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CAMERAWORK:

SOVIET FILM EXPERIENCE AND VISUAL POETICS AFTER STALIN

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## ABSTRACT

Camerawork: Soviet Film Experience and Visual Poetics after Stalin

Zdenko Mandušić

When Nikita Khrushchev, on the last day of the Twentieth Communist Party Congress in February of 1956, specifically invoked the use of films in creating a varnished image of Soviet reality and fashioning Stalin's "cult of personality," he articulated a fundamental crisis in Soviet cinema. Khrushchev's 'Secret Speech' suddenly forced filmmakers and the entire film industry to reexamine their treatment of official ideology and the means by which Soviet films sought to convey meaning to viewers. In response to this challenge, new Soviet films introduced stylistic changes, which were conceptualized in similar and sometimes even identical terms by competing rhetorical frameworks, promoting a range of specific aesthetic and political expectations concerning film production and reception. Confronting the competing production practices and discursive frameworks of Soviet cinema during the Thaw, this dissertation studies how film style of this period was successively redefined to advance distinct modes of film experience in relation to the new ideological demands. Based on extensive archival research, I bring a detailed account of film technique into relation with film discourse of the Thaw, correlating the visual strategies of post-Stalinist Soviet cinema with the different ways filmmakers, critics, and even administrators imagined audiences and their engagement with films.

The chapters are organized chronologically to cast into relief the development of film style and of the terms in which it was described in public discourse. Chapter 1 analyzes the early co-directed films of Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov, *Pavel Korchagin* (1956) and *Wind* (*Veter*, 1958), as models of the search for new, visually expressive strategies. Focusing on the handheld

camerawork of Sergei Urusevskii in *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, Mikhail Kalatozov, 1957) and *The Unsent Letter* (*Neotpravlennoe pis'mo*, Kalatozov, 1959), chapter 2 considers how new film technologies were exploited in innovative stylistic techniques and conceptualized within a semantic field of immersive film experience. Chapter 3 examines how camera movement was used in *Ilich's Gate* (*Zastava Il'icha*, Khutsiev 1964/1988) to present a new, more sincere vision of the Moscow urban landscape. Chapter 4 studies Andrei Konchalovskii's *The Story of Asia Kliachina, Who Loved but Did Not Marry* (*Istoriia Asi Kliachinoi, kotoraiia liubila da ne vyshla zamuzh*, Konchalovskii, 1967/1988) as a model of the documentary style in Soviet cinema of the 1960s. As case studies, these four chapters provide a basis for interrogating the changing valences of "realism," from socialist realism through a Soviet version of neo-realism. In the dissertation's conclusion, I return to the broader historical context and review how visual strategies of Thaw cinema presented the new cultural values as sensual film experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

On February 25, 1956, when Nikita Khrushchev officially criticized Stalin at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, he repeatedly cited the complicity of Soviet cinema in the veneration of the leader's cult of personality. Even though Khrushchev also named other offending forms of cultural production, like novels and historical studies, he specifically indicted films for creating a false image of Soviet history and society, and for promoting an idealized image of the leader:

Let us recall the film *The Fall of Berlin*. In it only Stalin acts, issuing orders in a hall in which there are many empty chairs... And where is the military command? Where is the Politburo? Where is the Government? What are they doing, and with what are they engaged? There is nothing about them in the film. Stalin acts for everybody, he does not reckon with anyone. He asks no one for advice. Everything is shown to the people in this false light. Why? In order to surround Stalin with glory, contrary to the facts and contrary to historical truth.<sup>1</sup>

These pronouncements provoked an aesthetic crisis in Soviet cinema, articulating a profound mistrust in the medium's capacity to convey truth and elicit appropriate emotions. Implicating the entire film industry, Khrushchev's indictment forced filmmakers, administrators, and critics to reexamine the treatment of reality in Soviet films, the viewer's relationship to the screen, and the means by which Soviet films sought to convey meaning. In order to promote Soviet cinema as a means of revising cultural norms, films produced after the Twentieth Party Congress would have to transform how viewers related to moving images.

Khrushchev's indictment of Soviet cinema criticized an industry that was then slowly recovering from the moribund years of late Stalinism. In the late-Stalinist period, Soviet cinema had nearly collapsed. Compared to the 150 film productions per year during the 1920s, between

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jay Leyda's *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film*, Third edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 399.

1945 and 1953, the industry produced only 185 feature films in total. After eighteen films were produced in 1949, and ten in 1950, only nine feature films were produced in 1951 across the entire Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Some changes were already underway inside the Soviet film industry at the time of Khrushchev's speech. Toward the end of 1954, the Ministry of Culture indicated that films could warmly and sympathetically deal with complex film characters, exposing their weaknesses and revealing the complexity of human emotion within the larger social context.<sup>3</sup> The sixth Five-Year Plan, announced in 1955 for the years 1956 to 1960, committed substantial funding for the repair and expansion of studio facilities and equipment, the enlargement of existing cinemas and the construction of new ones. While the financial investment was much needed and the official approval was welcomed, the aesthetic crisis Khrushchev announced in his Secret Speech could not be fixed by additional funding alone. In addition to new resources, Soviet cinema required new themes and new stylistic strategies. There was a need to revise how films depicted social conditions, Communist ideology, and everyday reality.

Khrushchev's speech unintentionally validated Andre Bazin's critique of postwar Soviet cinema and its idolization of Stalin. Although Soviet critics would go on to robustly criticize the "monumental style" of late-Stalinist cinema, Bazin, writing in 1950, was among the first to warn about how postwar Soviet cinema was representing historical reality, contemporary figures, and world events. Referring to three recent Soviet films, *The Vow* (*Kliatva*, Mikhail Chiaureli, 1946), *The Third Blow* (*Tretii udar*, Igor Savchenko, 1948), and *The Battle of Stalingrad* (*Stalingradskaia bitva*, Vladimir Petrov, 1949), Bazin wrote: "I wouldn't necessarily deny Stalin the personal and historical merits these films attribute to him, but what I would object to, with slight reservation, is

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<sup>2</sup> This period was known as *malokartin'e* ("cineanemia"). See-Margolit, Evgenii. "Kinematograf epokhi 'malokartin'ia'." in *Pervyi vek nashogo kino: entsiklopediia: fil'my, sobyt'ia, geroi, dokumenty* (Moskva: Lokid-Press, 2006), pp. 352.

<sup>3</sup> Woll, Josephine, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 8.

that the image of Stalin presented as ‘real’ conforms exactly to what the myth of Stalin would have him be—to what would be useful for him to be.”<sup>4</sup> At the center of Bazin’s concern is the ontological nature he ascribed to film, whereby “a cinematic reconstitution of Stalin, especially when it is centered on him, is enough to define forever his place and meaning in the world—enough to fix his essence irrevocably.”<sup>5</sup> Film’s relationship to reality, the fact that “the cinematic image is other, seeming completely superimposable with reality,” made late-Stalinist cinema not just manipulative through the perpetration of falsehoods, but perilous because of the way these cinematic depictions of Soviet history and of Stalin gave ontological weight to historical myth and ideological fantasy. Even if Bazin was not an authority on Soviet cinema, and the historical context of his article “The Stalin Myth in Soviet Cinema” is the struggle to create a socialist France, Bazin’s critique resonates profoundly with Khrushchev’s, pointing to a juncture of academic disciplines this project embraces, a juncture joining the study of regional cultures to the field of cinema studies. Notwithstanding the cultural specificity of this project, its questions regarding the significance ascribed to features of cinema within a particular culture and particular historical period stretch beyond regional boundaries toward the practice of film history.

In the aftermath of Khrushchev’s challenge to Soviet cinema, new films presented stylistic innovations that dramatically altered the relationship between viewer and screen. The relaxation of control over culture following Stalin’s death made it possible for an increasing number of Soviet filmmakers to advance new aesthetic techniques. These innovations were promoted as contrasts to the “varnished” representations of reality and grandiose pomp of late-Stalinist films.

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<sup>4</sup> Bazin, Andre, “The Stalin Myth in Soviet Cinema”, in *Movies and Methods*, Volume II, Bill Nichols, Ed. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Bazin, p. 39.

Focusing on Soviet films from the 1950s and 1960s, this dissertation studies how visual strategies of the post-Stalinist Thaw were understood to produce more intimate experiences, more sincere representations of individuals, and more authentic depictions of Soviet reality. Asserted as claims to greater realism, the new professions of intimacy, sincerity, and authenticity represented qualities perceived to be in direct opposition to late-Stalinist epic visions of history and grandiose depictions of individual leaders. I argue these qualities were asserted as affective and discursive frameworks, generated as part of the industry-wide effort to revive and de-Stalinize Soviet cinema. Through case studies focusing on select films, my dissertation delineates how similar and sometimes identical terms were applied to quite distinct models of film experience, thus revealing underlying aesthetic and political expectations concerning the cinematic representation of reality.

## **I. The Organization of Soviet Cinema**

The aesthetic developments and critical debates regarding Soviet films of the Thaw transpired within the stratified bureaucracy of the post-Stalinist Soviet film industry. The regimented structure of this system included multiple stages at which film productions had to be reviewed and could be censored if necessary from the point of inception at studios to the final approval for release from the Ministry of Culture. On the ground level of film production, the larger Soviet studios, like Mosfilm in Moscow, Lenfilm in Leningrad, and Dovzhenko Film Studio in Kiev, were organized into production units (*tvorcheskie ob"edineniia*), usually headed by a senior film director. Republican studios like Kirgizfilm essentially consisted of single production units. Each creative unit clustered together crews who proposed projects following the studio's thematic plans. Every stage of film production was comprehensively reviewed and discussed within the creative unit and at the level of the studio as a whole. Script-editorial boards read and evaluated

drafts of the scenario.<sup>6</sup> Artistic Councils (khudozhestvennyye sovety), composed of studio employees and Party members, supervised the making of films, discussing approved scripts, rushes and finished films, prescribing changes and determining whether scripts could go into production, as well as deciding whether films were finished and should be submitted to the State Film Committee. Since the mid-1930s, the principal means for intervention and control over film productions was the script. Writers were forced to produce multiple versions of scripts in response to the artistic council's reviews and criticism. If scripts were satisfactorily revised, directors would be allowed to develop shooting scripts (rezhisserskii stsenarii), which, if approved, became binding—it was referred to as a “steel scenario” (zheleznyi stsenarii)—meaning the director was obliged to follow closely the vetted text, not changing a single word or technical specification (shot type, shot length, etc.) without explicit permission.<sup>7</sup>

During the Thaw, the artistic council's reviews of scripts, rushes and finished films presented some of the main venues where competing discourses and production practices were articulated and disputed. Another site of discourse was the post-screening discussion organized under the auspices of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers (Soiuz kinematografistov SSSR), founded in 1957. Outside of the studio context, these latter discussions were more open and brought together a more diverse public, including directors, writers, cinematographers, actors, and visiting filmmakers. Conferences organized by the union, especially those of the body's organizing committee, served as an important gauge for the reception of new themes and visual strategies in Soviet cinema. These multi-day events included long discussion sessions where mostly critical views of new developments were articulated. The proceedings of these conferences

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<sup>6</sup> Woll, Josephine. *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Kenez, Peter, “Soviet Cinema in the Age of Stalin” in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, Eds. (New York: Routledge, 1963), p. 61.

would be covered both in the main trade journal *Iskusstvo kino* (Film Art) and by general newspapers, disseminating the discourse over Soviet cinema of the Thaw to the larger public.

The Party, specifically the Central Committee, monitored the work of studios through a succession of institutions. Established on March 20, 1946, the Ministry of Cinema (Ministerstvo kinematografii SSSR) guided the work of Soviet studios up to Stalin's death. During the total reorganization of Soviet ministries in March 1953, the Ministry of Cinema was replaced by the Main Cinema Administration (Glavnoe upravlenie kinematografii), a branch of the newly established USSR Ministry of Culture. The reason subsequently provided for the institutional downgrade in status was that "ministerial amalgamation created the conditions both for greater 'mobilization of reserves' and for 'more precise coordination of interrelated production branches', avoiding 'duplication in the work of a number of ministries'."<sup>8</sup> Unsurprisingly, however, in the assertion of central political authority during the 1953 reorganization of Soviet ministries, the abolition of the Ministry of Cinema led to the reduplication of duties as elements of film administration were still spread across many Ministry of Culture departments.<sup>9</sup> In March 1963, in the wake of the scandal caused by Marlen Khutsiev's film *Ilich's Gate* (*Zastava Il'icha*), which was then still in production, the State Committee of Cinema (Gosudarstvennyi komitet po kinematografii) was established as a centralized administrative body to oversee all aspects of the film industry. Better known as Goskino, this committee was administered by the Ministry of Culture and was attached to the Council of Ministers. More centralized than prior arrangements, Goskino oversaw the production, distribution and exhibition of films, along with developing

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<sup>8</sup> Crowfoot, John and Mark Harrison, "The USSR Council of Ministers under Late Stalinism, 1945-1954: Its Production Branch Composition and the Requirements of National Economy and Policy", *Soviet Studies* 42:1 (1990), p. 48.

