiev creates a sense of alienation by using the camera as a voyeuristic observer, detached from the characters and the *mise-en-scène*.

In one lengthy sequence limousines pull up to the French embassy, depositing ambassadorial guests at a reception to honor de Gaulle's visit to Moscow. The camera stands on the opposite side of the street amid a

group of ordinary citizens surveying the comings and goings of distinguished guests. They are so divorced from the world across the street that they might as well be staring at exotic animals in a zoo. (222)

This sense of alienation contrasts with the harmonious experience of merging the public and private, the communal and individual, in the key scenes of *Lenin's Guard*. In *July Rain*, Khutsiev's DP, German Lavrov, is consistent in his distancing vision of Moscow: he observes and follows his characters, but never identifies with a character's point of view. The technique is more akin to a horror or a detective film than to a melodrama about Moscow intellectuals. In *July Rain* Moscow crowds stop being a community of individuals and become a faceless flow of bodies mirrored by the grayish flow of automobiles on the streets. Merging with such a cosmos was equal to losing oneself as an individual.

An important theme that links *Lenin's Guard* and *July Rain* is the theme of the war. In *Lenin's Guard* the war brings together the son and his killed father: they share their youth, values, and hopes. *July Rain* ends with a meeting of war veterans on Victory Day, May 9th. This May, however, is very different from that of the May Day Parade in *Lenin's Guard*. The veterans' joyful reunion is contrasted not only with Lena's detached observation of their happiness, but also with the faces of teenagers who can hardly relate to their fathers' memories. The profound split between generations creates an atmosphere of emotional *Angst* at film's end.

Reinventing the Artist-Demiurge

Khutsiev is a figure of prime importance for the cinema of the 1960s because he abolished the primacy of the cause-and-effect narrative in Soviet film and made individual identity both the central theme and the paramount stylistic issue for films of the Soviet New Wave in general. Tarkovskii, Konchalovskii, Panfilov and many other young filmmakers followed in many respects the paradigm established by Khutsiev. For these filmmakers, an individual, especially one who possesses artistic talent, is credited with the capacity to recapture a holistic vision of the world, which was compromised by the discovery that Soviet culture can inspire mass murder and create concentration camps. The longing for such a redeeming harmony was especially acute because the era's cautious departure from the "grand style" in cinema had resulted in economic and stylistic splintering within Soviet film industry. The fragmentation process gave more independence to the national schools in various Soviet republics, notably, in Georgia and Lithuania. Furthermore, in the 1960s women's culture

started taking shape as an independent cultural force. In literature, new names included I. Grekova and Natal'ia Baranskaia. In film, such original filmmakers as Tat'iana Lioznova (1924-), Larisa Shepit'ko, and, above all, Kira Muratova (1934-), made their presence felt. Finally, beginning with Khutsiev, one can speak of *auteurism* in the Soviet studio system. Andrei Tarkovskii, Andrei Konchalovskii, and Gleb Panfilov are the few names in a long list of the period's new and original filmmakers for whom the imprint of philosophical and artistic individuality is the prime factor of cinematographer's identity.

Many *auteur*-filmmakers of the sixties graduated from Romm's workshop and inherited the narrative model that crystallized in *Nine Days of One Year*: intellectual-demiurge tries to bring together a world, the internal coherence of which has been lost. This lost harmony finds visual expression in the fragmented narrative structure of films—usually a set of episodes from the life of a protagonist, who resists the discrete structure of experience. If the older generation of filmmakers (Romm, Kalatozov, and Kozintsev) favored a scientist-intellectual as the tragic visionary and potential redeemer of the world, for the generation of the sixties (Tarkovskii, Konchalovskii, Panfilov, and Shengelaia), the central figure was an artist-savior. For their protagonists, schooling is of secondary importance compared to the divine touch of creative genius. Tarkovskii's Andrei Rublev (Solonitsyn), for instance, learns mainly through observing, with his talented eyes, the life around him. Niko Pirosmani (the protagonist of Shengelaia's *Pirosmani* [1971]) and Tania Tetkina (the protagonist of Panfilov's *No Ford Through the Fire* [1967]) are self-taught geniuses whose art is a product of revelation rather than education. It is worth mentioning here what Panfilov said about his wife, Irina Churikova, who played the lead in most of his films: she has "a face, a personality, marked by God" (Gerber, cited in Lawton 21).

The exceptional nature of the period's artists on screen manifests itself in their unconventional style of painting. In Tarkovskii's film, *Andrei Rublev* (1966), the protagonist's artistic work marks a watershed in Russian icon painting. An icon, significantly, functions as a unifying force, bringing together disparate aspects of life into a harmonious whole. Rublev's works erase distorting barriers between the divine and secular life: the icon is God Himself in direct, unmediated form. Artists in the films of Panfilov and Shengelaia favor a primitive, two-dimensional style of painting: it is simultaneously boldly experimental and childish naïve. This manner of representation evokes the notion of icon-painting on secular subjects, similar to the seventeenth century *parsuna* painting. This style offers not a sheer reflection of worldly life, but a defamiliarizing vantage

point of the spiritual eye on worldly experience. If Kalatozov/ Urusevskii invented the visual viewpoint of nature on human life, then Tarkovskii, Shengelaia, Panfilov, and their directors of photography attempted to convey a divine point of view on both nature and human experience. The protagonist's artistic eye promises to regain tranquil control over the world by capturing in an artistic work the perspective of a higher order.

The paintings of Pirosmani and Tetkina, similarly to the icons of Tarkovskii's Rublev, transform the entire community. At the end of Tarkovskii's film, icons bring color into the black and white world of medieval Russia. In Panfilov's film, Tetkina's paintings constitute the only genuine expression of the revolutionary spirit. In Shengelaia's film, Pirosmani's paintings bring happiness to the life of his compatriots and change the appearance of his native city, Tbilisi. As does the protagonist of *Lenin's Guard*, the artists in the films of the sixties create their art for the community. However, in contrast to the characters of *Lenin's Guard*, the protagonists of Tarkovskii, Panfilov, and Shengelaia remain unique individuals, detached or even alien to their communities. Art establishes a balance between the private and the public, but artists cannot come to terms with the public. The tragic fate of many of these artists establishes a certain cultural paradigm: the artists sacrifice themselves for the community; yet simultaneously assert their individuality, because only they are capable of such an extraordinary, paradoxical complexity. Sometimes such a sacrifice is overtly dramatic—the death of Tania at the end of Panfilov's film. Often, however, as in Shengelaia's film, people do not even notice the sacrifice: the messiah-artist quietly abandons the world leaving behind his paintings—icons (the traces of his divine presence) as redemptive exemplars for the community.

Not surprisingly, many Thaw films employ biblical, especially New Testament, motifs. Shengelaia's film about Pirosmani's life opens with the reading of the Gospel. The genre of the parable, central for Georgian cinema, became especially important in the context of the Thaw cinema. Parables lend a quasi-religious, totalizing meaning to the life of both individual and community. In *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovskii also employs New Testament imagery and parables as a narrative mode to represent the life of his protagonist. Tarkovskii's first feature film, *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), evokes a different kind of imagery from the Scriptures, that of Apocalypse. The horrifying visions and dreams of the child Ivan (John), an orphan, are inspired by the loss of his family, his hatred of the Nazis, and his desire for revenge. As one critic notes, "hatred is the meaning of Ivan's life," the only reason for him to survive (Woll 140); it determines his existence. In *Ivan's Childhood*, Tarkovskii spotlights not art as redemption, but the art of

despair. The iconic image that Ivan discovers in one of his books and that becomes the thematic core of the film is Albrecht Dürer's *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*. Another biblical image central to *Ivan's Childhood*, which recurs in Tarkovskii's later films is the image of the scorched tree of life. If the paintings of the Thaw's artists-redeemers restore hope for harmony in the concrete, empirical world, Ivan's creative power, inspired by a thirst for revenge and death, implodes into his dreams and transforms the memories of his lost childhood into images shot on negative (scorched) film stock.

Andrei Konchalovskii, Tarkovskii's co-author of the script for *Andrei Rublev*, likewise raises the issue of creation without redemption in his debut feature film *The First Teacher* (1965). The protagonist, a semi-literate Red Army soldier, Diuishen (Beishenaliev), is sent to a remote Kirghiz village to teach children. The first messenger/prophet of the new world, he is supposed to mold local nature and its people into the new faith. Everything he does, however, even with the best intentions, turns into failure and violence against human nature. When he interferes with the traditional marriage of one of his female students who is bought by one of the rich locals, she gets raped and the villagers destroy Diuishen's school. To rebuild the school, he cuts the only tree in the village, located in the middle of the Kirghiz semi-desert prairies. The tree of life traded for the new truth serves as an extremely ambiguous metaphor in Konchalovskii's film. In a key episode in the film, the village children repeat the word "Socialism" as a prayer, while the camera pans across the lifeless expanses of the desert. The teacher/artist provides a coherent vision of the world, but, in this case, at the price of life, which disappears from the landscape.