<sup>9</sup> Iakov Butovskii et al., "Istoriia gosudarstvennogo upravleniia kinematografom v SSSR", *Entsiklopediia otechestvenogo kino*. Accessed May 23, 2016.  
[http://2011.russiancinema.ru/index.php?dept\\_id=15&e\\_dept\\_id=6&text\\_element\\_id=55](http://2011.russiancinema.ru/index.php?dept_id=15&e_dept_id=6&text_element_id=55)

economic plans for the film industry and approving thematic plans submitted by studios.<sup>10</sup> This bureaucratic system closely bound the film industry to the political hierarchy; the chairman of Goskino from 1963 to 1973, Aleksei Romanov, had previously chaired the propaganda department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party.<sup>11</sup> Under his direction, Goskino became increasingly involved in the production of films, passing judgment on proposed and completed films, specifying what changes were necessary before films could be released into production or released to the public. Goskino censored film content through departments like its own Script Editorial-Board, which reviewed scripts and detailed required changes.

The Soviet film industry produced an immense quantity of documents. Every stage of production and review was fully documented. Nearly all discussions were transcribed and saved. Along with these transcripts, a range of other documents, including productions reports, assessments, financial reports, and correspondence between the production crews and studios, and between the studios and Goskino were all preserved and archived. The Russian State Film Archive (Gosfil'mofond), The Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts (RGALI), and the individual studio archives house vast troves of documents, which detail film production, planning, and administration. The obsessive production and archivization of textual records has not only made possible a detailed history of the Thaw-era discourse around film; they also point to the central position of verbal discourse in the production of films.

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<sup>10</sup> Here “thematic plans” refers to proposals submitted by individual studios to produce a specific quantity and proportion of genres/topics of films, such as films marking the 20th anniversary of the end of World War II.

<sup>11</sup> Woll, Josephine, *Reel Images*, p. 6.

## **II. Cinematography and Camera Techniques**

Films of the Thaw period represent a return to visual expressiveness and compositional dynamism relinquished starting in the 1930s during Soviet cinema's transition to synchronous audio-visual filming and as part of the increasing political emphasis on making cinema accessible to millions. To create more prosaic and accessible forms of narrative, dialogue was privileged to reveal the psychology of individual characters. Simplified visual styles, associated with greater realism and precision, were required by these coinciding developments in policy and technology. If during the 1930s and 40s the camera operator was either confined to soundproof booths or constrained otherwise to work with unassuming or invisible visual strategies, during the Thaw period cinematography regained a prominent position. Techniques such as handheld camera shots, extended pans, and tracking shots, as well as striking camera angles and the use of wide-angle lenses to exaggerate depth became distinctive features of Thaw film style. These techniques altered the visual address of Soviet cinema, marking a fundamental stylistic shift away from presenting the psychology of characters toward the production of film experiences based on sensory impressions and the production of affective responses.

Another prominent aspect of Soviet cinematography during the Thaw was the use of black-and-white film stock. This quality of the Thaw film image depended on both institutional factors as well as stylistic choices on the part of filmmakers. The Main Cinema Administration and later Goskino were empowered to decide whether a film was going to be made in black-and-white or color. Initially, after World War II, this choice was dependent on the availability of resources. Although the Soviet film industry had reached the two-color additive stage of film color's technological evolution prior to the war, after Germany's defeat Agfacolor film stock and the company's patents became spoils of war. These materials became the basis for the

development of what has come to be known as “Sovcolor”. According to Barry Salt, Sovoclor made many hues of color look muted and was incapable of producing an intense red.<sup>12</sup> These drawbacks gave Soviet color films a distinct visual appearance, which during the Thaw was associated with late-Stalinism. Due to Sovcolor’s limited range of color values and inconsistency from one batch of raw stock to another, a limited amount of Eastman Kodak negative color film stock was purchased with western currency and imported. Strictly rationed and highly prized, this film stock was allocated as a mark of favor reserved for projects preferred by industry administrators.<sup>13</sup> As a rule, films granted “highest category” and “first category” status were supplied with Eastman Kodak film stock. Less privileged filmmakers had the options of black-and-white film stock or Sovcolor. During the Thaw many filmmakers chose the former, perceiving black-and-white as “a signifier of reliability and truthfulness.”<sup>14</sup> As an aesthetic statement, filmmakers choosing monochromatic aesthetics during the Thaw mobilized the expressive graphic qualities of black-and-white photography as well as its associations with documentary filmmaking and the Soviet avant-garde film tradition.

In order to study how and to what end Thaw cinema privileged visual expression over narrative, this project follows recent endeavors to revise understandings of the development of Soviet cinema, which embrace a view of film as primarily a photographic phenomenon. With his detailed and edifying studies of cinematography from the pre-revolutionary and the early Soviet period, Philip Cavendish has led the way in this visual approach, which characterizes the film

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<sup>12</sup> Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 1992), p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Misek, “‘Last of the Kodak’: Andrei Tarkovsky’s Struggle with Colour” in *Questions of Colour in Cinema*, Wendy Everett and Axel Goodbody, Eds. (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 163.

<sup>14</sup> Irina Shilova, “Cherno-beloe kino”, *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, No. 32 (1996-97), p. 25-29.

image as bearing a “particular set of creative practices and aesthetic preferences”.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, the visual strategies of Soviet cinema are treated as “a delicate negotiation between a series of diverse and sometimes competing pressures, the most important and compelling of which lies in the relationship between the director and camera operator.”<sup>16</sup> Focusing on the visual style of Soviet cinema and its production, this approach emphasizes the important role of cinematographers, as well as illustrating how creative decisions negotiated by directors and camera operators produced the visual address of films and shaped the viewer’s experience. An additional benefit of this approach is to highlight the stature of cinematographers in Soviet film culture. In his scholarship Cavendish has demonstrated how early Soviet film press celebrated camera operators, especially those involved in the production of newsreels. Leading cameramen of the 1920s such as Andrei Moskvin, Iurii Zheliabuzhskii and Vladimir Nil’sen made significant contributions to film discourse. Together with Evgenii Mikhailov, his assistant on *The Overcoat* (*Shinel’*, Kozintsev and Trauberg, 1926), Moskvin contributed a chapter to Boris Eikhenbaum’s *Poetics of Cinema*, in which they claimed that the camera operator was ultimately responsible for giving expressive shape to dramatic ideas from the script. Both Zheliabuzhskii and Nil’sen published books, defining the work of camera operators as graphic art reliant upon their techniques of visual composition.

In popular discourse and the Soviet film press of the Thaw period, cinematographers and their work became increasingly frequent topics of articles in both *Film Art* (*Iskusstvo kino*) and the bi-weekly magazine *The Soviet Screen* (*Sovetskii ekran*). Along with occasional articles in the Ministry of Culture periodical *Soviet Culture* (*Sovetskaia kul’tura*), critics also began to publish monographs

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<sup>15</sup> Cavendish, Philip, *The Men with the Movie Camera: The Poetics of Visual Style in Soviet Avant-Garde Cinema of the 1920s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

about the visual style of new Soviet films. In articles discussing the work of cinematographers such as Sergei Urusevskii, Vadim Iusev, and Margarita Pilikhina, *Iskusstvo kino* promoted camera operators as creative artists rather than as technicians or craftsmen who executed the orders of others. Corresponding to the links between Thaw visual style and those of the Avant-Garde, the increasing attention to camera operators and their art in public discourse of the 1950s and 1960s revived a formerly robust aspect of film culture. Even if the leading camera operators of the Thaw did not stake out claims about cinematography by publishing their own texts, they participated in the discourse through interviews, lectures, and discussions. Writing about the new visual style of Thaw films was taken up by critics, among whom some of the best writers on cinematography were the contributors to *Iskusstvo kino* Maia Merkel' and Lidiia Dyko.

Along with providing contextual interpretations of specific visual strategies, Thaw-era writing on camerawork demonstrates the evolving discourse on visual style during the Thaw. For example, following the success of *The Cranes Are Flying* (1957) both in the Soviet Union and abroad, it became fashionable for Soviet films to include sequences with rapid handheld camera movement. In the October 1961 issue of *Iskusstvo kino*, Maia Merkel' took aim at this copycat trend, mobilizing the concepts of presence and participation to distinguish Urusevskii's work from that of his imitators.<sup>17</sup> As opposed to the visual style of Kalatozov and Urusevskii's film, which features handheld camera shots together with the use of drastic camera angles, expressive lighting, and rhythmic editing, subsequent filmmakers like Sergei Bondarchuk in *The Fate of a Man* (*Sud'ba cheloveka*, 1959) and Evgenii Tashkov's *Thirst* (*Zhazhda*, 1959) utilized handheld shots to convey the mental state of characters in films which otherwise lacked expressive cinematography. In this manner Merkel' defines both the specific qualities that differentiate

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<sup>17</sup> Mekerl', Maia. "Dolzhen li operator 'videt'?", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 10, 1961, p. 51-57.

Kalatozov and Urusevskii's visual strategy and the ways in which other Soviet filmmakers sought to reproduce the handheld camera aesthetic. Toward the end of the end of the 1960s, filmmakers Andrei Konchalovskii and Andrei Tarkovskii would separately express their shared disdain for shaky handheld camera shots, believing they interfered and distracted from film's capacity to create an impression of reality.<sup>18</sup> The shift in attitudes toward handheld camera shots presents not only the ebb and flow of stylistic trends, but also how production decisions made by filmmakers, both directors and camera operators, were tied to the qualities of the moving-image.

As part of correlating Thaw-era public discourse on cinematography with the close analysis of films and their visual strategies, I rely on quantitative methods of film analysis to consider time-related differences between shots and to chart the deployment of stylistic choices over the course of films. In this regard, my methodology has been shaped by the emerging measurement theory in film studies and specifically by my work with the software Cinematics. I utilize quantitative techniques and statistical data as a point of departure for the close analysis of how Thaw films were made and received. Combining the close analysis of visual composition and mise-en-scene with a numerate approach to film style makes it possible to consider the temporal elements of a film's visual address. Quantitative attributes, such as the length of shots, the reoccurrence of particular compositions, as well as shifts in the editing rate, provide reference points for the kind of film experience Thaw cinema provided Soviet viewers. Lying outside the semantic field of competing rhetorical frameworks, these attributes also help distinguish between the means of persuasion of various claims about Thaw film style and the actual qualities of stylistic elements.

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<sup>18</sup> See Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii, Andrei. "Nekotorye soobrazheniia po postanovke 'Pervogo uchitel'ia'", *Iskusstvo kino*, January 1967, p. 36-44, and Tarkovskii, Andrei, "Zapechatlennoe vremia", *Voprosy kinoiskusstva*, Vol. 10, 1967, p. 79-102.

### III. Film Experience

Through their visual address, films of the Thaw period revised the relationship between viewers and the screen, offering new forms of film experience in congruence with new cultural values. As a historical study of how cinema appeals to viewers and how this appeal was conceptualized in the Soviet Union of the 1950s and 1960s, this project presumes that a film's visual address is shaped by distinct historical and cultural contexts, which also influence how technology is perceived and mobilized in the filmmaking process. This project's historical approach to film experience emerges from successive developments in approaches and conceptualizations of spectatorship within film studies. Furthermore, in terms of the historical and/or cultural specificity of spectators and individual films this project takes into account the exchange between historically determined cultural politics of emotions that can influence viewer engagement and modes of representation shaped by historical and social developments.<sup>19</sup>

Since the 1970s and 1980s, the viewer's encounter with the screen and film's visual address have been central issues in response to the "apparatus theory". As articulated by Jean-Louis Baudry and Jean-Louis Comolli, the "apparatus theory" defined the spectator as a subject position aligned with the gaze of the camera through direct identification, "which acculturate[s] individuals to structures of fantasy, desire, dream, and pleasure that are fully of a piece with dominant ideology."<sup>20</sup> In response to this monolithic reading of spectatorship, film scholars developed several distinct approaches, endeavoring to account for differences in actual viewers (e.g. gender, race, social, class, historical) as well as the social and cultural forces shaping engagement with film and film technology. Embracing aspects of both the revisionist theories of

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<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of how spectatorship and affect studies rarely include investigations of such exchanges see Johannes von Moltke, "Sympathy for the Devil: Cinema, History, and the Politics of Emotion", *New German Critique*, Fall 2007, Vol. 34, No. 102, p. 17-43.

<sup>20</sup> Mayne, Judith, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 18.

spectatorship as well as important legacies from the apparatus theory, this project reads film experience as an interaction between the technologically produced cinematic visual address, the viewer's embodied encounter with the screen, and the articulated forms of the viewer-screen relationship. Included among this project's intellectual inheritance is the insistence from apparatus theory that movie technology must be considered in relation to the way that technology addresses the spectator.<sup>21</sup> Regarding the conceptualization of the spectator, film experience is here understood as an emergent, lived experience rooted in the human body, following the pioneering articulation of this position by Vivian Sobchack.<sup>22</sup>

Among the approaches that emerged in the wake of apparatus theory, new historical accounts of film and spectatorship sought to include not only the empirical gathering of facts, but also dialogue with theory. This project's focus on the historical specificity of the Post-Stalinist Soviet film experience descends from historical work on early cinema, which related its direct confrontation of viewers with visual shocks and appeals as well as the tendency to call attention to the act of display to the experience of industrial modernity.<sup>23</sup> I specifically follow Ariel Rogers' work on new movie technologies in locating cinematic experience "in the interplay among the movie on the screen, the viewer confronting it, and the social material configurations that inflect

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<sup>21</sup> Discussed in Rogers' *Cinematic Appeals*, p. 5, and originally stated in Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus", *Film Quarterly*, trans. Alan Williams, Vol. 28, No. 2, Winter, 1974-1975, p. 39-47.