The absence of harmony in the world modeled on a non-redeeming art is mirrored in the psychic structure of the protagonists. Films often emphasize the incongruity between a protagonist's age and his experience. Tarkovskii's Ivan is a child who endures so much pain that his soul ages long before his body. The director also deconventionalizes the Thaw's traditional vision of a child as a symbol of new life and innocence: "The hatred-driven Ivan skews one commonplace of Thaw art, the innocent child-hero" (Woll 140). Konchalovskii's Diuishen provides a different kind of distorted personality. Diuishen is an adult whose ideological rigidity slows down his development and transforms him into an abusive and helpless child with a one-dimensional vision of the world.

Discovering National Identity

The cultural Thaw saw the emergence of national identity as an alternative to Soviet identity. Film art played a key role in this practice of

fragmenting totalitarian mythology. The studios on the margins of the Soviet empire produced experimental and controversial films challenging the dominance of the central studios, epitomized by Mosfilm, Lenfilm, and Gorky Studio. Such a movement outward became especially perceptible after Khrushchev was voted out of office in 1964 and the political center started consolidating power and tightening its control over culture. In 1966, Tarkovskii, then working at Mosfilm, encountered problems with releasing his second feature, *Andrei Rublev*. The same year Moscow witnessed the trial of two writers, Andrei Siniavskii and Iulii Daniel, who were sentenced to the camps for publishing their works abroad. The periphery still lagged behind the center and therefore offered more opportunities for artistic experimentation. It is no coincidence that Konchalovskii and Shepit'ko traveled to remote Kirgizfilm to make their first pictures: *The First Teacher* and *Heat*, respectively. Moreover, non-Russian republics had quite a few talented and original filmmakers. Some of these national schools of cinematography, Georgian cinema, for example, had a rich tradition prior to the 1960s; others (the Lithuanian school, for example) in many respects came into their own during the Thaw.

Vytautas Zhalakiavicius's film *Nobody Wanted to Die* (1963) is significant far beyond Lithuanian cinema. The film pioneered the concept of national identity as a thematic and stylistic issue by entering a forbidden zone—that of nationalist resistance to Soviet postwar control. At the film's center is a family of four brothers, the Lokys, who avenge their father's murder. Their symbolic surname translates as Bears—that is, the masters of the Lithuanian forests. The film defines the two warring sides ambiguously, whereby beneath the surface of typical Soviet Civil War film, in which the good Reds fight the bad Whites, Zhalakiavicius implants a nationalistic agenda. At film's beginning the viewer sees a recognizable opposition: the brothers support the Soviets, while the bandits fight against the Soviets. For the rest of the film, however, the brothers' sole identity is that of Lithuanians, while the bandits are referred to as the newcomers. In the Lithuanian context, newcomers were, above all, Russians.

Modernity in the film is associated with the machine, specifically a truck with Soviet soldiers. This symbol of modernity is another ambiguous signifier in the film, one that undergoes redefinition in the course of the narrative. After the truck arrives at the village, the bandit leader takes over the machine's controls and directs it at the local wooden buildings. The machine crashes, and one of the brothers kills the leader. The mixed blessings of modernity and the threat posed by the newcomers converge into a unified power inimical to the forces of national identity.

The recuperation of national roots in the film is linked to the return of

natural elements/essences inseparable from the national: water, sand, stone, wheat, and, above all, wood, the Bears' forests. True to many Thaw films, Zhalakiavicius' DP Ionas Gričius plays the prime role in visualizing the world of natural forces in the film. His camera constantly focuses on national identity's "basic materials," with which the Bears reunite at film's end. After defeating the newcomers, the brothers sing a Lithuanian song and reenter the forest that was previously occupied by the bandits. In this scene, the Bears stand in the truck's bed and horses as natural engines pull the tamed, disabled truck. National traditions triumph over the newcomers' murderous modernity. To make the picture complete, *Nobody Wanted to Die* was filmed in Lithuanian and later dubbed into Russian at Lenfilm Studios.

Zhalakiavicius' film also initiates the process of decentering Soviet cinema as an artistic canon. Lithuania historically had deep religious and cultural connections with Poland. Polish cinema of the 1960s came under the strong influence of European art cinema, created its own "Polish School," and was more experimental and politically daring than its Russian counterpart, Thaw cinema. Consequently, for a Lithuanian director Polish cinema provided a model for emulation. Polish cinema of the era featured a preoccupation with existential issues and choices, with the subjection of individual and national fates to the forces of history. Instead of following Soviet cinema's genre models, Zhalakiavichus signals his preference for both Western and Polish examples. The film is both titled and structured as a bona fide Western, and Zhalakiavicius pays special homage to Jerzy Kawalerowicz's popular film of the era, *Shadow* (1956) (Margolit 2001, 1). Many non-Russian Soviet studios subsequently used Zhalakiavicius' film as a narrative model to examine nationalist resistance to the Soviets. Valerii Gazhiu and Vadim Lysenko will make *Bitter Seeds* at Moldova Film (1966). Iurii Il'enko will film *White Bird with a Black Spot* at Dovzhenko Studio, Ukraine (1972).

Gendered Visions

Thaw ushered in another important revolution in Soviet culture: women established themselves as independent voices in the artistic production of the era, above all in literature and film. Larisa Shepit'ko and Kira Muratova became major names in the Soviet women's cinema of the 1960s. Their gender marginality, however, was reiterated in the fact that they started their careers in provincial studios: Shepit'ko in Kirgizia (Kirgizfilm), and Muratova in Ukraine (Odessa Studio). Both initially paid tribute to traditional Thaw cinema values, depicting individual and communal identity through a visual focus on nature and its elements.

Shepit'ko employs this stylistic paradigm in her 1963 first feature, *Heat*, where the desert landscape functions as the externalized desert of human souls. Muratova collaborated with her husband, Aleksandr Muratov (1935-) on her first feature, *Our Honest Bread* (1964), the title alluding to the major building material of a harmonious human identity.

Both directors' second films, *Wings* (Shepit'ko 1966) and *Brief Encounters* (Muratova 1967), articulate important features of Russian women's cinema. Distancing from the naturalizing power of essentialist imagery constitutes one of the most important and sobering aspects of women's film style in the 1960s. Shepit'ko's film provides an excellent example of this stylistic trace. The protagonist, Petrukhina (Bulgakova), is a former military pilot whose career ends after World War Two. In the film, the sky figures the essence of freedom and love, yet everything related to the experience of sky is displaced into the war-era past. Petrukhina's lover, a pilot, was killed during the war. The protagonist herself now flies only in her dreams and in the flashbacks to her happier years—ironically, those of the war. She cannot find her niche in the postwar world. At film's end, Petrukhina comes to the local air club and takes off in one of the planes. The protagonist and the viewers finally see the sky, but the film makes clear that she has flown off only to commit suicide.

In *Brief Encounters* water images the unifying essence associated with female experience. Valentina, the protagonist,¹ works as the city official responsible for the water supply of a provincial town, yet water is precisely the substance that she cannot provide for the city dwellers. She cannot even attend a conference on water supply because she has to run some unrelated errands for her boss. This dearth of water defines Valentina's present and is linked to her separation from her lover, Maxim (Vysotskii), a prospector who, as the film reveals, seeks gold and finds silver. Lacking in Valentina's present, water exists in the flashbacks of Valentina's maid, Nadia (Ruslanova), whose full name (Nadezhda) means 'hope.' As the viewer learns later in the film, after Maxim broke with Valentina, he had a brief but passionate relationship with Nadia. Now both women, like Petrukhina in *Wings*, define themselves only through their losses and memories. The absence of human contact—of water as the symbolic signifier of living relationship—determines characters' identity.

Women's cinema of the late 1960s favors a female perspective and, usually, a female protagonist, whose solitude constitutes its thematic and emotional center. Even the traditionally glorified escape from solitude through childrearing loses its romantic aura and redemptive power in women's films of the 1960s. Neither Shepit'ko's Petrukhina, nor Muratova's Valentina is a biological mother, and both fail to establish contact

with their surrogate children. Petrukhina is alienated from her adopted daughter, and Valentina cannot find the right key to the psychology of her maid, whom she treats as her surrogate daughter. Any kind of essentialist foundation for relationships, however, is ruled out: in the two films spiritual and emotional closeness, for example, cannot be established through biological ties. Petrukhina and Valentina try to educate, to “enlighten,” their surrogate children but encounter only resentment. In Shepit’ko’s *Wings*, the protagonist works as the principal at the local vocational school. Woll notes that “Petrukhina explodes the Soviet clichés of the conventionally tough and fair heroine, who wins reluctant admiration despite her sternness” (218). Although the protagonist means well, her awkward didacticism alienates her students, as well as her adopted daughter.

Brief Encounters open with the scene of miscommunication between Nadia and Valentina. Nadia is looking for her boyfriend Maxim and shows up at the door of Valentina’s house because of the address that she (Nadia) has for him. Valentina is looking for a maid and assumes that Nadia is answering the ad Valentina had placed. She tries to be nice and hospitable to the lonely village girl, but immediately makes a *faux pas* by offering to help Nadia enter a school. The offer hints at a cliché of Soviet cinema (a country bumpkin comes to Moscow, receives an education, and becomes an exemplary worker), but Nadia responds to the possibility of a worn-out narrative with a harsh rhetorical question: “Did you look for a maid, or what?” Valentina completely fails to establish emotional contact with Nadia, while the latter understands her hostess very well. She knows, in both meanings of the word, Valentina’s wandering ex-boyfriend, and also feels acutely the pain of separation from him.