<sup>22</sup> See Sobchack, Vivian, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and the Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> See Yuri Tsivian, *Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception*, Alan Bodger, Trans. (New York: Routledge, 1994), Tom Gunning, "The Whole Town's Gawking: Early Cinema and the Visual Experience of Modernity," *Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1994, p. 189-201; Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,'" *New German Critique*, No. 40, Winter 1987, p. 179-224.

how this encounter is understood and felt.”<sup>24</sup> This approach correlates textual modes of cinematic representation with the verbal discourses that surround the production and reception of films, “informing us how cinematic experience is framed within a given context, allowing us to glean the specific attitudes and assumptions that inflect cinema’s affective functioning in that context.”<sup>25</sup> In the context of the Post-Stalinist period in the Soviet Union, the historical approach to film experience interprets how Soviet filmmakers brought viewers to experience Post-Stalinist cultural values through the public discourse surrounding these films and the visual strategies developed by the filmmakers, both of which imagined ideal spectators.

In pursuit of historical precision, this project examines how concepts like intimacy, sincerity, and authenticity were used as part of institutional criticism and the discourse of publicity to describe and evaluate cinematic experience in Soviet cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. In studio discussions, at gatherings of the Union of Soviet Filmmakers, and on the pages of film journals, a reciprocal exchange transpired during the immediate post-Stalinist decades in which discourse and production informed each other. These exchanges shaped how critical and creative agents defined what cinema could and should do. Approaching film experience in this manner entails some conditions. On the one hand, each viewer’s experience with moving images can be distinguished within individual, cultural, and physical contexts. On the other hand, neither descriptions nor assertions regarding cinematic experience can account completely for all of the conditions and factors that constitute and shape the viewer’s encounter of moving images. Yet, if we focus on how the viewer’s encounter with the screen was modeled in often similar and

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<sup>24</sup> Rogers, Ariel. *Cinematic Appeals: The Experience of New Movie Technologies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

sometimes even identical terms, I argue, we can trace shifts in the perception of cinema's function in Soviet culture and society.

#### **IV. The Soviet Film Experience**

This project spans the academic fields of Russian Studies and Cinema and Media Studies. I draw on area studies to study the production of a specific, national cultural discourse. From film studies I take methods of analyzing specific works in the medium of moving images and the spectatorial experience they create. My research most directly intervenes in the study of Russian and Soviet cinema by considering the significance of the dialogue between filmmakers and critics as it locates aesthetic decisions, critical definitions, and constructions of the ideal viewer at the juncture of discourse, production, and reception. I approach the study of Russian and Soviet cinema by considering how filmmakers, theorists, and critics navigated aesthetic and political limits to develop and define new film techniques, which allowed viewers to experience moral principles centered on the individual's role in society.

A dominant framework for the study of Soviet cinema in the West has been the dichotomy between the 'totalitarian' framework of analysis and a 'revisionist' one. The former approach holds that the Soviet film industry was brought under the firm grip of the centralized state under Stalinism, crushing the Avant-Garde spirit of the 1920s as it forced filmmakers to produce pro-regime propaganda.<sup>26</sup> In contradistinction to the determinism of the 'totalitarian' approach, revisionist scholars, starting in the 1970s and 1980s, turned their attention to the developments in discourse as well as the policies that shaped the film industry and the production of films. This latter approach turned to the material culture, a methodological shift that was

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<sup>26</sup> The leading example of this approach is Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin*, 2nd ed. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001).

highlighted by the publication of *The Film Factory* collection, which brought together translations of newspaper and journal articles that charted the discourse on Soviet cinema up to 1945.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1990s, post-Stalinist cinema attracted attention as a period of film production whose dynamics challenged many of the ‘totalitarian’ suppositions about cinema in the Soviet Union. As scholars increasingly began to write about this period, the historiography of post-Stalinist cinema brought to the fore another dominant aspect of Soviet film studies. Often guided by an understanding of art as a reflection of society, studies of Soviet cinema frequently define films as only reflections of cultural and political tendencies, rather than as effective forces that produce sensory and cognitive experiences, enact cultural values, and inform the experience of reality. In Russia, the study of post-Stalinist cinema was inaugurated by the two-volume anthology *Cinema of the Thaw* (*Kinematograf ottepeli*, 1996), edited by Viktor Troianovskii.<sup>28</sup> Essays in this anthology read the cultural politics of the post-Stalinist era in the themes and styles of Thaw cinema, providing nuanced analysis of key signifiers like nature and contextualizing popular tropes like the generational conflict in the cultural history of this period. This ‘reflectionist’ approach was echoed in subsequent English-language scholarship on Thaw cinema. Josephine Woll’s survey of post-Stalinist films *Reel Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* presumes that the political context of this period shaped the production and reception of films.<sup>29</sup> After Woll, Aleksandr Prokhorov identified the continuation of certain, largely narrative, Stalinist artistic practices in Thaw films.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *The Film Factory: Russia and Soviet cinema in documents*, ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Troianovskii, Vitalii, ed. *Kinematograf ottepeli* (Kniga pervaiia. Moskva: Materik, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Woll, Josephine. *Reel Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Prokhorov, Alexander. *Unasledovannyi diskurs: paradigmy stalinskoi kul'tury v literature i kinematografe "ottepeli"* (Sankt-Peterburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2007.) This is an expanded version and a Russian translation of Prokhorov’s Ph.D. dissertation, originally written in English.

By no means without merit, the ‘reflectionist’ framework of these studies suggests that the politically influenced cultural context of a given period bluntly shapes reception of films in a top-down fashion. Such approaches assume that viewers see, comprehend, and internalize cultural values in a homogeneous fashion. The relationship between viewers and the screen, and the discourse on cultural values films represent is elided by such explanations. My project acknowledges the importance of these preceding studies, drawing especially on the work of Evgenii Margolit regarding the development of themes and motifs in post-Stalinist Soviet cinema. But, while heavily influenced by social and political developments following Stalin’s death in 1953, I argue that stylistic developments of this period demand attention for their transformation of cultural values into sensory experiences and the viewer’s encounter of these visual appeals to her senses. More recently Emma Widdis has initiated the study of how Soviet cinema in the 1920s and 1930s became a privileged site for the investigation of new models of sensory perception. Along with studying film experience in the Post-Stalinist period, my project expands Widdis’ approach to sensory experience by considering how the symbiotic relationship of discourse and production in the 1950s and 1960s allowed for competing production practices and discursive frameworks to confront each other, the development and contours of which requires historians to account for the give-and-take of the interrelationships among filmmakers, critics, audiences, and bureaucrats. In this regard, I supplemented my own research by drawing on published archival materials compiled by Valerii Fomin and his team at the Institute for Cinema Studies (NIIKINO). Fomin’s contextualization and expansive curation of documents (including letters, diary entries by film workers of the era, KGB and the Party Central Committee’s secret memos and reports, denunciations, as well as recollections of filmmakers, critics, and party functionaries) presents a model reconstructing the dense environment in which

films were produced, exhibited, and received. Together with my own archival studies, I excavated from the published materials the discursive frameworks that both imagined and inflected the Soviet viewer's experience of Thaw-period films.

## **V. Chapter Descriptions**

This dissertation is composed of four chapters focusing on select films and their contemporary reception. The first chapter analyzes the production and discourse surrounding *Wind* (*Veter*, Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov, 1958), defining this film and its reception as an event marking a paradigmatic shift in Soviet cinema, which came to favor cinematographic style over narrative and sound. Making their third historical-revolutionary film dedicated to communist youth, the young co-directors of *Wind* faced conflicting demands of tradition and stylistic and thematic innovation. In search of stylistic techniques that would resolve this conflict, Alov and Naumov re-inscribed avant-garde film strategies into Soviet cinematography. The co-directors turned to the archive of the avant-garde in search of means to affect viewers. The discourse over *Wind* and the film's visual style present affective and discursive frameworks for understanding developments in the Soviet film experience over the latter course of the Post-Stalinist Thaw into the subsequent Brezhnev freeze.

The second chapter "Participatory Cinema," correlates the handheld camerawork of Sergei Urusevskii in *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, Mikhail Kalatozov, 1957) and *The Unsent Letter* (*Neotpravlennoe pis'mo*, Kalatozov, 1959) with its alleged "presence effect" [*effect prisutstviia*]. This case study focuses on three main issues: the public discussion of Urusevskii's visual strategies, his own claims about the immersive experience of handheld shots, and the publicity for the new widescreen technology that also touted an ability to produce the sensation of being

absorbed into the moving image. In this manner, I trace how filmmakers and critics exploited and conceptualized technological and stylistic developments in response to the idea that viewers could be involved in the on-screen action in an enhanced illusion of participation. Whether on the personal level of the body or on a monumental one, these technologies were believed to intensify cinema's address to the senses, and the concepts of presence and participation were developed as new modes of realism.

Chapter Three analyzes the use of cinematographic techniques to achieve the affect of sincerity in films of the Thaw. Sincerity became one of the leading cultural values of the Thaw after Vladimir Pomerantsev inserted this concept into the Post-Stalinist cultural debate.<sup>31</sup> Pomerantsev's call for more sincerity in literature resonated with filmmakers who were interested in depicting contemporary Soviet individuals and delineating their relation to the broader community. Focusing on the film *Ilich's Gate* (*Zastava Il'icha*, Marlen Khutsiev, 1962; released in 1965 as *I am Twenty* [*Men dvadtsat' let*]), this chapter examines how camera movement and extended shot lengths were used to evoke sincerity and to present a new mobile vision of the Moscow urban landscape. With the inclusion of internal monologues, especially, this mobile vision appealed to viewers as a sincere view of historical conditions and Post-Stalinist Soviet reality.

The fourth chapter takes up the development of a documentary style in Soviet cinema of the 1960s. Over the course of that decade Soviet feature-length fiction films were increasingly discussed in terms of their perceived documentary qualities. What was described as the collision of fictional and factual interests was addressed with the abstract noun *dokumental'nost'* (sometimes *dokumentalizm*). Although no uniform definition was adopted, the appeal to veracity and

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<sup>31</sup> Vladimir Pomerantsev, "Ob iskrenosti v literature", *Novyi mir*, No. 12, 1953, p. 218-245.

authenticity through *dokumental'nost'* expressed a renewed engagement with the problem of how cinema could be used to provide accurate knowledge of the world. Soviet director Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii invoked this discourse during the production of his film about contemporary life on a collective farm, which came to be called *The Story of Asia Kliachina, Who Loved but Did Not Marry* (*Istoriia Asi Kliachinoi, kotoraiia liubila da ne vyshla zamuzh*). Focusing on Konchalovskii's production methods and the public discourse concerned with *Asia Kliachina*, this chapter interrogates the competing discourses over “documentary-ness” and how this aesthetic quality was invoked to define a developing brand of realism whose attested goal was to renew cinema's link to actual events, persons, and/or social conditions.

Following the case studies, the concluding section relates my project to wider intellectual frameworks. On the level of film's dialogue with culture, history, and social concerns, historicising Soviet film experience and the visual poetics after Stalin enables us to study how film and other aesthetic media are utilized to negotiate the relationship between individual and society. On the disciplinary level of film studies, studying the cinematic appeal of visual strategies and how film experience is conceived allows us to grapple with the history of film style, the history of the film industry, film's cultural history, and the history of cinema as technology.

CHAPTER ONE  
IN SEARCH OF NEW EXPRESSIVE MEANS

Co-directors Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov began work on *Wind (Veter, 1958)*, their third film about members of Komsomol, the All-State Leninist Young Communist League, with one image in mind—a wounded, young revolutionary passionately addressing a packed meeting hall. In their research on the history of Komsomol, Alov and Naumov had read that proceedings of the league’s inaugural congress in 1918 were interrupted suddenly on the fourth day when a wounded delegate was allowed to speak out of turn. Hailing from an unnamed southern region under the control of the White Army, the injured man was the only one to reach the conference from the territories of Russia not held by the Bolsheviks.<sup>1</sup>

This scene is represented at the end of *Wind*, when Fedor (Eduard Bredun), tottering on stage, addresses a packed hall of Komsomol delegates. Throughout this final sequence of the film, Fedor is framed from below in medium shot, the low angle making his bandaged figure still look imposing. He begins with a summary of the film’s plot, recounting his difficult path to Moscow, on which his friends were killed. Fedor’s would-be executioners, believing him dead, buried him alive. He was rescued by a Bolshevik patrol and brought to Moscow to fulfill his duty as a delegate to the Komsomol congress. In the final moments of the film he implores those present to pledge their loyalty and strength to the Leninist Young Communist League and the Revolution.

Inverting the chronological progression of plot, Alov and Naumov’s conception of *Wind* bases all of the travails represented in the film on this sentimental finale, where the presence of the battered young revolutionary at the congress is presented as a victory for the Bolshevik cause.

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<sup>1</sup> Anon. “Veter”, *Sovetskii ekran*, No. 14, 1958, p. 1.

As the film's point of origin, Fedor's address to the Young Communists requires the deaths of his comrades, so that his speech would be all the more poignant. *Wind's* fatalism is clear from the beginning. In the film's opening, an old Bolshevik dispatches Fedor and another delegate, the student Mitia (Aleksandr Dem'ianenko), to the Komsomol conference, with the calculation that "if one is killed the other can go on." With suspense mostly stripped from the plot, the appeal of unknown outcomes is replaced in *Wind* by a narrative of endurance, the result of which is to emphasize graphically the duress the Young Communists confront on their way to Moscow.

The production and reception of *Wind* was shaped by competing discourses about the nature of post-Stalinist Soviet cinema and art, specifically regarding the development of new styles. Following the implication of Soviet cinema in the development of Stalin's "cult of personality" at Twentieth Party Congress, there were calls for "bold initiative" [tvorcheskaia smelost'] and "artistic originality" [khudozhestvennoi original'nosti] to accomplish the work assigned art.<sup>2</sup> Despite these demands for ingenuity, artistic councils, film reviewers, and managers would check aesthetic originality and boldness in the years following Khrushchev's speech by citing previously accepted standards. Such conflicting demands set the stage both for a critical backlash against *Wind* as well as its redemption.

Even before it was released on March 18, 1959, *Wind* was heavily criticized for its visual style, with commentators describing the film's cinematographic qualities as *vychurnost'* ("mannerism"), *kinematograficheskoe barokko* ("cinematic baroque"), *nadryvnyi stil'* ("a painfully strained style") and *izslizhniaia postanovochnost'* ("excessive staginess").<sup>3</sup> For all the bombast of this criticism, it included a caveat that would redeem Alov and Naumov's mistakes. Charges of

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<sup>2</sup> Anon. "Uvelichenie proizvodstva fil'mov – vazhnaia gosudarstvennaia zadacha", *Iskusstvo kino*, February 1956, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Shchatsillo, D. quoted in Segida, Mirosława and Sergei Zemlianukhin, *Domashniaia sinemateka: otechestvennoe kino 1918-1996* (Moscow: Dubl'-D, 1996), 63.

formalist excess were tempered by claims that *Wind's* visual style resulted from the co-directors' search for new affective means of engaging the spectator. At a Union of Film Workers discussion of the film, production artist Vladimir Egorov claimed: "In search of methods that would agitate and rouse the audience's interest (I repeat -- in search of) filmmakers Alov and Naumov often do not achieve complete success. This happens sometimes. But, in contrast to how films are now made, [at least] they are searching."<sup>4</sup> As an ethical appeal this defense strategy aimed to soften the rebukes launched at the co-directors by promoting the value of searching for new visual strategies. Development of new visual strategies along with new themes gained critical prominence in light of the official indictment of late-Stalinist cinema at the Twentieth Party Congress and the subsequent critique of its monumental style, which was articulated in the Soviet film press and manuscripts. Alov and Naumov were recognized young talents of the 1950s, poised to make important contributions to an industry still recovering from the bleak years of Late Stalinism. Those critics who did not take a positive view of Alov and Naumov's search and experimentation, warned against abandoning the tradition of *Chapaev* (Georgi Vasil'ev & Sergei Vasil'ev, 1934), the most famous of all Civil War films. Although *Chapaev* demonstrated how ideological *diktat* could be reconciled with innovative visual poetics to produce a Soviet blockbuster, in the discourse over *Wind* the Vasil'ev "brothers" film was invoked punitively to lambast Alov and Nuamov for failing to live up to established narrative and visual standards.<sup>5</sup> For their part, Alov and Naumov claimed that they sought to combine the visual address of the Soviet Avant-Garde cinema, namely Eisenstein, with the everyday realism, the "bytovoi" style, of

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<sup>4</sup> "V poiskakh priemov, kotorye by zastavili zritel'ia zainteresovat'sia (ia povtoriai u – v poiskakh) i vzvolnovat'sia rezhissery Alov i Naumov chasto ne dostigaiut polnotsennogo rezul'tata. Byvaet i tak. No oni ishchut v otlichie ot togo, chto u nas delaetsia seichas v kino". RGALI fond 2936, opis 1, delo 386, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> See Papava, M. "V poriadke repliki", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 4, April 1959, p. 31.

films driven by the psychology of characters.<sup>6</sup> As young filmmakers working in a stultifying system, Alov and Naumov paid lip service to the commands of Socialist realism and turned to the archive of the avant-garde to revive the revolutionary cinematic appeal of Soviet cinema.

The discourse over *Wind* was a sequel to the criticism of Alov and Naumov's previous film, *Pavel Korchagin* (1957). Both films were faulted as "pessimistic" representations of the Civil War period. Protesting the earlier film's grim portrayal of wartime conditions, then-director of Mosfilm, Ivan Pyr'ev asserted, "There were bright moments in our lives [during the Civil War], not just war, lice, and typhus."<sup>7</sup> Almost three years later, N. Klado wrote: "In *Wind*, directors Alov and Naumov are excessively infatuated with depictions of disaster, victims, and death, forgetting that the Revolution brought joy and enthusiasm."<sup>8</sup> But, beyond these similarities, *Pavel Korchagin* and *Wind* present an escalating development of the revolutionary romantic hero who's ready to sacrifice himself for the cause. Most importantly, the tragic romantic pathos did not disappear with the arrival of *Wind*, as some have claimed.<sup>9</sup> It reached, instead, a terminal stage, where the revolutionary hero was enshrined as a static image. The graphic visual strategy on display in *Wind* and the rationale developed in the discourse about the film signal a shift, which promoted cinematographic technique over narrative and character development.

*Wind* revised dominant practice in two ways. First, it signals a revision of formulas and practices, which were developed in the production of films about famous military leaders and revolutionary-era heroes. Instead of biography, which as a genre had come to dominate Soviet

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<sup>6</sup> RGALI fond 2936, opis 1, delo 386, p. 53-55.

<sup>7</sup> "Diskussiiia o fil'me 'Pavel Korchagin'" in *Aleksandr Alov and Vladimir Naumov: stat'i, svidetel'stva, vyskazaniia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), p. 40.

<sup>8</sup> Klado, N. "Klich na plach", *Izvestiia*, December 8, 1959, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> "Together with Alov and Naumov's *Wind* [*Veter*, 1958] and Kalatozov and Urusevskii's *Unsent Letter* [Neotpravlennoe pis'mo, 1959], Chukhrai's film signaled the disappearance of the tragic romantic ethos exemplified in *Pavel Korchagin*, *Cranes are Flying*, and *The Communist*." Woll, Josephine. *Real Images: Soviet Cinema of the Thaw* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003), p. 65.

historical film, Alov and Naumov produced an action-adventure film. Second, the foregrounding of artifice in *Wind*, which unnerved critics and provoked a conditioned response to formal experimentation, arrested the reading of the Soviet historical-revolutionary film as a historical document, laying bare the visual component of this genre. Focusing on how Alov and Naumov handled specific stylistic challenges, and also on how their work on *Wind* was subsequently defined as a search for new expressive devices, I will argue that this film and the discourse surrounding it crystallized the paradoxical expectations of continuity and change, which confronted Soviet cinema in the Thaw period. *Wind* and the reactions it inspired furthermore offer a model for how experimentation could be inscribed in the institutions and practices of Soviet cinema and more generally within discourse of socialist art. In no small regard, this film was an event in the reestablishment of aesthetics in the production of Soviet film. Specifically, *Wind* shows how Soviet filmmakers began once again to resolve intellectual and even ideological problems less through narrative (screenplay) or characters (psychology), than through visual form.

### **I. The Cult of the Revolutionary Hero**

The tandem of Aleksandr Alov (1923-1983) and Vladimir Naumov (b. 1927) originated in Igor Savchenko's directing class at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK). Alov had served in the army during World War II and had passed the entrance exam in 1942 while convalescing from wounds sustained in combat. The son of cinematographer Naum Naumov-Strazh, best known for shooting the historical-revolutionary film *We Are from Kronstadt* (*My iz Kronshtadta*, dir. E. Dzigan, 1936), Vladimir Naumov was too young to serve and spent the war years in Kazan'. Alov and Naumov's expressive visual style was fostered under the tutelage of Savchenko, whose work is characterized by "a striving for flamboyant pictorial precision in each

shot, [and] an emphatically abrupt editing style.”<sup>10</sup> Savchenko involved his students in the production of *Third Blow* (*Tretii udar*, 1948), exposing them to his techniques and preference for formal experimentation. As an example of the expressive style, which Savchenko passed on to his student, Evgenii Margolit writes that “the fundamental innovation of *The Third Blow* lies in the fact that the dynamic energy of its battle scenes derives not from the movement of a cast of thousands on screen, but from an explosive chain reaction among individually depicted human personalities.”<sup>11</sup> When their mentor passed away during the production of *Taras Shevchenko* (1951), Alov and Naumov were enlisted to complete the film. The co-directors described their first independent film, *Restless Youth* (*Trevozhnaia molodost'*, 1955), as a homage to Savchenko.<sup>12</sup> Set in Ukraine in the immediate years following the Bolshevik Revolution, the *Bildungsroman* plot of *Restless Youth* concentrates on a wise commissar’s tutelage of three youths, who pledge their resolve to each other and the revolutionary cause when their mentor is killed. Beyond its conventional socialist realist narrative, the film features rapid editing, striking graphic compositions, as well as lyrical images, such as those of the commissar’s execution. Receiving praise for their visual compositions, use of depth and lighting effects, *Restless Youth* established Alov and Naumov as promising young directors.<sup>13</sup>

Like *Restless Youth*, which was based on Vladimir Beliaev’s well-known trilogy *The Old Fortress* (*Staraia krepost'*, 1935-1951), Alov and Naumov’s next film *Pavel Korchagin* also adapted a prominent work on literature: Nikolai Ostrovskii’s widely publicized autobiographical novel *How*

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<sup>10</sup> Evgenii Margolit, “‘A conglomeration of aggressive personalities’: Savchenko's students at the All-Union State Institute of Cinematography (1945–50) and the cinema of the Thaw”, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2012, p. 366.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 371.

<sup>12</sup> Qtd. in Loginova, A., “Istoki” in in *Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov: stat'i, svidetel'stva, vyskazyvaniia*, L. A. Alova, Ed. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Semion Freilikh published a glowing review of the film in *Iskusstvo kino*, trumpeting the arrival of Alov and Naumo. See Semion Freilikh, “Tema i talant”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, June 1955, page(s): 46-56.

*the Steel was Tempered* (1932-4). Although it became a hit at the box office with 25.3 million tickets sold, making it the 15th most popular film of 1957, *Pavel Korchagin* also touched off a debate over “realistic depictions” of the Revolution and the civil war period.<sup>14</sup> Eschewing what they called “decorative waxworks”, Alov and Naumov shot their film in the difficult conditions depicted in *Pavel Korchagin*, developing a visual style that conveyed the visceral suffering of strained bodies. In this regard, the film promotes endurance as an aesthetic principle, reproducing the fascination with trauma and death, which Lilya Kaganovsky has identified as a crucial aspect in Ostrovskii’s novel.<sup>15</sup> The co-directors’ depiction of the quintessential Soviet New Man revised the socialist realist image of him as a “stalwart, politically irreproachable” and unemotional. Casting doubt on the value of sacrifice, Alov and Namov, as Josephine Woll states, “created a Pavel Korchagin whose renunciation of personal happiness, expressed in the phrase ‘this isn’t the time for love’, is shadowed by pain and longing.”<sup>16</sup> A key point of the contentious discourse around the film was the kind of responses its style would provoke from spectators. The discourse specifically focused on the depiction of squalid conditions and arduous physical labor, which, it was claimed, excessively focused on grueling strain and discomfort. As they developed the visual style of *Pavel Korchagin* to revise the look and feel of the civil war era, the production and reception of this biopic anticipated both Alov and Naumov’s further development of a graphic visual style in *Wind*, as well as the resulting backlash against that film on expectations of gritty realism.

The narrative of *Pavel Korchagin* is framed as an extended flashback of the eponymous hero, a young war veteran left blind by battle wounds and physical exertion during the Civil War. After introducing the disabled latter-day Korchagin, the film rapidly advances through his

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<sup>14</sup> Segida and Zemlianukhin, *Domashniaia sinemateka: otechestvennoe kino 1918-1996*, p. 316.

<sup>15</sup> Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), especially pages 11-27.

<sup>16</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, p. 36.

youth in the Rostov-on-Don up to the Civil War period. Following the socialist realist convention of older Party members helping younger protégés gain a revolutionary consciousness, a grizzled old sailor, Zhukhrai, tutors Pavel in the ways of the Party. Pavel joins the Red Army after a Bolshevik detachment drives Ukrainian nationalists from Rostov. As he transfers to the cavalry corps the film presents a montage of battle shots, with Pavel riding headlong in charges until he is seriously wounded. Rushing back from his recovery, Pavel reports to Kiev where he is mobilized with a detachment of other volunteers to build a narrow-gauge rail track, which will enable the Bolsheviks to bring wood to the freezing city. As he leaves for the construction project, Korchagin sacrifices the chance for a romantic relationship mostly from a sense of duty, but also because he mistakenly believes the woman he desires is already married. While the White Guards pose a threat to the building site, the real danger comes from the elements. At first Pavel and the other workers work through near constant rain as they dig through mud. Later, winter brings icy coldness and snow. Along with the taxing weather conditions and enemy raids, the builders fall pray to lice that infect them with typhus. While he endures the harsh conditions for a long time, Pavel eventually falls ill. As the narrow-gauge rail line is eventually completed in his absence, Korchagin learns the consequences of his physical exertions and battle wounds. In the end he is left blind and bedridden back in Rostov, where he decides to write his autobiography, and then to rewrite it after the first draft is lost in the mail.