Shepit’ko and Muratova entertain no sentimental illusions about the blessings of a nuclear family. Traditionally, the Thaw favored the nuclear family as a shelter for genuine feelings and emotional bonding. In early poststalinist culture, the nuclear family served as the master signifier for identity construction, both personal and communal. In *Wings*, however, mother and daughter can hardly talk to each other. *Brief Encounters* ends with the image of the family table devoid of human presence. A visual simulation of a harmonious nuclear family waits for Valentina and Maxim, but family bliss remains unattainable.

Muratova’s film also ends the cult of a harmonious individual in Soviet film. In fact, Muratova redefines the very phenomenon: instead of creating a redeemer-artist, a child-hero/victim, a genius-intellectual (all men, by the way), she suggests the fundamental impossibility of a unified individual identity. In lieu of creating a new positive hero, Muratova introduces the notion of “characterness” in Soviet film. Boris Groys de-

scribes “characterness” as the desire of an artist to assume another’s identity to express oneself (1999, 53). Instead of embodying the self-articulation characteristic of traditional art, the artist uses ready-made identities and their discourses to achieve only a degree of self-expression. Muratova’s Valentina changes her identities, like clothing and none of them becomes completely her own. She plays a lover, a surrogate mother, and a caring city official responsible for satisfying everyone’s thirst. All these identities, however, do not fit, do not create a coherent character. They fall apart, to reveal Valentina’s persona as a series of lacks and desires. The social roles that Valentina plays in the film exist as fragments of 1960s heroes. Her public persona symbolizes “the source of life” for everyone. Her romance with the prospector Maxim links Valentina to the pioneers of the Thaw, but in a very mediated and rather ironic way. These fragments, however, have one thing in common—they are displaced into the past. Together with the lifegiving water, these fractured pieces of the hero from the sixties never surface in the present. In the present, Valentina is responsible for supplying non-existent fluids.

To visually install the fragmentation of the self, Muratova found several original narrative and visual techniques. First, she constructs two selves, those of Valentina and Nadia, around intricately arranged flashbacks. An identity of loss in the present can be defined only through its past encounters. The only Thaw-era reviewer of the film, frustrated by the complex and non-linear temporality of the film, accused Muratova of unprofessionalism: “You get the impression that the director, sitting at the editing table, just rearranged individual pieces of film without really justifying rearrangement” (Kovarskii, translated in Woll 221). Muratova also represents fragmentation by creating multiple communicative barriers separating the characters. In the film’s present, contacts with Maxim occur only via a telephone with a poor connection. Maxim also exists in the film as a voice on the tape recorder, which Nadia eventually erases. These vanishing material signs of brief encounters underscore personal selves defined through lack, trauma, and unfulfilled desires.

After Utopia

The cinematic New Wave inevitably ran into ideological complications with the censors, critics, and party officials. As the political Thaw came to its end with the Warsaw Pact tanks roaring through Czechoslovakia in 1968, cultural Thaw producers yielded ground to the conservatives. The widespread banning and censorship of ideologically controversial films in 1966-68 marks a major manifestation of the new cultural policies in the film industry. Aleksandr Askol'dov’s film, *The Commissar* (1967), was

banned due to what censors perceived to be an erroneous interpretation of the revolution. The film also centered on a Jewish family as the microcosm of humanity, which the Soviet censors considered unacceptable, especially, in the context of Israel's victory in the Sixth Day's War. It was released only during perestroika in 1987. Also in 1967 Andrei Konchalovskii's second film, *The Story of Asia Kliachina Who Loved But did not Marry*,² was not approved for distribution primarily because of its innovative style. The film takes a traditional Soviet subject—a love story played out against the backdrop of life at a Soviet collective farm—and, by using experimental techniques, pushes Thaw era concern with sincerity and naturalness to the limit. In order to portray national identity in its most unmediated form, Konchalovskii filmed primarily local collective farmers instead of professional actors; only two professional actors appear in the entire film. The result was stunningly unconventional and far from the glossy idylls of Soviet Hollywood. The film was censored and not released until the perestroika (1988).

Muratova's *Brief Encounters*, though not officially banned was, as Jane Taubman points out, a film that went through massive attacks from the State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino) and various editors and reviewers. Goskino resented the fact that the protagonist (a government official) was involved in a love triangle and had an affair with a morally questionable character (Taubman 371). Muratova, as one Soviet commentator of the era fairly noted, obviously lacked the necessary Party-minded position (cited in Woll 221). In the late 1960s the film had a limited release; it was not until the glasnost era (1986) that it received a general screening.

Perhaps this brief account of the Soviet New Wave gravitates toward an anti-climactic closure because Russian popular culture favors the unhappy (or as a contemporary reviewer of the early Russian cinema would put it "the inevitable") ending. The late 1960s backlash against dissidents and liberal cultural producers gives copious evidence of cultural and political repression and tempts the author to provide such a closure. The artistic production of the era, however, hardly allows for such a depressing and finalizing reading of the Thaw on screen.

The filmmakers of the era tried in good faith to revive the revolutionary utopia, which the Bolshevik revolution worshipped and attempted to implement as the totalizing narrative of the ultimate civilization (Groys 1992, 8-13). In the course of refurbishing Soviet utopia they produced innovative and experimental films that subverted the master narratives of Soviet culture: that of raising the new Soviet race to Marxist consciousness and that of the war on nature with its subsequent transformation into

post-historical paradise on Earth. Furthermore, Thaw filmmakers also undermined the myth of a harmonious Soviet community by recognizing a variety of alternative identities. Thus experimental films of the 1960s gave vision and voice to the discourses of individuality, ethnicity, and femininity. In the 1980s the films of the Soviet New Wave became associated with a genuine revolution—Gorbachev’s perestroika. This previously unknown New Wave, however, is yet to be fully appreciated and studied in detail by international viewers and film scholars.

NOTES

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1. Muratova herself plays the protagonist.
2. The film is also known as *Asia’s Happiness*.

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Landscape, with Hero

EVGENII MARGOLIT

The role and place of nature in Soviet film may initially seem to be a peripheral theme, but, upon closer scrutiny, it presents a methodological foundation for examining general patterns in the development of Soviet film. The issue at hand is, of course, not simply landscape (though that, too, provides a certain conceptual approach to the problem), but about the *image* of nature, about nature as a character in its own right, with its own independent voice.

If one follows the doctrine of socialist culture, however, it is precisely this right to speak that is taken away from nature. In the totalitarian system, it is precisely nature that becomes cultivated; that is, subordinated. In fact, the final construction of the new [Soviet] society is contingent on the following condition: total escape from the power of natural laws. Moreover, in the opposition of “natural versus cultural,” the former is associated with everything that is spontaneous, unpredictable, unforeseen, and opposed to the plan; it is precisely this that the totalitarian system, first and foremost, gets rid of.

Meanwhile, it is clear that this element of spontaneity makes up, in the first place, cinema’s essence as an art. Moreover, it is precisely Soviet film, in its most classic examples, that was undoubtedly and unconditionally the first to use this element. Though it is possible to speak of Soviet film’s predecessors—of Swedish or American cinema—the practical (for lack of a better word) philosophy of nature’s image in film was formulated in the first decades of Soviet film (and definitely, prior to 1937). In fact, the novelty of Soviet film manifests itself precisely in the representation of nature; the human mass manifests its basic kinship with natural elements and a deep-seated hostility to any geometric rules of construction. The examples are numerous: from *Battleship Potemkin* [Sergei Eisenstein. *Potemkin*, 1925/26] to *Chapaev* [Georgii and Sergei Vasil’ev. 1934] where the absence of an open natural space amounts to its negative presence, and from *Bed and Sofa* [Abram Room. *Tret’ia meshchanskaia*, 1927] to *Ivan the Terrible* [Sergei Eisenstein. *Ivan Groznyi*, 1944-46].

This can be explained, in my opinion, by the rather obvious abstract and undeveloped focus of the official doctrine [on conquering nature], and, therefore, the necessity of adapting to the moment, of utilizing whatever viable means were available from the very “hostile” arsenal of other theories. It is not an accident when this practical philosophy appears

overtly; texts elicit accusations of biologism, pantheism, etc. as in the case of *Earth* [Aleksandr Dovzhenko. *Zemlia*, 1930].

This particular case, however, provides an example of how complex, wide-ranging, and ambiguous the doctrine itself was. Asserting control over nature could be understood as a synthesis of nature and culture that, thereby, produces a new entity, an achievement of real quality. This is the model of the mid-1930s “new utopia” (*Pilots* [Iulii Raizman. *Letchiki*, 1935], *On the Shores of the Blue Sea* [Boris Barnet. *U samogo sinego moria*, 1935], *Aerograd* [Dovzhenko 1935], *The Accordion* [Igor' Savchenko. *Garmon'*, 1934], etc.). The entire preceding development of Soviet film paved the way for precisely this model where both the human masses and natural elements had risen to find themselves inextricably linked. How paradoxical and unexpected is thus the speed with which nature in the capacity of an independent, sovereign source disappears from Soviet film; it literally vanishes, not in the course of years, but of months.