Selecting the eponymous title for their film over the famous and resonant title of Ostrovskii's novel, Alov and Naumov followed the naming convention of the Soviet biopic genre when they had their film bear Korchagin's name. As a Thaw-era biographical film, *Pavel Korchagin* presents both the continuation and revision of the genre established by the Vasil'ev brothers' *Chapaev* (1934). As the most popular Socialist realist film ever made in the Soviet Union,

as well as Stalin's favorite film, *Chapaev* provided the model for the Soviet biopic. Through the figure of the rough and gruff Chapaev and his relationship with the wise commissar Furmanov, the Vasil'evs' film positively depicted how "the anarchic representative of the masses [was] saved from the devil of spontaneity by the influence of the commissar, who embodies Bolshevik consciousness."<sup>17</sup> As it delivered the *Bildungsroman* schema for creating the cinematic Soviet hero, *Chapaev* also successfully rewrote and mythologized history. In crafting the image of their hero, the Vasil'evs turned to the myth and legends about commander Chapaev, as opposed to Dmitrii Furmanov's novel, which was based on his direct impressions of experiences with the real Vasili Ivanovich Chapaev. The Vasil'evs readily declared their method. "Not wanting to copy Chapaev, not wanting to give a photographic reproduction of him, [we] reconstructed him, so that his image united all the typical features which must inalienably have been inherent in Chapaev. We arrive[d] at an understanding of the actual, real truth about this person."<sup>18</sup> In their second film, Alov and Naumov sought "the truth" about Pavel Korchagin in images conveying endurance of excruciating labor in the service of the Party.

Still in production when word spread about Khrushchev's secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Alov and Naumov's work on *Pavel Korchagin* was marked by their pursuit of verisimilitude and expressive forms. In production over the winter and spring of 1956, Alov and Naumov shot *Pavel Korchagin* at Kiev's Dovzhenko Film Studio and on location in and around the city.<sup>19</sup> Working from a script written by Konstantin Isaev, the two looked to recreate the conditions first described in Ostrovskii's novel. Location shots, particularly those relating to the building of the narrow-gauge rail line, were filmed outside in corresponding

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<sup>17</sup> Dobrenko, Evgenii. "Creation myth and myth creation in Stalinist cinema", translated by Sarah Young, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2007, p. 245.

<sup>18</sup> Vasil'evy, Brat'ia. *Sobranie sochinenii: v 3 tomakh*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987), p. 140.

<sup>19</sup> Zorin, B. "My snova vstretimsia s Korchaginym", *Smena*, No. 18, 1956, p4.

weather conditions. According to Naumov, the co-directors, “tried to make the screen spectacle [*ekrannoe zrelishe*] unconditionally truthful in every way possible; in the setting of scenes, in the situations, in the weather conditions, and the acting performances. We really built the narrow-gauge rail line.”<sup>20</sup> In these conditions, the actors, like their characters, were pitted against nature. “In the fierce cold and the terrible wind, half-clothed actors experienced again the hardships, which their prototypes dealt with: fingers numb from cold and frozen lips.”<sup>21</sup> Despite their drive for authenticity Alov and Naumov did not imagine completely effacing artifice. “All of that was mere preparation [*zagotovka*], which by itself did not have a value on its own. We always kept in mind [Goethe’s] notion of ‘the realism of two dogs’. No, the material still had to ‘grow’, it had to be enriched with expression, religious fury, and it had to be transformed into a complex visual fabric of the ‘third knowledge’.”<sup>22</sup> “The realism of two dogs” is a reference to Goethe’s famous comment, “Paint me an exact facsimile of my mistress’ pug-dog and we shall have two pug-dogs—never a work of art”. “The third knowledge” is a reference to Aristotle’s conception of artistic production. Though veiled, these references to Goethe’s and Aristotle’s claims against the slavish imitation of nature articulate Alov and Naumov’s development of expressive means.

While prominent figures like Mosfilm director Ivan Pyr’ev objected that Alov and Naumov only focused on hardship, many filmmakers defended the co-directors for their realistic depiction of the 1920s. As part of this debate a kind of “severity” [*surovost’*] was attributed to the whole film. Proponents claimed that this visual strategy faithfully represented actual conditions during the civil war. At a pre-release screening and discussion in Moscow, on November 16, 1956, actor Nikolai Okhlopkov asserted: “In this film about Pavel Korchagin,

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<sup>20</sup> Naumov, V. “Alov” in *Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov: stat’i, svidetel’sva, vyskazyvaniia*, L. A. Alova, Ed. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), p. 250.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

there is truth, a brutal and severe truth about life.”<sup>23</sup> This sentiment was echoed in a number of reviews following the film’s release. “Whichever episode you take [...] all of them depict with life’s authentic truth [*s podlinnoi pravdoi zhizni*] the gritty, unvarnished everyday life of that time [...] The realistic depiction of the difficulties, which the film’s characters overcame...is the film’s essential point and its main merit.”<sup>24</sup>

Discussions of *Pavel Korchagin*’s visual style fixated on the film’s main conflict, the struggle to build a stretch of narrow-gauge railway, which would bring much needed firewood to Kiev. Stretching across two-thirds of the film, this construction project foregrounds the Soviet struggle with nature, repeatedly returning the viewer’s attention to the physical experience of this struggle and the toll it exacts. Narratively, the project is divided into scenes, which include the White Guard raid, the expulsion of a Party member, and the appearance of typhus. The episodes are connected through exterior shots depicting the construction of the rail line, which include images of ragged men digging in all conditions, sleeping en masse in a dilapidated building, and rationing supplies. On the one hand, crowd shots of physical exertion and communal meals utilize staging in depth to depict the labor force acting in concert. The physical strain in these sequences is concentrated in the body of Pavel Korchagin (Vasilii Lanovoi) and in those of lesser characters who are closely linked to the main protagonist, Ivan Zharkii (Vladimir Marenkov) and Frants Klavichuk (Lev Perfilov).

In the first and longest presentation of the construction, which lasts 38 shots with an ASL of 5.2 seconds, the film cuts between long shots of scores of workers digging and

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<sup>23</sup> “V fil'me o Pavle Korchagine est' pravda, zhesotkaia, surovaya pravda zhizni.” Okhlopkov, Nikolai', “Zdes' zvuchit nastoiashchii' mazhor”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 2, February 1957, p. 91.

<sup>24</sup> “Kakoi by epizod ni vziat'... vse eti epizody s podlinnoi pravdoi zhizni risuiut surovyi, neprikrashennyi byt togo vremeni i zastavliaiut proniknut'sia istinnoi poeziei geroicheskoj epokhi... Realisticheskii pokaz trudnostei, kotorye preodolevali geroi fil'ma, odna iz osnovnykh linii i odno iz glavnykh dostoinstv kartiny.” Losev, “Pavel Korchagin”, *Moskovskaia pravda*, 7 February, 1957, p. 3.

medium/medium close-ups of Korchagin, linking them together through the swings of shovels or the hews of picks. In several shots the camera is mobilized, tilting and panning to echo the movements of tools and bodies. In between shots of physical labor, the film presents the collective consumption of food in close-ups of hands grabbing slices of bread and of faces eagerly chewing. Shots of a gong being rung punctuate the labor and substance subsequences. Diegetically the gong marks the beginning and end of shifts, but in the editing structure of the film it functions to emphasize the duration of the labor.

As precedents for the labor shots in *Pavel Korchagin*, one could look to the end of Mikhail Kalatozov's ethnographic documentary *Salt for Svanetia* (*Sol' Svanetii*, 1928), where shirtless men similarly hew and dig feverishly to clear a path to the isolated Georgian village in the film. What sets *Pavel Korchagin* apart is the incessant focus on the physical labor and the affect these shots produce. According to film critic and scriptwriter Iurii Khaniutin, Alov and Naumov broke an unwritten law in filmmaking, according to which: "In film one cannot depict in great detail or for a long time the process of labor – it's boring and un-cinematographic."<sup>25</sup> Over the course of the latter half of the film these shots elicit a visceral experience of this labor and the climate in which it takes place. In his criticism of the film, Iulii Raizman claimed that *Pavel Korchagin* overburdens the viewer's senses. "In episodes where rain is incessantly falling, and then snow, where the characters are covered by frost, all of this [i vse eto] lasts so long, that it becomes physically uncomfortable to watch the film."<sup>26</sup> Replying to this notion, Fridrikh Ermler positively characterized the sensory experience *Pavel Korchagin* would offer spectators. He argued that the film would lead "an overwhelming number of people to feel and understand, understand with

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<sup>25</sup> Khaniutin, Iurii, "Trudnye sud'by", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, June 1995, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Raizman, Iulii, "Diskussiiia of fil'me 'Pavel Korchagin'", *Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov: Stat'i, svidetel'stva, vyskazaniia*, p. 42

their hearts and not just their brains, what the Revolution was like and how the establishment of Soviet power occurred.”<sup>27</sup>

Whether viewers felt physical discomfort or were filled with nostalgic sentiment, Raizman’s and Ermiler’s claims indicate that *Pavel Korchagin* revised the Soviet biographical film genre by means of visual address, which provoked emotional and sensory responses. The popular and institutional success of the Vasil’evs’ *Chapaev* established a set of conventions for the Soviet biographical film genre, including the dominance of eye-level and frontal shots, as well as classical editing conventions such as eye-line matches, the use of master shots, and the observance of 30° and 180° rules. With *Pavel Korchagin*, Alov and Naumov turned to dynamic editing between long shots and medium close ups, using canted angles and whip pans to elicit affect.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, the romantic Soviet hero remained as such. Even if the shots of a blind and paralyzed Korchagin that open and close the film might made his sacrifice “ambiguous”, as Josephine Woll claims, the film still allowed viewers to empathize with his suffering and revere his renunciation of personal happiness.<sup>29</sup> In this manner, the visual style of *Pavel Korchagin* revised the biopic genre’s claim to realism after it had been utilized in the late-Stalinist era to build up the myth of Stalin, making him appear omniscient and infallible and portraying him as, in Bazin’s words, “a familiar god or incarnated transcendence”.<sup>30</sup> Alov and

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<sup>27</sup> Ermiler, Fridrikh, “Diskussiiia of fil’me ‘Pavel Korchagin’”, *Stat’i, svidetel’sтва, vyskazaniia*, p. 43

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Crofts provides a summary of *Chapaev*’s self-effacing mise-en-scène. “The film’s camera style is generally functional and naturalistic. Most shots are eye-level and frontal, with some heroic upward-angles and few downward-angle general shots. Camera movements are few. Framings consistently center the characters. There is little tonal contrast, [or the] use of deep focus on biplanar action. Sets are predominantly simple [...] In the film’s scheme, editing is relegated to a subordinate role, serving character presentation and plot exposition.” Crofts, Stephen. “Ideology and Form: Soviet Socialist Realism and Chapayev”, *Essays in Poetics*, Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1977, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Bazin, Andre, “The Stalin Myth in Soviet Cinema”, in *Movies and Methods*, Volume II, Bill Nichols, Ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 35.

Naumov's next film inscribes exactly this process of audio-visual myth making in its mise-en-scène, foregrounding not the heroic experience of Revolutionary martyrs, but their subsequent remembrance and portrayal.

## II. The Iconicity of the Revolutionary Hero

After making *Restless Youth* and *Pavel Korchagin* at the Dovzhenko Film Studio in Kiev, *Wind* was the first film Alov and Naumov made at Mosfilm, Soviet Union's preeminent studio, where they arrived in 1957. Also, unlike their first two films, Alov and Naumov wrote their own script for *Wind*. This authorial undertaking on the part of two directors was very much out of the ordinary in an industry that had long been organized around the notion of the "iron scenario," which was exhaustively evaluated and edited prior to production. Since scripts were perceived to contain the main ideological messages and were more easily checked than later stages of production, the written word was primary and directors were supposed to faithfully follow the scripts.<sup>31</sup> Alov and Naumov's script for *Wind* would go on to be a constant target of criticism during and after the production. One-time director of Mosfilm, Ivan Pyr'ev, who had brought the co-directors to the Moscow studio, identified their script as the main cause of *Wind*'s narrative failings, characterizing this as a widespread occurrence among young Soviet directors.<sup>32</sup>

Although subsequently Alov and Naumov were exclusively held responsible for the excesses of *Wind*'s visual style, the film's camera strategy should also be linked to its cinematographer, Fedor Dobronravov. Only slightly older than the co-directors, Dobronravov already had four films under his belt. Immediately before *Wind*, Dobronravov had filmed

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<sup>31</sup> Kenez, Peter. "Soviet Cinema in the Age of Stalin", in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, Eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 60.

<sup>32</sup> Pyr'ev, Ivan. "Glavnyi v kino-pisatel'", *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 18 May, 1959, p. 4.

Samson Samsonov's *The Fiery Miles* (*Ognennye versty*, 1957), considered to be one of the earliest Easterns, a Soviet subgenre of the general Eastern Bloc take on the American Westerns. Vaguely set somewhere in southern Russia during the Civil War period, just like Alov and Naumov's second and third film, *The Fiery Miles* is also a travel movie in which an officer of the Soviet secret police, known as Cheka for *Chrezvychainaia komissia*, must reach an unnamed town to prevent a saboteur from instigating a mutiny. On his journey, the Chekist is joined by a small group of diverse characters, including an elderly doctor, a young nurse, a washed-out actor, and a white-guard officer disguised as a veterinary surgeon. In terms of visual style *The Fiery Miles* exploits the rigid facial features of the lead actor Ivan Savkin through frequent closeups. The film also fixates on the "tachanka" gun-cart (also featured in *Chapaev*), beginning with a visual quote of Mitrofan Grekov's famous painting "Gun Cart", which depicted the legendary vehicle of the Civil War era "in headlong movement on the field amidst explosions of shrapnel, drawn by a team of four horses excited by the battle". Most importantly, in relation to Dobronravov's work with Alov and Naumov, *The Fiery Miles* and *Wind* both feature scenes aboard a crowded train shot in similar ways as well as a gunfight involving men on horseback.

*Wind* begins with a prologue, in which the Komsomol conference is introduced as a news item that draws the attention of Red Army soldiers. After the credit sequence, *Wind* opens in the midst of a battle at a train depot somewhere in southern Russia, the exact location not being specified. As a sign of resistance to the Whites, the depot's elderly engineer sends the factory workers Fedor and the gymnasium student Mitia to the conference. Nastia (Tamara Loginova), introduced as Fedor's romantic interest, is also allowed to go after first threatening to go on her own. As they make their getaway from the besieged depot aboard one of the train engines, Mitia is wounded. Along the way to Moscow they are pursued by the White Army and are joined by a

homeless boy nicknamed Okurok, “cigarette-butt” (Aleksei Krychenkov) and the prostitute Mari (El’za Lezhdei). As a travel film belonging to the Soviet historical-revolutionary genre, *Wind* unfolds through a succession of sequences aboard trains, streetcars, and boats, which are punctuated by gun battles between the Red and White Armies. Over the course of these sequences Mitia, Marie, and Nastia are successively gunned down. The only ones to survive are Fedor and Okurok. Along with seeing Mitia, Marie, and Nastia die, Fedor survives being shot and manages to crawl out of a mass grave. In the end he is carried to the conference on a stretcher, where he delivers a climactic speech, which frame his journey and the death of his comrades as important sacrifices for Komsomol and the Revolution.

Originally *Wind* was to be completed in time for the commemoration of Komsomol’s 40th anniversary at the end of October of 1958. However, even in the early stages of production, during the review of Alov and Naumov’s literary script, *Wind* came under scrutiny for lacking character development and dramaturgical cohesion between episodes.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, it was accepted on December 13, 1957 by Mosfilm’s script department, giving Alov and Naumov permission to develop their shooting script; the co-director’s script was in turn approved on February 27, 1958.<sup>34</sup> After two months of preparation, filming began in May 1958 in the Zariad’e district of Moscow, after which most of the locations shots were filmed in and around the town of Kolomna, located southeast of the capital.<sup>35</sup> Kolomna possessed preserved, historical buildings dating from before the Revolution, which factually matched the film’s historical setting and freed the production from constructing sets. Although the film was finished by December

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<sup>33</sup> RGALI 2453-3-236.

<sup>34</sup> RGALI 2453-3-238.

<sup>35</sup> Kniazev, Iu. “Film o pervykh komsomol’tsakh”, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 18 June, 1958, p. 3.

1958, *Wind* was not released until March 18, 1959 as a result of the criticism leveled against it and its co-directors.

While there are clear stylistic continuities between *Pavel Korchagin* and *Wind*—most explicitly the co-directors' penchant for low angle, vertical compositions—the visual style of *Wind* and its reception signal a departure from expectations of gritty realism toward greater exploitation of cinematographic elements. For their third film, Alov and Naumov mobilized a host of devices that had been abandoned by the late 1930s, in favor of more simplified and less expressive visual styles, which accommodate cinema's accessibility and the nuanced treatment of characters and their psychologies. Turning toward the avant-garde, specifically Eisenstein, in their search for expressive means, the co-directors modeled a productive attitude toward the past, which paralleled Eisenstein's re-integration in Soviet film discourse in the 1950s. In this manner, *Wind* affects viewers emotionally and intellectually through its cinematic appeal.

With Fedor's appearance at the Komsomol congress serving as *Wind's* narrative frame the film's visual style organizes cinematographic elements to give meaning to the deaths of his compatriots and to designate them as Bolshevik martyrs, exploiting low angle framing, canted close ups and the backgrounds of long shots. In shots denoting the ideological authority of the Bolsheviks, including the opening of a revolutionary tribunal, an address to Red Army troops, and several shots during the finale, where Fedor and other Komsomol delegates pledge their resolve to the organization, low-level framing, in certain shots approaching perpendicularity, emphasizes passionate Bolshevik rhetoric. The framing of White Army officers in this manner, during the film's two execution sequences, makes them appear ominous and threatening. Alternatively, when non-combatants are framed from the low angle during the arrest of Fedor sequence, the shot's visual composition in conjunction with the worried look on their faces

attributes a sense of sympathy to this diegetic audience. Low-level framing is combined with the use of canted angle to make action sequences more dynamic. During the battle at the train depot, a group of White Army soldiers is framed from a low-level canted angle as they use their rifles to break down a door. The imbalance of this framing adds visual mass to the door as it seems to however over the soldiers, who are seemingly unable to break it down. On the other hand, when Mitia and Fedor respectively deliver monologues/speeches in praise of the Party and the Revolution, low-level angles and canted framing combine with the extreme close-up scale to individualize their appeal to ideological authority. The same three elements are combined to expand the romantic tensions between these characters in a sequence featuring the successive extreme close ups of Fedor, Mari, and Nastia.

A host of visual devices in the film exceed narrative function, including shots through rain-covered windows and ones that feature reflections on water. While such aqueous shots obscure vision, other ones, namely the high angle, crane shots, which bookend the film, function to flatten distances and neutralize depth. In these compressed shots, characters are shown in a wide-open space with no horizon line to determine distance. With movement along diagonal lines and lacking a horizon line, the overhead perspective reduces depth cues and perspectival orientation, abstracting the spatial dimensions of these shots. Without these spatial dimensions, the flat surface of the shot doubles the actual flatness of the moving image projected in the theater. In terms of the plot, the flat, overhead shots serve a transitional function, shifting the spatial coordinates of the narrative. The first overhead shot, the sixth overall in the film, fades in from a medium tracking shot in which a Red Army soldier marching with his squad reads aloud the announcement of the Komsomol conference. An overhead shot locates presumably the same squad as it marches diagonally across the screen. The film then cuts to a medium shot of smoke

pouring from a locomotive. This introduces the title sequence, which features phantom-ride shots of the camera rapidly advancing over train rails. News of the Komsomol conference is thus carried by these shots outside Moscow, presumably to the peripheries. In reverse order at the end of the film, *Wind* cross-fades in to a flat, overhead shot, no. 567 in the film, from rapidly advancing train rails in the previous shot. Here, the wounded Fedor is being taken to Moscow in order to participate in the first Komsomol conference. Beyond their transitional narrative function, these shots denote artifice of the flattening technique and provide an aesthetic pleasure by marking the specificity of the medium where flat surfaces stand for three-dimensional objects, emphasizing firmly the screen as surface. Connecting pleasure and awareness of the artifice, these shots acknowledge the viewer's encounter with these images.



Figure 1.1: Early overhead shot in *Wind*.



Figure 1.2: Overhead shot of Fedor being brought to the Komsomol conference in *Wind*.

Along with calling attention to the film's surface and using camera angles to influence the perception of characters, Alov and Naumov utilized elements of cinematography throughout *Wind* to elicit affect. For instance, near the beginning of their journey to Moscow, the group comes across a destroyed Bolshevik train. The wreckage is introduced in an extremely long shot, which foregrounds the mangled steel and debris while locating the silhouettes of Fedor, Mitia, and Mari in the rear. Spelling danger on the road ahead, the excess tonnage of train wreckage weights down the frame with the image of destruction while making the figures appear vulnerable.

In a 19-second tracking shot toward the end of *Wind* (*Veter*, 1959) the mobile frame follows along the ground strewn with footwear and clothes left behind by recently executed Bolsheviks. Before they were murdered, the prisoners were ordered to remove their shoes. After a succession of men's boots, the camera comes up to and pivots around a pair of black heels. These belonged to Marie, a prostitute who has recently pledged herself to the Bolshevik cause. She sacrificed herself to the White Guard executioners so that the remaining comrades could continue their arduous journey. Through the metonymic substitution, the gradual revelation and

subsequent retreat from Mari's idiosyncratic shoes, this shot builds up a forceful appeal to pathos. The strain of violin notes and the distinct character of Mari's heels amid the boots of soldiers and sailors exaggerate the appeal to emotions. One review wrote, "This image is maximally succinct and expressive at the same time!"<sup>36</sup> That this is primarily accomplished through camera movement, shot composition, and inanimate objects crystalizes the move announced by *Wind*, away from psychological character drama toward the dramatic appeal of the visual address.

Invoking the qualities and textures of images, *Wind* endows objects and figures in the frame with meaning. In this manner, the film visually resolves the biographical requisites of the Soviet historical-revolutionary genre. When Fedor, Mitia, Mari, and Nastia take refuge in the cellar of the destroyed church, the young revolutionaries and their newfound ally are framed in front of frescos of Christian saints and martyrs. This association of the young zealots, who would suffer and all but one of whom would die, exploits religious iconography to frame the characters as revolutionary martyrs. Wounded in the leg during their escape from the train depot, the fate of the gymnasium student Mitia is sealed from the beginning of the film. In a low-angle shot that begins as a medium close-up, Mita, wanting to talk about the conference, turns toward the camera and wakes Fedor. Visible behind him is an icon of the Virgin Mary surrounded by lit candles. Imagining what he would say at the Komsomol conference, Mitia stands up and walks into the center of the cellar. Panning to follow him, the camera reframes and centers the student in the middle ground of a long shot amidst a loose ring of beeswax candles, with another icon of the Virgin Mary visible on the left side of the frame. The shot's religious iconography is coopted by Marxist ideology, bestowing upon Mitia a revolutionary sanctity, as he verbally offers his body and limbs to the Revolution.

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<sup>36</sup> Khalturin, G. "Gde on, veter epokhi?" *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, May 9, 1959, p. 3.

Located underground, the vaulted, dark space of the church cellar functions as a transitional space, where the wounded gymnasium student is vaulted into the ranks of Soviet revolutionary heroes. When he dies in the next scene, gunned down by White Army soldiers pursuing the group, Mitia's story becomes visual iconography for future Soviet generations.



Figure 1.3: Icons in the background behind Fedor and Mitia in *Wind*.



Figure 1.4: Mitia standing in front of icons in *Wind*.

*Wind* acknowledges the historical perspective of its initial Soviet audience in the late 1950s both verbally, when Mitia's refers to future generations, and visually, when the film cuts on the line "before future generations" (*pered litsom griadushchikh pokolenii*) from a canted close-up of his

face to a low-angle, extreme long shot, which locates the young revolutionary in the deep background of the shot, as if submerged in the recesses of time. The burning candles dotting the dark cellar illuminate the path joining the present of viewers in 1958 to the historical moment of the revolutionary hero in 1918, who stands in the only lighted space in the shot. If this wasn't enough, after subsequent close-ups of all the characters, the camera returns to Mitia, also in close up, who faces the camera and states that he would ask future generations if they had done everything for the revolution.

Through the figure of Mari, the co-directors staged an affective experience in the diegetic space of the film. When Mari is unable to sleep, worried that she might jeopardize her new comrades' mission to reach the Komsomol conference in Moscow, she walks away from the group into the recesses of the cavernous underground space. While looking back at her sleeping companions off-screen left, Mari walks rightward, not seeing a massive upturned icon of Christ until she nearly runs into it. Panning to follow Mari, the camera is complicit in the abrupt revelation of the massive holy image, delaying its appearance until both Mari and the viewer are startled by its presence. Mari momentarily freezes before the eye of God. She then crosses herself, bends down and begins to pray, supplicating to be allowed to stay with her new friends. When the film cuts away to a long shot that reveals the dimensions of the space, the massive size of the fresco slab is established, making it difficult to understand how Mari could have missed it. Yet, more intense than this surprise is the appeal of the massive graphic image. Aleksandr Alov, stated that in this scene the directors had sought to represent how "for centuries a world existed, at the center of which lay a false belief in god and in this church [they] found the image of the past

collapsed.”<sup>37</sup> But there is also a doubling of the visual address. Along with the anti-religious appeal, Mari’s initial encounter with the massive graphic image, her physical reaction and subsequent communion with the fresco infuse these shots with an additional semantic register; both of these appeals to visual meaning point to the affective power of images. The appeal of the fresco’s large, upturned eyes and the effect it elicits from Mari stages an immediate, visual experience inside the frame, enacting how graphic compositions like *Wind*’s cinematography can seize the spectator.



Figures 1.5: The sudden appearance of the massive fresco in *Wind*.

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<sup>37</sup> RGALI, Fond 2936, opis 1, delo 386, p. 55.



Figures 1.6: The full size of the massive fresco in *Wind* revealed in long shot.