Up until 1937 this theme—though not a significant one in their oeuvres—is identifiable even in the work of such filmmakers as Mikhail Romm, Iulii Raizman, Sergei Gerasimov, and Aleksandr Zarkhi and Iosif Kheifits; for example, in such films as *Thirteen* [Romm, *Trinadtsat'*, 1936], *Bold Seven* [Gerasimov. *Semero smelykh*, 1936], *Pilots* [Raizman. *Letchiki*, 1935] and *Hectic Days* [Zarkhi and Kheifits. *Goriachie denechki*, 1935]. See for example, the final lyrical scene in *Hectic Days* that takes place in a moonlit garden among falling ripe apples. But try to imagine the appearance of a simple landscape shot in Romm's films about Lenin or in *Baltic Deputy* [Zarkhi and Kheifits. *Deputat Baltiki*, 1936-37]. From this moment on [post 1937], nature becomes nothing more than a place of service similar to the factory or the office. And it is this that marks the difference between, let's say, *Pilots*, filmed in 1935, and *Fighter Pilots* [Eduard Pentslin. *Istrebitel'*], filmed in 1939.

It is not difficult to establish the connection between these tendencies in cinema and the proclaimed goals articulated by the growing Soviet empire. It is precisely at this moment that the contours and parameters of the system—as well as its limits in the literal and figurative meanings of the word—had finally been determined, and, consequently, the cultural doctrine as well. Above all, this manifests itself in the movement toward the total verbalization of cinema: all cinema aspires to become the embodiment of the word, just like the protagonist strives to become the embodiment of the official word (the only possibility in the system). The word of the antagonist essentially represents the anti-word. It is either an announcement of evil intentions, a declaration of a positive program but with an evil goal (“With their slogan, but toward our goals”—as proclaims

the leader of the opposition in *The Great Citizen* [Fridrikh Ermler. *Velikii grazhdanin*, 1937]), which marks numerous spies and double agents, or the distorted word of the foreign enemy. Multi-lingualism, which worked effectively in the early sound films of Barnet, Kavaleridze (in *Koliivshchina* and *Prometheus* [*Koliivshchina*, 1933 and *Prometei*, 1935]), and Zarkhi and Kheifits (in *My Homeland* [*Moia Rodina*, 1933]), now completely disappears. In the films of the late 1930s the slightly distorted official Soviet word replaces the word spoken in different languages. Non-Russians appear as younger brothers-in-class who are only approaching the *logos* of the first land of victorious socialism, and these minors are allowed to exhibit some natural, spontaneous, and naïve traits, which in the course of the characters' growing social consciousness will be overcome.

Typical of the second half of the 1930s, actors of the previous generation are slowly replaced by actors from academic theaters who have excellent enunciation and posture, such as Boris Livanov, Nikolai Simonov, Alla Tarasova, and Nikolai Cherkasov (the latter also changed the types of roles he played). Having been in one way or another on the periphery of Soviet cinema (either because they played episodic roles or acted in "peripheral" films), these actors now become the central figures, thus marginalizing cinematic actors.

This tendency, halted by the war, gathers momentum during the postwar years—the time when the formation of the "Grand Style" was completed. It is only in relation to the "Grand Style" that it becomes possible to speak about the relatively complete implementation of the official cultural doctrine in film. Perhaps it is best illustrated by the flourishing of filmed stage productions at the end of the Stalin era, in which nature is replaced by props that signify nature. This signals the final "exile" of the natural (spontaneous) principle from film, which, in effect, meant the loss of the film's very spirit, the loss of its natural foundation. Even in those instances when an image of nature appeared on the screen, it was always framed as merely a sign of nature—nature that had been "acculturated." Hence even Sergei Urusevskii in *Cavalier of the Golden Star* [Raizman, *Kavaler Zolotoi Zvezdy*, 1950] filmed landscapes that are direct [visual] quotations from Itinerant painting—the only permissible model for imitation during these years because it is the model of landscape purity. Cinelandscape at this time is static; it exists disconnected from the character, as a separate and, in the best cases, picturesque background. Landscapes depicting winter and summer are preferable to those that represent transitional seasons, which lack complete clarity, and are, therefore, less common. Movement is not encouraged: the world is interpreted as having attained its full realization, not as "becoming" but "has already become" to

use Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology.

Accordingly, the same occurred with the actors. The central figures in film during the postwar years were, as a rule, the bearers of a fixed acting style (for example Ivan Pereverzev, Vladimir Druzhnikov, Sergei Bondarchuk, Sergei Kurilov, and Vladlen Davydov). The divergence between the style of an actor and his words, which produced a special effect in the 1930s, now becomes simply impossible. The history of Lev Arnshtam's film *Glinka* (1946), in which Boris Chirkov played the lead role and Petr Aleinikov played Pushkin in a very interesting way, is a revealing example. The picture received a Stalin Prize, but the original film soundtrack, where Chirkov sang Glinka's romances, was re-recorded by Sergei Lemeshev. Five years later Grigorii Aleksandrov released a new color version of the film, in which the stately Boris Smirnov played Glinka (who, a few years later, would be cast in the role of Lenin, for which he would subsequently be invited to join Moscow Arts Theater). The equally imposing L. Durasov of the Moscow Arts Theater played Pushkin.

An even more characteristic example is the choice of Aleksei Dikii for the role of Stalin. The deciding factor was the fact that at the audition Dikii spoke without a Georgian accent. The flawless speech completed the ideal image of the leader, in which the following was incorporated: height, stateliness, and—of extraordinary importance—the slow pace and the precision of his gestures. Dikii fully subordinated his acting to the word, thus insuring himself against any involuntary gesture. Any involuntary gestures captured by the cameramen, as well as any slips of the tongue, were immediately edited out. This precise measuring and slow pacing underscored Stalin's importance; the full convergence of the word and the gesture are of principle significance. The word in this instance has, undoubtedly, an epic character to it. In the epic poem, the mythological hero-demiurge, having created natural cosmos from chaos, gives way to the creator of the social cosmos, who maintains the memory of his prototype. The rhythm is, in fact, the ideal natural rhythm. The leader is a phenomenon of nature, not of the chaotic elements, but, rather, of the cosmos—of an organized nature. From this premise comes the constant comparison of Stalin to the sun. The Word belongs to the leader, hence it is a sacred word, compared, above all with the sunlight that illuminates the forward motion of the collective. As much as any central hero represents a leader, the master-plot is always absolute, invariable, and identical, and the function of the word is always one and the same.

In a way, this is a metaphorical representation of the ritual eating of the opponent with the goal of acquiring his merits. In this case, nature is the subject for dismemberment and consumption so that the victor inherits

its ideal characteristics.

Exceptions during this period appear in texts where the narrative is historical; that is, where it is not epic, but novelistic. In such cases, the plot serves to test an idea. This appears most clearly in *Ivan the Terrible*, *Michurin* [Aleksandr Dovzhenko, *Michurin (Zhizn' v tsvetu)* 1948] and *Taras Shevchenko* [Igor' Savchenko, 1951]. The hero, in these instances, searches to find a common language with the elements in order to ask nature questions, that is, to engage it in dialogue. The defeat of the hero in *Ivan the Terrible* (in drafts of the conclusion, Eisenstein's Ivan ends up on a par with the sea, towards which he felt drawn throughout the entire film), and the victory of the heroes in the other two films hinge on the ability to find a common language with the natural elements.

Finally, there exists one more variant: the *auteur* cinematography of Mark Donskoi, represented most prominently by his film *Village School Teacher* [*Sel'skaia uchitel'nitsa*, 1947]. In this film, the actual plot—the collision of human life's finiteness with the infiniteness of the natural cycle—provides the film's fairly straightforward *fabula* with a unique accent, thus setting it apart from others. However, the dramatic production of his first three films as well as his ensuing joint work with Urusevskii, *Alitet Leaves for the Hills* [*Alitet ukhodit v gory*, 1949], provides additional evidence that the confrontation between man and nature was acknowledged to be heretical during the final years of Stalinism.¹ *Alitet*, the film co-created by Donskoi and Urusevskii, was subjected to harsh criticism and was reedited essentially without the participation of the director.

There is profound significance in designating the period of liberalization in [Soviet] social life with the name of a *natural* phenomenon—the Thaw. It amounted to an abandonment of the State's claims to dominate the logic of natural development and replace it with the State's own will. This name seems accidental and is said to have appeared in connection with the somewhat scandalous criticism around Il'ia Erenburg's novella "The Thaw"; however, by flipping through the pages of Russian poetry from those years, one can easily see how prevalent the motif of the expectant spring and the inevitability of its arrival had already become. Consider Leonid Martynov's poem from 1952:

To the surface of the counter
The apple is frozen,
In the kiosks there are no flowers,
The opening of the skating rink is announced,
At the ski resort, the snow's piled up to the knees,
In the sky snow clouds fly by,

In the stove the wood cracks...
All this means that spring is close!

Though not particularly well known, Semen Lipkin's poem "Little Sparrow" ["Vorobyshek"] is no less remarkable; written in 1953 it includes a most expressive line: "The kingdom of heavy snow." Later Il'ia Erenburg wrote his poem "Children of the South Do Not Know" in which the following paradigmatic lines appear:

We knew such winters,
We learned to live in such freezes...