At a special screening and discussion of *Wind* organized by the Film Workers' Union on January 12, 1959, Aleksandr Alov articulated the method informing the film's visual strategy, defining *Wind* as an attempt to unite what he called the two principal strands of Soviet cinema. One strand is defined as extending "from [Sergei] Eisenstein with his revolutionary passion, pathos, and temperament expressed by means of the great arsenal of cinematic means."<sup>38</sup> Alov associates the second strand of Soviet cinema with the representation of everyday life (*byt*), which he asserts, "expresses the kind of ideas Eisenstein and other masters of the first strand spoke about through man (*cherez cheloveka*), through a detailed and thorough development of a human character."<sup>39</sup> As primary examples of the *bytovoi* strand, Alov named the directors Sergei Gerasimov and Iulii Raizman, both of whom had recently enjoyed massive success with historical-revolutionary films. Gerasimov's epic adaptation of Mikhail Sholokhov's novel *And*

<sup>38</sup> "Oдно napravlenie – eto napravlenie, idushchee ot Eizenshteina s ego revoliutsionnoi strast'iu, pafosom, temperamentom, vyrazhennym s pomoshch'iu vsego ogromnogo arsenala kinematograficheskikh sredstv." RGALI fond 2936, opis 1, delo 386, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> "I est' drugoi kinematograf – kinematograf, kotoryi ia by nazval bytovym. Eto kinematograf chelovecheskii. Eto kinematograf, gde te idei, o kotorykh govorili Eizenshtein i drugie мастера etogo napravleniia, vyrazhaiutsia cherez cheloveka, cherez podrobno doskonal'no razrabotany chelovecheskii kharakter." Ibid.

*Quiet Flows the Don* (Tikhii Don, 1957) won the award for best picture at the Soviet All-Union Film Festival in 1958 and was praised for realistically recreating the historical setting featuring the Cossacks of the Don River valley along with their folk songs and customs.<sup>40</sup> In a similar vein, Iulii Raizman's *The Communist* (*Kommunist*, 1957), a film about the civil war veteran Vasili Gubanov who dutifully obeys Party discipline and displays Bolshevik ardor, was equally well received and was praised critically for presenting an example of a true "Soviet hero" and the rejection of nihilism.<sup>41</sup>

Alov's reference to Gerasimov and Raizman was as an acknowledgment of Soviet cinema's normative standards in 1958, conceding to those who criticized *Wind* that Post-Stalinist historical-revolutionary films were dominated by characters and actor performances. The first strand Alov invoked, his reference to Eisenstein and his "arsenal of formal devices", both marks a specific cultural moment, the so-called liberalization of Soviet society during the Thaw, while also providing the logic of how *Wind* visually addresses viewers. Eisenstein had only recently been rehabilitated in Soviet film culture. After Stalin's death and Khrushchev's secret speech, Eisenstein reemerged in *Iskusstvo kino* articles, a collection of his theoretical essays edited by Rostislav Iurenev was published in 1956, and part 2 of *Ivan the Terrible* was released on September 1, 1958. Semyon Ginzburg's review of the 1956 essay collection defended Eisenstein as a filmmaker and theoretician who developed new creative principles and continually experimented, making him a fitting source of tradition and inspiration for Alov and Naumov. Alov's invocation of the "great arsenal of formal devices" depended on the salient point Eisenstein had made as early as his "The Montage of Attractions" essay: "every artistic decision

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<sup>40</sup> See Freilikh, S. "Sud'ba Grigoriia Melekhova", *Iskusstvo kino*, January 1958, p. 20-35.

<sup>41</sup> Woll, *Reel Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, p. 84-86.

is to be guided by how the film will affect the spectator.”<sup>42</sup> In this regard, the visual strategy of *Wind* asserted the potency of visual devices to seize the spectator. Through their emphasis on visual address and their use of mise-en-scène to define their characters as revolutionary heroes in *Wind*, Alov and Naumov moved away from conveying experiences toward a focus on the transaction between viewers and images. This approach reconstituted the historical-revolutionary genre’s claim to realism and historical fact as film materials with which “to subject audience to emotional and psychological influence”.<sup>43</sup> In part, this was a return to the archive of the avant-garde. At the same time, Alov and Naumov executed this strategy within a genre that had turned into biography.<sup>44</sup> Focusing the viewer’s attention on the production of the heroic revolutionary image, as an experiment in style, *Wind* revealed the limiting conventions this genre imposed on filmmakers, which became the grounds for the disparaging critical reaction to the film.

### **III. Defending the Search for New Expressive Means**

*Wind* was pilloried at the Second Plenary Session of the Film Workers’ Union Organizing Committee, December 24-27, 1958. Grouped together with the films of two other young Soviet directors, Marlen Khutsiev’s *Two Fedors* (*Dva Fedora*, 1958) and Tengiz Abuladze’s *Someone Else’s Children* (*Chuzhie deti*, 1958), Alov and Naumov’s third film was judged as being too somber and presenting too pessimistic a picture of Soviet life. By itself *Wind* was also targeted for its visual strategy and narrative deficiencies. After *Wind*’s screening at the plenary session, Ivan Pyr’ev, now chairman of the Film Workers’ Union Organizing Committee, criticized the film for lacking

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<sup>42</sup> Bordwell, David, *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei. “The Montage of Attractions” in *Writings, 1922-1934*, Richard Taylor, ed. and trans. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 33-38.

<sup>44</sup> Dobrenko, Evgenii, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press 2008), p. 66.

character development, which would prevent viewers from becoming emotionally engaged. Pyr'ev asserted “there is a lot of death [in *Wind*], where people are killed like dogs, and you don't feel terrible or sad because you have not grown fond of these people, you haven't learned their thoughts or hope.”<sup>45</sup> Alov and Naumov were also heavily criticized for including the prostitute Mari in their band of young Communists. Her character was said to be anachronistic, failing to convey the growth of a revolutionary consciousness from the ruins of the old world.<sup>46</sup> Together with the defects of *The Two Fedors* and *Someone Else's Children*, Alov and Naumov's mistakes on *Wind* were characterized as a warning for the generation of young filmmakers who had entered the industry in the 1950s.<sup>47</sup>

There were some filmmakers and critics in 1959 who recognized *Wind's* visual address and claimed that the film elicited a strong emotional response from them. In praise of Alov and Naumov's handling of cinematographic elements, veteran director Mikhail Romm claimed that *Wind* contained

“hundreds of frames that were composed without any reminiscences in a new, exceptionally expressive manner [...] expressing a rich directorial imagination, which in recent year we have often ignored, considering directing to consist of making sure actors perform their lines correctly, that they don't collide, and that everything is visible.”<sup>48</sup>

Declaring the originality of their expressive style, the lack of “reminiscences” in *Wind* asserted by Romm credits Alov and Naumov with not directly repeating devices from other films. Vladimir Egorov reported that he was “practically moved to tears by the film's narrative about a

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted in “Na vtorom plenumе Orgkomiteta soiuzа rabotnikov kinematografii SSSR”, *Iskusstvo kino*, 3 March 1950, p. 24.

<sup>46</sup> Zorkaia, Neia. “O iasnosti tseli”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No 4 (April 1959), p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Papava, M. “V poriadke repliki”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 4 (April) 1959, p. 31.

<sup>48</sup> “Mozhno napomnit' bukval'no desiatki epizodov, sotni kuskov, kotorye resheny imi vne vsiakikh reministsentsii, po novomu iskluchitel'no izobretatel'no, tochno, temperamentno, s nasyshchennoi rezhisserskoi fantaziei, o kotoroi my v poslednee vremia chasto zabyvaem, schitaia, chto delo rezhissera sledit, chtoby aktery pravil'no proiznosili tekst, ne stalkivalis' lbami na ekrane i chtoby vse bylo by vidno...” RGALI 2936-1-386, p. 20.

generation that did not spare itself regarding its personal life, its physical well-being or in the choice between life and death.”<sup>49</sup> While they recognized *Wind* was not without faults—Romm called the prostitute Mari a “legacy of vulgar art [durnogo iskusstva]”—proponents of *Wind*, like Romm and Egorov, valued Alov and Naumov’s search for new expressive means.

A similar balance between positive and negative assessments was observed in subsequent press reviews. On the one hand, film critic Vasilii Sukharevich claimed the film was nothing more than a “cinematographic exercise” (*kinematograficheskii ekzersis*), which consisted of simply piling up effects.<sup>50</sup> But many critics, even though they dismissed *Wind* for lacking authenticity and realism, still recognized the intended function of the film’s visual address. Another critic, V. Amlinski asserted, “Sometimes in their search for sharp, unexpected details, for a moment of cinematic ‘brilliance’, they lose depth. But there was one very valuable quality — the search, without which there is no contemporary cinema. This search Alov and Naumov continued in *Wind*.”<sup>51</sup> Although they echo almost verbatim the criticisms first asserted at the Second Plenary Session of the Film Workers’ Union Organizing Committee, these reviews clearly show that critics not only found it difficult to completely dismiss the co-directors’ visual strategies in *Wind*, but that they also attributed value to Alov and Naumov’s undertaking. Even critics like T. Ivanova, who dismissed *Wind*’s visual style as being “averse to all simplicity”, qualified Alov and Naumov’s film as an effort in the search of expressive formal device.<sup>52</sup> In this manner, Neia Zorkaia tempered her criticism with the assertion that the two directors did not want “to reconcile themselves to the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> RGALI 2936-1-386.

<sup>51</sup> “...inoi raz v pogone za ostroi, nezhidannoi detal’iu, za kinematograficheskoi ‘blestkoi’ oni teriali glubinu. No bylo odno ochen’ dorogoe kachestvo — poisk, bez kotorogo net nastoiashchego kino. Etot poisk Alov i Naumov prodolzili v ‘Vetre’.” Amlinskii, V. “Komu mnogo dano...”, *Moskovskii komsomolets*, 25 March, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> Ivanova, T. “Ot zamysla k voploshcheniiu”, *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, 7 March, 1959, p. 3.

academic frigidity, dispassion, and the clichés found in films about the Revolution, and [they] certainly reject sweetened [*podslashchennoe*] images of the Civil War.”<sup>53</sup>

Thus arguments both for and against *Wind* framed its visual strategy as a desire to elicit affect. This experimentation was deemed important and potentially valuable in terms of how they engage viewers. The proclivity of both critics and proponents to discuss the visual style of *Wind* in terms of a *search* (*poisk*) or the visual strategies of Alov and Naumov as a seeking (*ishchut* from *iskat*, “to search or seek”) reveals the contradictory pressures in this period of Soviet cinema.<sup>54</sup> On the one hand, there was a demand for innovation greatly motivated by the economic interest in reviving the Soviet film industry after the period of *malokartin'e*. As early as 1954, the Ministry of Culture had issued calls for more complex film characters. Such calls suggested openness to aesthetic innovation and the possibility for new semantic spaces. On the other hand, bearing down upon Alov and Naumov was the pressure of affirmed conventions and the appeal of canonized classics like *Chapaev*. At this time it was a common tactic of party-line criticism to utilize select films, like the Vasil'evs' classic or more recent hits like Mikhail Kalatozov's *The Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, 1957) and Sergei Bondarchuk's *Faith of a Man* (*Sud'ba cheloveka*, 1959), as measurements of quality and instruments for hectoring, whose merits were confirmed either at home (Bondarchuk's film was voted the best film of 1959 in *Sovietskii ekran*) or abroad (*The Cranes Are Flying* won the Golden Palm for best film at the Cannes Film Festival in 1958).

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<sup>53</sup> Zorkaia, “O iasnosti tseli,” *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 4, April 1959, p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> For examples of this usage: “Vsiu silu kinoiskusstva - delu stroitel'stva kommunizma!”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 3, March 1959, p. 24; Papava, M. “V poriadke repliki”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 4, April 1959, p. 31; “Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia novogo khudozhestvenogo fil'ma ‘Veter’”, RGALI, Fond 2936, opis 1, delo 386, p. 11-13; Dobin, E. “Ot epopei k epizodu”, in *Molodye rezhissery sovetskogo kino*, Sokol'skaia, A. L., Ed. (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1962), p. 128.

Neia Zorkaia's subsequent reconsideration of her own negative evaluation of *Wind* is revealing of the motivations behind the formalist line of criticism launched against the film in the late 1950s. In her original *Iskusstvo kino* discussion of *Wind*, *The Two Fedors*, and *Someone Else's Children*, Zorkaia wrote that Alov and Naumov's film "does not make viewers feel nor understand that Fedor's very appearance at the conference justifies the exploits, sacrifice, and the deaths of some of his friends."<sup>55</sup> Such critiques appear as reactionary assertions of expectations that film narrative would articulate in detail the motivations of main characters, taking care to evidence their development of a Communist consciousness. Returning to the film almost twenty years later, in 1987, Zorkaia positions *Wind*, as well as Alov and Naumov's earlier two films, as successors to the classic Soviet historical-revolutionary films of the 1930s, specifically *Chapaev* and *The Youth of Maksim* (*Iunost' Maksima*, dir. G. Kozintsev and L. Trauberg, 1934). *Wind*, *Restless Youth* and *Pavel Korchagin*, were experiments (*opyty*) in a "retro" style, which borrowed formal devices from the classic historical films about the revolution, along the way also revising the genre's poetics and how it conveyed ideas and emotions.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the most telling indictment of the 1950s criticism against *Wind* comes in the form of Zorkaia's question: "Does each film have to answer every question and put matters to rest?" In response, she writes: "It will be difficult and take a long time, for us, the critics of that era, to get out of the habit of normative expectations."<sup>57</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion: Alov and Naumov's Method**

As Zorkaia's reflections suggest, in the midst of the critical barrage against the co-directors and their *Wind*, left ignored was Alov and Naumov's conscious imitation of modernist visual devices

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<sup>55</sup> Zorkaia, "O iasnosti tseli," p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> Zorkaia, Neia. "Post-skriptum cherez tridtsat' let" in *Aleksandr Alov, Vladimir Naumov: stat'i, svidetel'stva, vyskazyvaniia*, L. A. Alova, Ed. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), p. 52.