Precisely in these early years, Russian poetry of the Thaw legitimized in the reader's consciousness winter and the plains as images of the State where life had become frozen. Thereby this symbolism also carried hope for rebirth (in Lipkin's poem this is precisely the main point). That is why the Thaw in film begins not by returning rights to man but rather, by returning these rights to nature. This return begins, in fact, with the purely metaphorical (and in this sense—still verbal) premise of Vsevolod Pudovkin's 1953 film *The Return of Vasilii Bortnikov* [*Vozvrashcheniie Vasiliiia Bortnikova*], in which spring symbolizes the "melting" of life following the trying war years. The film is very traditional; nothing in the plot indicates actual realia of postwar country life. The fear of conflict does not allow one to develop even an innocent drama of a man, who, having returned from war, finds out that his wife married another. Instead, the protagonist quickly finds consolation in the effective work of rebuilding agriculture. The actors worked maintaining the same stylistic tradition of Stalinist cinema: the same irreproachable enunciation and the same secondary role of gestures as compared to words (with the exception, perhaps, of young Inna Makarova). Strictly speaking, the motif of winter as a symbol of hardships appeared throughout all of Soviet film during the war years (consider Donskoi's film *The Rainbow* [*Raduga*, 1944] and even Aleksandr Stolper's quite unconventional film *Story of a Real Man* [*Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke*, 1948]).

What, then, compelled both Soviet and foreign film historians alike to recognize Pudovkin's film, the plot of which is minimally interesting, as the beginning of this new brilliant period in Soviet cinema? It was the landscapes shot by Sergei Urusevskii, whom Pudovkin invited to work on the film after having watched *Cavalier of the Golden Star*.

As soon as the landscape became necessary for conveying and expressing man's inner world, that is, the journey of the human soul (to return to

the initial meaning of the trite expression), it immediately acquired a lost dynamic and liberated itself from the inner frame, which is so frustrating in the landscapes of *Cavalier*. This landscape ceases to be merely a sign of nature and inevitably demands camera movement. The landscape opens nature's infinity precisely through motion, through its endless cycle. The scenery shots record changes in nature, but not the abstract concept of "nature" (or of "Russian nature") that characterizes cinematography of the final years of Stalinism. Thereby, it does not so much convey (for to convey would be too daring a claim for this film) as hint at the possibility of an inner life, of movements of the soul in the characters who are represented in the film to be absolutely rock solid.

In a sense, the landscape here replaces the characters' spontaneous, non-verbal, and "natural" gestures. This is especially noticeable in the first half of the film. *The Return of Vasilii Bortnikov*, therefore, initiates the pattern for the next ten to fifteen years when unexpected rain, gusting wind, and the like come to dominate the screen. This would be followed with equally unpredictable scenes of characters running or dancing: the landscape opens the way to the characters' spontaneous gesticulation. For example, in the final scene of Marlen Khutsiev and Feliks Mironer's film *Spring on Zarechnaia Street* [*Vesna na Zarechnoi ulitse*, 1956] the spring wind blows into the room and whisks the pages of essays onto the floor as if facilitating the hero's liberation and subsequent declaration of love.

This film, in fact, is a collection of all the main stylistic devices of early Thaw films. First of all, in 1956 a total of three films came out with the word "spring" in the title. No less revealing is that the school year and the change of the seasons mark the temporality of the plot, and for the first time since *Village School Teacher*—as if marking phases in the development of love—is of principle significance to the plot. As in the case of Pudovkin's last film, this device played a role in making Khutsiev and Mironer's film an event. The distinguishing feature of Khutsiev's poetics is not the abundance of everyday details that moved the film's contemporary viewers, but, rather, the "melting" of the plot into the natural cycle. The landscape plays such a significant role in *Spring on Zarechnaia Street* that it serves to overcome the rigid performance of the lead actress, that is, to make the lack of actor's temperament an element of the plot: the heroine, Ivanova, seems to "melt" emotionally at the end of the film when spring arrives.

Slightly earlier and to a somewhat lesser degree, this same principle, though not as directly, appears in the work of so keen and fine an artist as Iosif Kheifits. With respect to *The Rumiantsev Affair* [*Delo Rumiantseva*, 1955], one may speak of the entire suite of rain and puddles (no matter

how strange this might sound at first). Here, too, the change of the seasons echoes the plot (action begins as summer ends and concludes in the spring), and “meteorological” details save the static—especially when compared to her partner Aleksei Batalov—lead female actor. It is interesting to note a characteristic detail of the era: women in film of this period emotionally “defrost” significantly longer than do men. Actresses of this time are much more constrained than are their male partners. This is not only a metaphor of natural transformation, which woman, above all, embodies, but the actual reflection of the displaced cine-aesthetics of the previous era, where the female protagonist was in the lead; the woman, as a rule, was ideologically and morally superior to her beloved.

Thus, the world of human feelings and the world of nature in Soviet film of the 1950s reveal their kinship; though fairly conventional at first, it is suitable as a kind of rhyme. Meanwhile, independent from authorial intention, the rhyme begins to reveal previously unnoticed hidden meanings; it begins to take over the development of cinematic art. Man turns out to be less a social creature than a natural being. Nature turns into something bigger than simply an object for transformation. But even if it remains such, it is not transformed enough to be just an appendage of social life. Precisely *this* change of nature’s role frees the hero from his epic contours and shows him as a human being. Moreover, the hero himself turns into a stage for the combat between the social and natural forces inside him.

Clearly, it was not advisable to depict contemporary life, and thus film was limited to the heroic historical past. Out of this material, one of the most sensational works of 1950s world film was created—Grigorii Chukhrai’s *The Forty-First* [*Sorok pervyi*, 1956] based on the eponymous story by Boris Lavrenev. The head cameraman was again Sergei Urusevskii.

Here the dualism (of the human and the natural) is presented straightforwardly as the conflict between the two main parts of the film. In the first part, the motif of one-on-one combat between man and nature ensues. It is a struggle with sand and wind, which only a human being can endure. Obviously, the conflict here is meant to be a social one and the heroes, the Bolsheviks, are particularly strong people, which explains in part their steadfastness. (Also in 1956 Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov filmed *Pavel Korchagin*, in which a battle against the elements becomes the focus of the film based on Nikolai Ostrovskii’s novel.) Those people who carried out their duty to the end serve as a justification and prelude for the denouement of Lavrenev’s story. Nature here is included in the category of “dark powers,” which “maliciously bear down.” The second part—an idyll on an island—transforms the representatives of the

two enemy classes simply into a young man and a young woman. Both lose their class-consciousness together with the remnants of their military uniforms. The natural bares itself underneath the “class” uniforms with metaphorical straightforwardness. For the first time after many years the naked body appears on the Soviet screen and exposes its hostile, classless essence. For this reason, the ending of Chukhrai’s film may be read in two diametrically opposed ways: first, as the triumph of the heroine who fulfills her class duty; or, second, as the tragedy of the heroine who kills her beloved. The shades of meaning are so numerous that any reading is both possible and insufficient because the natural here may be understood as essentially existing beyond words.

It is noteworthy that in his infrequent verbal statements, Urusevskii hardly ever addresses the theme of nature—either nature as a problem, or the principle of its presentation on the screen. At the same time, he repeatedly speaks of the need to emancipate film from the domination of the word, which enslaves the unused possibilities of visual representation. What is at stake here is the system of devices named “the subjective camera” by one of Urusevskii’s contemporaries. This means the movement of the camera, which de-conventionalizes traditional, familiar perceptions of the world by revealing completely unexpected vantage points, extreme in their expressivity. Meanwhile, one question has not been raised: who, then, is the notorious “subject” of these points of view? It was assumed that the camera’s eye identifies with the character’s point of view. However, if the poetics pioneered by Urusevskii in *The Cranes are Flying* [*Letiat zhuravli*, 1957], in fact, includes this device of identification (for example, in the scene of Veronika’s attempted suicide), it is but an isolated case. At times Urusevskii’s camera flies upwards to such a height—in the literal and figurative sense—that such an explanation turns out to be, admittedly, incomplete. The main principle here is the alternation of scale. So, in the scene of his death, Boris (Batalov) “collapses” from an extreme close-up to an extreme long shot. The microcosm of an individual human life collides with nature’s microcosm, an instant collides with eternity. This view from above, as if from another world—from divine heights—is the point of view of eternity, which belongs to nature. What Urusevskii introduced to Soviet film was nature’s point of view.

This mobile gaze is a horrifying experience for a human being, especially when the finality of his individual life is revealed to him. Prior to Urusevskii, this type of visual perception was unknown in Soviet film. The collective had always been the traditional hero of Soviet film. And not simply the collective, but the laboring collective, who lives by nature, who does not separate itself from nature, but who overcomes nature in the

process of labor. The best example of this is *Salt for Svanetia* [*Sol' Svanetii*, 1930], the film that marks Kalatozov's debut as a director. In this film it is already possible to detect elements of his new cinematic language, which will shock the world in *The Cranes are Flying*. In *Salt for Svanetia* there is already an alternation of scales: the clashing of extreme close-ups and extreme long shots. But the vector of movement is opposite to the one employed in *The Cranes are Flying*: in *Salt for Svanetia*, the scale tends to move from long shots to extreme close-ups. This is no coincidence. For all his insignificance in comparison to nature, man possesses a life force, given to him by the community. This strength ensures his survival: the community-family is the collective hero in *Salt for Svanetia*. The individual means very little in and of himself in this film. A quarter of a century later Kalatozov returns to this language, but in the exact opposite context. In *The Cranes are Flying*, the director examines the drama of an individual life. The person realizes his total disconnectedness from the world that surrounds him. *The Cranes are Flying* and *The Letter Never Sent* [*Neotpravlennoe pis'mo*. Kalatozov, 1959] are two films that cannot be explained without each other, for one is reflected in the other, as if in a mirror. The female image created by Tat'iana Samoilova in *The Cranes are Flying* is an open challenge to the canonical heroine of Soviet film. In this new heroine there is both a protest against the geometry of total socialization and an asymmetry of the natural gesture, its unexpectedness and unpredictability. Veronika's plasticity is akin not even to that of an animal, but to that of a plant: a tree or a bush. She is nature's messenger in the socialized world, her kinship with nature is the source of her universal loneliness.

The heroes of *The Letter Never Sent* are just as lonely in the expanses of wild, virginal nature. Man is portrayed at the border between two worlds—that of nature and that of civilization. He belongs to both of them, and to neither of them. Strictly speaking, it is precisely this duality of human nature that Urusevskii and Kalatozov, themselves unaware of it, opened up for Soviet cinema. *The Letter Never Sent* provoked some confusion among its contemporaries, both its admirers and its critics. After *The Cranes are Flying*, they had all expected a totally different result. Even the authors were not completely satisfied: Urusevskii thought that the poetic principle was not maintained throughout the film and complained that the influence of the editors led to a series of “conversational”—“prosaic”—scenes.

Certainly, today the alien nature of some dialogues in the film is obvious. But it is equally obvious that neither their presence, nor their absence could have fundamentally influenced the ultimate result. As is now clear,

the heart of the matter lies elsewhere.

The film is dedicated—as the credits inform the viewer—to the Soviet people, the pioneers and conquerors of nature. Obviously, the original idea of the film is quite canonical. The heroes' innocence in the face of society is undeniable, the question of their innocence in the face of nature is not posed at all. The main device of the film, however, turns the plot upside down. In lieu of a story about the greatness of the human spirit manifested in combat between man and nature, the catastrophic drama arises out of man's claim of supremacy over the natural world. This plot-level transformation occurs thanks to the camera work.

One could say that nature takes revenge on the heroes for transgressing nature's innermost secrets; such a banal, mystical reading of the plot cannot, however, be ascribed to the film, although the key scene of the prospectors' work definitely comes across as a violent and rude invasion of the earth's bosom. The actual drama of the plot is however the fact that nature does not pay any attention to human presence.

In this film (*The Letter Never Sent*) there is a most characteristic idiosyncrasy. The odd vantage points and landscapes, which have their origin in the shots of the birch trees in the scene of Boris's death in *The Cranes are Flying*, appear in the traumatized consciousness of the characters. This is nature from the perspective of people who feel that they are losing control over the situation. But as soon as the camera gives a long shot of the heroes, the frame, losing none of its expressiveness, immediately balances itself, and the composition regains its former stability. This reverse point of view belongs to nature, which sees nothing extraordinary in what is happening. That which is cataclysmic from the point of view of a human, is uneventful for nature and nothing disturbs its flow. That is, the epic of nature turns out to be the humans' drama—a drama precisely because nature simply does not notice them, because nature does not distinguish a human within the series of its other creations, and because nature is indifferent to human pain.

The Letter Never Sent focuses on the deformed human face—a remarkably powerful cinematic effect, which Urusevskii first discovered for Soviet film. Only after *The Cranes are Flying* did Soviet film discover the expressiveness of the exhausted human face covered with dirt and blood. Urusevskii revealed the human face's kinship with the scorched trees, (like the famous black tree on the river shore at the end of *My Name is Ivan* [*Ivanovo detstvo*, 1962] by Tarkovskii, who, as an artist, learned quite a bit from Kalatozov and Urusevskii.

The face obscured by smoke, plastered with wet hair after the rain, and covered in frost from the cold, such a face—altered by natural phe-

nomena—is, in fact, the mask with which nature dresses man; or, more precisely, it is the way man appears from nature's perspective. Shot from above, the protagonist at the end of *The Letter Never Sent* looks like a twig frozen in ice. This is the tragic apotheosis, which, unforeseen by the authors, became all the more momentous. The film's editors demanded that the hero be "resurrected" at the end of the film rather than found dead, as he was in the first version. Precisely because they were unaware of the entire inner duality of the situation, Urusevskii and Kalatozov bravely adopted this new ending; it seemed to express the quintessence of man's duty carried out until the end.

However today that same ending reveals the almost opposite meaning: the entire superhuman energy with which the protagonist challenges nature simply doesn't exist as far as nature is concerned. While demonstrating what they considered combat-dialogue between nature and man, the authors revealed something horrifying: at *this* level no such dialogue exists. It only exists in the haughty imagination of culture, which generated this narrative and claims utopia to be reality. Nature, onto which the authors thrust this narrative (with the earnest belief in its truth), simply pushes it back out, it spits man out onto the foreground. This is how most of the "conversation" scenes are filmed in which the heroes time and again proclaim their credo. These scenes look as though nature were added to them by means of screen projection: the foreground and background are separated by an invisible border and are unable to interact with each other.

More importantly in the place of an epic appears a most horrible drama. Instead of the ideal unity of the hero with the world, with the cosmos—the titan-conqueror in the center of the universe—his primordial separation from nature is revealed. Uniqueness is understood as separation. Every person turns out to be detached from nature. This is the source of his individuality perceived as a drama. That which in *The Cranes are Flying* could still be perceived as an individual idiosyncratic part of Veronika's personality, now (and I emphasize, now) in *The Letter Never Sent*, appears as an essential trait of the human phenomenon.

In this instance the mobility of the camera conveys the self-perception of a human being who, for the first time, feels himself to be an individual, to be the one and only, and as such loses the solid ground under his feet. The person discovers the catastrophic vulnerability of one's "I" for the first time and this discovery creates the poignancy of Urusevskii's device.

I am not talking about the self-realization of this very "I" [of the individual]. It is too early to talk about it because the socialist culture simply lacks any foundation for the existence of personality in the full sense of the

word. One can only talk about a sense of individuality that cannot yet logically articulate itself. The poignancy of the device comes from this very inability for self-reflexivity.

From today's vantage point it is clear that we have before us the farewell to the utopia of the total man, as the center of the universe. The hero, who has discovered his own alienation from the world, rushes about and feels that the ground is slipping from underneath him, and it is therefore necessary for him to find a new place in the world. The persistence of this quest only underscores its futility, since the person continues to seek self-definition outside of himself. The quest will continue thus for approximately one more decade.

Through the mid-1960s, filmmakers try out different variants of a unified world searching for new sources of harmony. In this respect, the end of the Thaw (or its dusk) presents a series of epilogues. We will now consider them.

The most paradoxical one, the one that is absolutely traditional for Soviet culture, we discover in the works of such different artists as Alov and Naumov, Tarkovskii and Khutsiev. But—and this is the paradox—it appears as a mirror reflection; it is turned 180 degrees. I am referring to the films *Peace to the One Who Enters* [Alov and Naumov. *Mir vkhodishchemu*, 1961], *My Name is Ivan*, and *I am Twenty* [Khutsiev. *Mne dvadtsat' let*, 1965]. Though varied, these films have one thing in common: the source and embodiment of harmony in these films is nature, whereas the social world appears to be chaotic. More precisely, the social is chaotic in those instances where the logic of natural life is ignored or simply excluded from human relations. We can trace how this occurs in Tarkovskii's film.

According to Tarkovskii's well-known statement, the permission to shoot the film coincided with the moment when he realized that his future film should be organized around the dreams of the young hero. This statement is very important for our discussion. Dreams are expressions, manifestations of unrealized incarnations, and signs of the indisputable incompleteness of man's existence in tangible reality. Meanwhile, the correlation between dreams and reality in Tarkovskii's film offers one more inversion: reality assumes the capricious force of nightmares, whereas a natural, normal setting appears only in Ivan's dreams.

It was not Tarkovskii who discovered the apocalyptic, war-torn landscape for Soviet film. The link to the aesthetics of the war scenes from *The Cranes are Flying* was already clear to its contemporaries (in her article "On the Clichés of the Audiences Upbringing," Zorkaia ironizes the clichés statements: "birch trees—that's Urusevskii"). It would be strange, though,

if Tarkovskii and Iusov had experienced *The Cranes are Flying* without noticing.

The point, however, is that the authors of *My Name is Ivan* take the same effect further. In their film, nature is not simply crippled by the war; rather, it is used as building material for the war. Urusevskii's birch trees here become logs for dugouts, shelters, bridges, etc. and all these structures are temporary, shaky and unsteady. Murdered trees cast a shadow of death over the entire world. This is why any attempt to display genuine human feeling here is doomed. The entire film is constructed on the inevitability of such a sense of disruption: the meeting of Captain Kholin and the nurse Masha in the birch grove and their embrace on the bridge built out of birch trees and stretching over a deep ditch—an abyss; Masha and Lieutenant Gal'tsev's relationship; and the unfinished song from the Shaliapin record. (The song, "Do not take Masha to the other side of the river," is about unfulfilled love and the passage across the river suggests marriage.) In this context, the apogee of the un-natural is an image of the child-warrior. This war takes Ivan out from the world of nature, to which he is organically joined, and thus handicaps his essence, his nature.

In the final analysis, the apocalyptic war landscape in *My Name is Ivan* is not so much an image of the outside world as it is one of the inner world—and here lies its originality. The idyllic landscapes of "dreams," in contrast, turn out to be externalized and separated from the characters. Quotation marks are necessary here because all of the plot's reality is built on the logic of a horrifying dream, on the logic of a nightmare—a nightmare of separation. It is based on the logic of a child's unconscious fear of entering the world from his mother's womb. Such a vision determines a sharp graphic contrast between the irregular, broken lines of the war landscape and the roundness of apples that seem to contain in themselves the harmonious wisdom of natural forms (which is not surprising for Tarkovskii who admired Dovzhenko's *Earth* [1930]).

In a certain way, *My Name is Ivan* provides an answer (and a negative one) to the symbolic frame, which opened *Peace to the One Who Enters*: the green spout having found its way from the freshly chopped down gravestone cross. In *My Name is Ivan*, the chopped down birches cannot grow. Life, from which nature has been exiled, is doomed; it is no longer life in the full sense of the word. A new life, which in Alov and Naumov's film is generated amidst the chaos of war, here, in the space of *My Name is Ivan*, cannot exist. The possibility of re-emergence or re-vitalization is not at all denied, but it has no place in Tarkovskii's film. *My Name is Ivan*, not so much exhausted this illusion, but, rather, pulls it out through antitheses. This is why Tarkovskii's debut became a revelation: he destroyed all illu-

sions that the Soviet war film could continue on its traditional path. *My Name is Ivan* clarified the logic of the existence of the main character from *Peace to the One Who Enters*—the shell-shocked soldier, Iamshchikov, whose role Viktor Avdiushko played with remarkable power and precision, more in the style of Tarkovskii than that of Alov and Naumov. It is no coincidence that Iamshchikov continuously distances himself from the film's world. His point of view belongs to the "other-world," just as Ivan's dreams do. He, Iamshchikov, is the most natural character in Alov and Naumov's film, but he is likened to the scorched black tree that stands on the river's edge in Ivan's dreams, for the war has completely scorched Iamshchikov's soul. The natural has no place in the world of social chaos, the world that does not take into consideration nature as an independent realm.

The filmmakers question the main postulate of socialist culture while remaining strictly within its limits: the supremacy of the social over the natural, the subordination of the natural to the social. It is not an accident that in *My Name is Ivan* the central myth of this culture—the child-hero as the main hypostasis of the new, totally socialized person—becomes the incarnation of culture's unnatural make up. In this sense it is possible to say that *My Name is Ivan* concentrated in itself not extra-natural but hyper-natural existence with all of its horrors and nightmares, the mode of existence proposed by this cultural system as the ideal mode of life. The very existence of these films, therefore, points to the question of a new ideal. The question was soon answered—by Khutsiev.

It is interesting that the long path—from the beginning of filming in 1961 to its appearance on the screen, from *Lenin's Guard* [*Zastava Il'icha*, 1962; restored 1988] to *I am Twenty* (it was under this title that the film was released in 1965)—redefined Khutsiev's work. From an early sign of new cinema it became the closing statement of an era. Films influenced by Khutsiev's film appeared prior to his work, for example, Georgii Daneliia's and Vadim Derbenev's first films *I Walk Around Moscow* and *Journey into April* [*Puteshestvie v april'*], respectively, were released as early as 1963. And possibly this prolonged production period gave Khutsiev's film a fullness that made it a farewell to the great Soviet utopia.

Khutsiev's film is a complete merger of the social and natural: an apotheosis of Thaw freedom, a kind of socialist paganism. The protagonist feels himself a drop in the free-flowing "stream of everyday life." It is telling that the milestones along this path are marked as the change of seasons. The city turns out to be a variant of the cosmos in its comprehensiveness. The pathos of blending with life's flow triumphs in *I am Twenty*. This pathos is related to one of the most stable literary traditions of the

1960s, where Okudzhava's Moscow streets are compared to rivers, and Iurii Trifonov's wise and bitterly stoic last novel *Time and Space* [*Vremia i mesto*] concludes with the phrase: "Moscow surrounds us like a forest. We have traversed it. Everything else has no meaning." This self-reflection is a way of penetrating into a general harmony of a society renewed by the 20th Party Congress; it is a society based on the significance of the unity of both elements—the social and the natural. Such is the initial feeling from the film. The fellow-traveler-films listed above convey this atmosphere in crystallized form. Unsurprisingly, the leitmotif of Daneliia's film—also based on a screenplay by Gennadii Shpalikov appropriately titled *I Walk Around Moscow* (in other words, the flow of streets and rivers is directly stated as the dominant element of the plot)—came from the words of the song "Everything goes well" ["Byvaet vse na svete khorosho"].

In my opinion, the cinematic utopian tradition of the early 1930s triumphs here in a redefined form. This is the tradition of Raizman's *Pilots*, Barnet's *On the Shores of the Blue Sea*, or Room's *A Strict Youth*. In place of the overtly artificial signs of the future, which, however, shows its small size in the present, one can see semi-documentary footage of everyday life, though filmed through a poetic lens. As in the cinema of the 1930s, we see the poetry of a flowing together with natural elements.

Without losing its mobility, the camera in these films, Urusevskii's camera, seeks out shots where there is a more balanced rhythm, movement, and wise measurement. The wealth of details does not make the rhythm any more hectic: the main thing in this diversity is precisely its unity; in this diversity the camera comes to know the pleasure of commonality. The film *Lenin's Guard* was conceived as a celebration of the recognition of this unity, and it is not an accident that three young people going through the entire history of the Soviet Union should have become the major symbol.² It was also not a coincidence that the shooting of Khutsiev's film started with scenes of the May 1st Parade.

The scene of the May Day Parade, which is the culmination and apotheosis of Khutsiev's picture, is unique in Soviet film, though, at the same time, it is poignantly recognizable.

Our national cinematographic tradition knows two types of mass scenes: the crowd as a chaotic pulsing organism, vulnerable in its spontaneity and naturalness (the scene on the Odessa steps in *Battleship Potemkin*); and the organized mass—an instrument of the reconstruction of the world—which strives for the clear geometric form. In Khutsiev's work, this constant pulsation is an indication of the *intellect* of the mass, which exists through its involvement in and merger with the flow of life. This is the pathos of self-motivated life finally understood by the masses.

It is in this sense that *I am Twenty* may be called the last example of Soviet cinematographic utopia. It is significant that, apart from the voice-over reading of Pushkin's lines, the film lacks any cultural signs of the pre-revolutionary past. Rather, one is surrounded by the signs of Soviet culture. If it is possible to talk here about the past, then this is the past of the first years after the Revolution. It is not by accident that the scene of the May Day Parade features the image of the house built by Le Corbusier on Miasnitskaia Street. The building looks very modern during the Thaw: the legendary past turns into the near future.

Meanwhile, the dramatic fate of the film is not at all surprising; or, more precisely, it is as surprising as it is predictable. For the film is completely permeated with an acute feeling of self-reflection, self-reflection that is as obvious as its subject is conventional. The process of the subject's separation from the world constitutes the latent, inner plot of the film, while on the surface the film celebrates the merger of the subject with the world, and the inability to explore this sense of separation verbally makes it all the more acute. As Andrei Shemiakin phrased it, 1960s film "still speaks, but has already said too much." From the beginning to the end of the film space becomes less and less dense, it is not a feeling, but, rather, an anticipation of rarefaction. The vacuum emerging around the protagonist, demands to be filled with something not yet known to him.

With what?

With one's own personality.

If individuality may sense and realize itself in *others*, personality can be realized only in the privacy of one's own self.

The genius and paradox of Khutsiev's film is in the "documentary" texture of the world that surrounds the hero. This texture creates the effect of lyrical subjectivity—it is precisely this pure subjectivity that affected viewers. The characters believe that they look at the world, while in fact they see themselves, and only themselves.

They see, but do not recognize themselves.

Self-recognition turns catastrophic in the director's next work—*July Rain [Iiul'skii dozhd', 1967]*—when it is discovered that the place of the Highest Meaning remains empty and vacant. The inner and outer worlds refuse to coincide. The existing tradition is not sufficient: it does not exist anymore. Even the experience of the fathers cannot be transferred to the generation that grew up after the war because the fathers will forever remain younger than the sons that survived them. The heroes of *I am Twenty* define their experience as the doom of solitude. It is for this reason that after the three friends' final passage, which crowns the film, the camera all of a sudden concentrates on the fellow, who, having lit his cigarette

from the hero's, runs off into the crowd in an energetic rhythm unusual for the film. It is this shot that concludes the film, as though anticipating a new time with new heroes.

Cinema did not delay in tracing the contours of this new hero; this took place in Evgenii Grigor'ev's wonderful screenplay *Ordinary Guys, or To Die Behind A Machine Gun* [*Prostye parni, ili Umeret' za pulemetom!* 1966], which then became Mark Osep'ian's famous film *Three Days of Viktor Chernyshev* [*Tri dnia Viktora Chernysheva*]. Grigor'ev's screenplay offers a direct answer to Khutsiev's film, concluding with the phrase, "It was Tuesday—the second day of the work week" ["Byl vtornik—vtoroi den' rabochei nedeli"]. "It was Monday—the first day of the work week" ["Byl ponedel'nik—pervyi den' rabochei nedeli"] is the last line from Gennadii Shpalikov's screenplay for *Lenin's Guard*. The energy of Grigor'ev's protagonist, who identifies himself entirely with the world, completely lacks any sense, except a destructive one. His life's credo—"be like everyone else"—reveals its deficiency. Viktor Chernyshev is a person who fully corresponds to objective reality, but who is the complete opposite of Khutsiev's lyrical hero.

One may say that Khutsiev works with characters at the level of their individuality, considering it—quite in the spirit of the time—as a completely self-sufficient concept. However, the major focus here is on the ripening of individuality when there is no ground for such an individuality to grow.

The following is one of the most characteristic features of Khutsiev's film: for the most part, he invited completely unknown actors—debut performers and film industry workers who were not professional actors. That is to say, Khutsiev shoots "film youth," taken as "people of their time," as representative types. This is how the original audience was supposed to relate to these characters (and apparently did). For today's researcher, or even simply for an educated viewer, this is a film that features Nikolai Gubenko, Stanislav Liubshin, Andrei Tarkovskii, Andron Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii, Natal'ia Riazantseva, and Pavel Finn. "Individuality" as a new type in these instances appears to be simply a pseudonym or a euphemism for "personality" (*"lichnost'"*). An unintended effect, which nonetheless turned out to be inevitable, was that people of distinct individualities were invited to play typical characters representative of the era, but in the future this typicality would anticipate an intense personal drama.

This is to say that the original idea behind the film's poetics was rejected in the course of time. Or perhaps the initial idea of the film is pushed to its limit. In the final analysis, time eventually transforms itself from material to co-author of the work, thus demonstrating its own social,

historical-cultural, non-material nature. Before us is an unexpected and unsurpassed example of molding *historical* time.

For, in fact, film stock imprints not so much natural cyclical changes, which are not changes at all because the cycle is about repetition, but social changes. This is the actual meaning of imprinted reality: material reality on the screen unavoidably appears as the world of cultural reality and as a historical document. And the natural phenomenon—the way it is filmed and perceived—is also transformed into cultural reality. For this reason, in the final instance, films of the 1960s documented a cultural evolution of social consciousness.

In 1964, the film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* [Paradzhanov, *Teni zabytykh predkov*] appeared with the force of a sensation on movie screens around the world. This film was fated to become not just a new beginning but a leap onto a new level within this collision. Paradzhanov discovered and articulated in his film the idea that cinema had tried to grasp since its advent: in the presence of man, nature itself becomes culture. Having opened for world cinema the patriarchal sanctuary—the Culture of Huzuls³—the filmmaker created an image of the world where man cannot separate himself from nature, where nature is experienced like a constant presence in communal life. The generative power of nature is parallel to the regeneration of humans' kin. Prior to the writing of the story on which the film is based, the author (a wonderful early 20th century Ukrainian prose writer and a friend of Gorkii's—Mikhail Kotsiubinskii) scrupulously studied folk demonology. In this preserve of archaic culture, a person is surrounded by the spirits of trees, of animals, of water, of fire, etc. Daily interaction with them is like daily interaction with neighboring relatives: some of these spirits are dangerous, others are friendly, but it would not occur to anyone to get rid of the spirits or to try to gain distance from them. Nature in Sergei Paradzhanov's film is shot precisely in the way that the film's characters perceive it. It is not an accident that the director got the local people, the Huzuls, actually involved in the process of filming; the film's imagery was adjusted based on their reaction to the filming process. It is not unlike the dwellers of Iares'ka village, who participated in the creation of Dovzhenko's masterpiece *Earth*.

From this come the emphatically decorative nature sequences, which echo the abundantly displayed multi-colored ritual masks in the film. This is the origin of the tradition of *lubok* landscapes that established itself in the future works of Ukrainian "poetic cinema." This tradition owes its existence not just to Paradzhanov's films, but to his creative energy.

The meaning of the film, or of its literary source, is not exhausted by its ethnographic sketch, even an inspired one. Mikhailo Kotsiubinskii, a

liberal writer and a remarkable expert of peasant life, was at the same time a man of the modern era. In his “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” two perceptions intersect. One originates in the folk material, which the writer infused with life. The second perspective is the vantage point of an outsider; it is the point of view of one of both Gorkii’s and Symbolist’s contemporaries.

The immediate impetus for the creation of the story came from writers’ impressions of a Huzul funeral ceremony that included not only orgiastic dances over the body of the deceased, but also the actual use of the body as a ceremonial effigy. While interpreting this ceremony as life overcoming death, civilized man’s consciousness cannot avoid sensing blasphemy (from a modern point of view) for having danced over the dead and thus involuntarily desecrated individuality. But for archaic consciousness, individuality as an issue or as a concept simply doesn’t exist: the pre-individual collective triumphs over everything. This sense of collectivity—exposed in its daily routine and captured fortuitously by the artist—shocks [the audience] as something magical, hypnotic, and fundamentally alien.

For this reason the main hero of Kotsiubinskii’s film turns out to be not a “typical representative” of the clan, but rather a misfit, an eccentric, or a poet, who could not forget his beloved despite the entire tradition of his clan, where relationships between men and women tend to be geared solely toward reproduction and the continuation of the family line. (From this tradition originates the orgiastic dance over the body of the deceased, which is likened to a magical resurrection.)

Therefore the film’s idea, in effect, is like a flash of lightning (to which Kotsiubinskii, incidentally, compares human life in the elegiac finale of his short story). The film represents the pre-individual world from the point of view of individual consciousness—as Lev Anninskii remarked at the end of the 1960s.⁴

The film’s metaphorical system, which abundantly and energetically uses folk symbolism, is not identical to that of folk culture. On the contrary, with every new frame folk symbols acquire new meanings that conform to a particular, singular, and individual human fate. It is precisely this meaning that gives the film’s images their lyrical content, full of inspiration and dark poetry. Communal meaning is replaced by a meaning of profound individuality. Everyday objects and cult objects evolve before our very eyes into poetic images.

In essence, Paradzhanov constructs his entire metaphorical system on this processing of folk imagery through individual consciousness. The world separates itself from man, it becomes alien and exterior to a person precisely because the hero discovers his *own inner* world. Within the epic

world of the film, where time does not exist, the film's protagonist all of a sudden discovers the *past*. He acquires memory, which, as Pasternak notes, begins a new, Christian culture.

In place of the conflict between natural and social, natural and cultural, there appears the conflict between collective and individual consciousness, represented as a dialogue between two cultures: pagan culture and Christian culture. The hero of Paradzhanov's film is the first true Christian in an entirely pagan world. The latent ripening of his individuality condemns him to solitude; though he doesn't understand it, he can feel it very acutely. (It is no coincidence that in the middle of the film there is an episode titled "Solitude," the culmination of the hero's internal exile, when he digs a grave for himself in a Jewish cemetery.) Everything in the world for him now hides some secret meaning, a meaning that is alien and, therefore, threatening. The origin of everything is the exodus from nature.

A lot has been written about the use of color in this film. Suffice it to say that the light tone of the first episodes' landscapes is gradually replaced by the landscapes of the dismal dusk. Yet, it is precisely in these darker landscapes that the scenery acquires power and mystery. Here, for the first time, man defines himself in relation to nature, and not to the other clan, as he would if he were still part of the archaic consciousness. From here comes the poignant feeling of the antagonism between the spirit and the flesh in Paradzhanov's film. The world of flesh strives to force the already ripening soul out of the film, to put a spell on it as in the scene of the funeral ceremony, which had such an impact on Kotsiubinskii. It is namely this scene that is developed into the strikingly powerful closure of the film.

Notice, however, that while this episode includes a *pagan* ceremony, it is called "Pieta"—the wailing over Christ's body. And the ritual concludes not with the whirlwind of bodies spinning in an insane dance over the corpse, but with children's faces in the windows reminiscent of the images of angels. It is in precisely this way, surrounded by angels, that Sayat-Nova departs in Paradzhanov's next film *The Color of Pomegranate* [*Tsvet granata*, 1968].

Paradzhanov's *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* thus concluded the previous stage of Soviet film history and delineated the directions for its development in the following period. After this film, the major concern of cinematography—a concern not just sensed, but fully realized—is the issue of individual consciousness.

Translated by Dawn A. Seckler

NOTES

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1. It is characteristic that *Alitet Leaves for the Hills*, a film about how Chukchi men imagined Lenin, is completely devoid of any type of reference to Stalin. The legend suggests that Beria once remarked: "It does not occur that two *suns* appear in the sky, remember this comrade Donskoi" (emphasis added).
2. This marks continuity in the cinematic tradition: from the three friends in *Maxim's Youth* to those in *Great Life*, from songs about the three tank drivers ("The Tractor Drivers") all the way to the three main characters from Kalik's film *Goodbye Boys!*, in which the device is laid bare—corresponding scenes from *Maxim's Youth* play in the movie theater.
3. *Trans. note.* A Huzul is a Ukrainian inhabitant of the Carpathian region.
4. In this respect, the predecessor of Paradzhanov is, obviously, not Dovzhenko, but Mark Donskoi with his *Rainbow* and *At Great Cost* (a film adaptation of another story by Kotsiubinskii). Anninskii, L. *Shestidesiatniki i my*. M., 1991. 134-37.