<sup>57</sup> Zorkaia, Neia. "Post-skriptum cherez tridtsat' let", p. 52.

for the purpose of transforming the historical-revolutionary film into an action-adventure genre. While the film's plot was simple and closely controlled by editors and censors, *Wind* worked out its drama visually. The largely negative reception of *Wind* exemplifies the contradictory pressures bearing down upon Soviet cinema in the late 1950s. Scriptwriters, filmmakers, and even studio administrators were called on to innovate in the areas of production, theme, and style, and yet they consistently faced entrenched lines of criticism. Nevertheless, the central arguments in public discourse about *Wind* demonstrate that the central issue for the competing discourses vying to define Post-Stalinist Soviet cinema was how viewers would respond to moving audio images. Soviet cinema was still obliged to the social command and had didactic responsibilities, but there was an increased focus on the viewers' relationship to the screen and cinema's affective potential. Filmmakers developed visual strategies to elicit specific responses from viewers, and in turn, critics and bureaucrats evaluated films according to how they believed viewers would respond.

It was clearly in Alov and Naumov's favor that they were relatively young directors. Emphasis on their potential as well as their inclination to develop affective devices allowed both critics and proponents of *Wind* to suggest a positive trajectory for Soviet cinema. However, over the course of the next decade such critiques of supposed formalist tendencies would steadily become more severe, eventually leading to the shelving of films. In this regard, the visual style of *Wind* and the discursive attempts to frame its address are exemplary for their promotion of visual methods to engage viewers and their senses. Both the film and the discourse function as a preview for the developments of affective and discursive frameworks in Soviet cinema over the course of the following decade.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PARTICIPATORY CINEMA

Emerging from the paralysis of the Late-Stalinist *malokartin'e* ("cine-anemia") period, the Soviet film industry received much-needed funding from the sixth Five-Year Plan, announced in 1955 for the years 1956 to 1960. This funding was intended to improve the conditions under which films were produced and exhibited.<sup>1</sup> The new economic plan committed substantial sums for the repair and expansion of studio facilities, the construction of new cinemas, expansion of existing ones, and the development of new technology such as the handheld Konvas-Avtomat camera and the Kinopanorama widescreen format. Cinematographer Aleksandr Shelenkov expressed the optimism for the new ways of filming and screening films in terms of the relationship between the viewers and the screen. "New equipment helps the emergence of new forms of our art. Cinematography is acquiring even more realistic expressiveness. The viewer ceases to be merely a beholder of events occurring on the screen; he becomes, as it were, their participant."<sup>2</sup> In this manner, filmmakers and critics exploited and conceptualized the recently developed film technology within a semantic field that was structured around the idea of immersive realism.

In the promotion of technological innovations, public discourse ascribed concepts of presence and participation to the new handheld camera and widescreen format. Soviet technicians who developed Kinopanorama and numerous other authors who wrote about the

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<sup>1</sup> For definition of *malokartin'e* (literally, "a time of few pictures") see Evgenii Margolit's "Kinematograf epokhi 'malokartin'ia'" in *Pervyi vek nashego kino: entsiklopediia: fil'my, sobytia, geroi, dokumenty* (Moskva: Lokid-Press, 2006), p. 350-353; On funding for the film industry in the sixth Five-Year Plan industry, see Woll, Josephine. *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2000), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> "Novaia tekhnika pomogaet rozhdeniiu novykh form nashego iskusstva. Kinematografiia priobretaet eshche bol'shuiu realisticheskuiu vyrazitel'nost'. Zritel' perestaet byt' lish' sozertsatelem proiskhodiashchikh na ekrane sobytii, on stanovitsia kak by ikh uchastnikom". Shelenkov, Aleksandr. "Zametki ob operatorskom iskusstve", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 5, May 1957, p. 50.

new screen format promoted the “presence effect” (*effekt prisutsviia*) as its alluring feature.<sup>3</sup> Kirill Dombrovskii, a director of educational films who was tasked with producing the first experimental, panoramic short films, asserted about the new screen format: “The viewer does not look at life through the ‘window’ of the screen, but appears to be integrally included in the ‘cinematic reality’. The viewer becomes one of the film’s participants.”<sup>4</sup> At nearly the same time “participatory involvement of the viewer” was attributed to Sergei Urusevskii’s innovative use of the Konvas-Avtomat camera in the *Cranes Are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli*, Mikhail Kalatozov, 1957), which critics labeled as “subjective” and “emotional”. Urusevskii, for his part, asserted that camera movement, specifically the handheld kind, was capable of provoking physical sensation on the part of viewers, conveying a character’s distorted view of reality (resulting from heightened emotional excitement or physiological states under duress) along with the authorial vision of the cinematographer and the director.

While both film technologies offered an immersive experience, “presence” and “participation” can be differentiated in terms of the kind of involvement they entail. While the initial effect locates viewers in the same space as the action on the screen, constructing for them an up-close, observational role, the latter implies engagement in the action, where the viewer has a stake in the events unfolding on the screen. At the time, public discourse defined the affective capacities of Kinopanorama and the Konvas-Avtomat camera in terms of their distinct technical features. Publicity for Kinopanorama promoted the new system by distinguishing it, in terms of screen dimensions and appeal to the viewer’s field of vision, from the traditional forms of cinema. Kalatozov and Urusevskii’s *The Cranes Are Flying*, on the other hand, reaffirmed the expressive

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<sup>3</sup> See Dombrovskii, K. “Effekt prisutsviia” in *Tekhnika-molodezhi*, No. 12, December 1956, p. 20-22.

<sup>4</sup> “Zritel’ uzhe ne smotrit na zhizn’ cherez ‘okno’ ekrana, a okazyvaetsia organicheski vkluchennym v ‘kinematograficheskuiu deistvitel’nost’”. Zritel’ delaetsia kak by uchastnikom fil’ma.” Dombrovskii, Kirill, “Novye khudozhestvennye sredstva”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 3, March 1958, p. 36.

force of those traditions, specifically the standard aspect ratio of 1.37:1 and black-and-white film stock at a time when, “despite the high cost of color stock, film-makers began consistently to replace black-and-white with color stock (often of inferior quality) in movies of all genres”.<sup>5</sup> As “color films occupied the highest rung on the hierarchy of planning and production,” the first Kinopanorama film, the documentary *Great Is My Country* (*Shiroka strana moia*, Roman Karmen, 1958), was filmed on Sovcolor film stock.

Qualitative cinematographic differences between Kinopanorama and the use of the Konvas-Avtomat were clearly on the mind of film director Mikhail Romm at the November 20, 1957 discussion of *The Cranes Are Flying* organized by the Union of Soviet Filmmakers. Romm asserted:

I was especially pleased that this was a black-and-white film, that it is not a widescreen movie, that it's an ordinary black-and-white film (applause) which we have forgotten how to shoot, and it is in this area, in the traditional areas of our art, in our black-and-white art, where for many more thousands of years we will have as our sustenance this black bread that two major masters [Mikhail Kalatozov and Sergei Urusevskii] have shown what can be done on the screen without widescreen, stereo, color, stereoscopic, dynamic and panoramic [technologies].<sup>6</sup>

With his archaizing rhetoric, Romm condemns the artifice of new screen technologies as decadent, whereas the “ordinary black-and-white film” is ascribed a moral and aesthetic purity. This opposition is inherently grounded in the viewer's relationship to the screen. Set against the monumental size of Panoramic Cinema, the affective potency of Kalatozov and Urusevskii's film

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<sup>5</sup> Woll, Josephine. *The Cranes Are Flying* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> “...i mne bylo osobenno priiatno, chto eto chernobelaia kartina, chto eto ne shirokoekrannoe kino, chto eto obyknovennaia chernobelaia kartina... /aplodismenty/..., kotoruiu my razuchilis' snimat' i cho imenno v etoi oblasti, v traditsionnoi oblasti nashego iskusstva, v nashem chernobelom iskusstve, gde my eshche mnogo tysiach let budem imet' kak osnovnuiu pishu etot chernyi khleb, vot zdes' dva krupnykh mastera pokazali, chto mozžno sdelat' na ekrane bez shirokoekrannykh, stereofonicheskikh, tsvetnykh, stereoskopicheskikh, dinamicheskikh i panoramnykh (sredstv)...”. RGALI Fond 2936, op. 1, delo 352, 20 November 1956.

is tied to the very personal object of the handheld camera. Whereas Kinopanorama suggests a massive, unified field of vision in which action unfolds, enveloping the viewer, handheld camera movement constructs space through action anchored in the human bodies of the filmmakers, characters and viewers.

Later scholarship on Kalatozov and Urusevskii's films, especially Maiia Merkel's monograph *Dialogues with Urusevskii (Dialogi s Urusevskim, 1980)* and Iurii Bogomolov's *Mikhail Kalatozov* (1989), merges notions of presence and participation into the concept of the "presence effect". Although in the 1960s Merkel' described viewers being drawn as participants in the onscreen action through Urusevskii's camerawork, in her later work she prefers the notion of presence for this experience and identifies the "presence effect" in both *The Cranes Are Flying* and their next film *The Letter Never Sent (Neotpravlennoe pis'mo, 1960)*.<sup>7</sup> Bogomolov asserts the "presence effect" when discussing Urusevskii's handheld shots of close proximity to the characters in *The Letter Never Sent*.<sup>8</sup> He differentiates this experience from that of long shots, in which the camera pans to follow the silhouettes of characters as they move across the landscape. In this regard, both Merkel' and Bogomolov refer to the presence effect as an accepted theoretical concept, which obscures how critics mobilized it in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The aim of this chapter is to historicize the "presence effect" by examining how competing discursive frameworks during the Thaw invoked the "participatory involvement of viewers" as the main appeal of new film technology. The goal is to understand how notions of realism were expanded in this manner to include greater cinematic immersion. Central in this account is the move toward modes of filmmaking that focused on the immediate, sensual experience of moving, audible images, which could place viewers inside speeding cars, aboard

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<sup>7</sup> Merkel', Maiia. *Dialogi s Urusevskim* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), p. 23-26.

<sup>8</sup> Bogomolov, Iurii. *Mikhail Kalatozov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1989), p. 189.

high-flying planes, or running through burning forests. Like Kinopanorama, the films of Kalatozov and Urusevskii challenged expectations of what films and their characters should look like and pushed critics to make sense of the kind of experience these films produced. The concepts of presence and participation were asserted in response to these challenges as ways to frame how these new film technologies addressed the viewer. This chapter will consider the interrelated origins of the concepts of presence and participation in the discourse over Kinopanorama and Kalatozov and Urusevskii's films. After tracing how immersive realism was defined in the public discourse of the Thaw, I will focus on the poetics of Urusevskii's camerawork in *The Letter Never Sent* and the reception of this film, since it was originally faulted, as opposed to its predecessor, for not producing the experience of participation despite assertions to the contrary from the cinematographer. As it exploits the camera's ability to mobilize space and convey subjective states, the failure of *The Letter Never Sent* marks out the limits of participatory cinema.

### **I. Widescreen Technology and the "Presence Effect"**

Originally called Panoramic Cinema (Panoramnoe kino), Kinopanorama was developed by technicians at the All-Union Scientific Research Institute of Cinematography (NIKFI or Nauchno-issledovatel'skii kinofotinstitut), between 1956 and 1957, under the direction of E. M. Goldovskii, the leading developer of widescreen film technology in the Soviet Union.

Kinopanorama emerged as part of the soft-power competition between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War over who had the most advanced culture and technology.<sup>9</sup> According to James H. Krukones, the marked success of Cinerama at international trade shows

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<sup>9</sup> Belton, John. *Widescreen Cinema* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992), 87-90.

in the mid-1950s left the Soviets envious of the attention the cinematic wonder from America was attracting.<sup>10</sup> The production of Kinopanorama was heavily supported by the state. The Sixth Five-Year Plan explicitly “demanded more sophisticated technology for the making and exhibiting of movies as well as an increase in the production of widescreen films.”<sup>11</sup>

In terms of widening the viewers’ field of vision, Kinopanorama was preceded by anamorphic widescreen technology, which arrived in 1955 and entailed the horizontal compression of an image into a narrower aspect ratio during production and its “stretching” during projection, both by means of anamorphic lenses.<sup>12</sup> Although conceptually related to the anamorphic horizontal widening of the frame, Soviet technicians placed Kinopanorama into a separate category of screen technology labelled ‘panoramic film’ that distinguished it from ‘widescreen’ systems.<sup>13</sup> This classification rested on the need to develop new camera and projection equipment for panoramic cinema, whose main feature was defined as the production of a new, more immersive relationship between the viewer and screen. The concept of “presence effect” (“effekt pristutstviia”) was deployed to describe the experience of immersion and was advanced as Kinopanorama’s salient feature to set it apart from similar preceding technology. Although the anamorphic widescreen technology might have started diminishing the critical distance between viewer and the screen, it was claimed that Kinopanorama overwhelmed viewers’ senses and made them confuse the representation they were watching with actual material reality.

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<sup>10</sup> Krukones, “Peacefully Coexisting on a Wide Screen”, p. 288-289.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Maiorov, Nikolai, “Khronika sovetskogo shirokogo ekrana”, *Tekhnika i tekhnologiia kino*, No. 3, 2009, 30.

<sup>13</sup> Vysotskii, Mikhail, *Bol’shie kinoekrany i stereofoniia* (Moskva: Iskusstvo 1966), 57-80.



Figure 2.1: With an image stretching across two pages to replicate a massive screen, this article authored by Kirill Dombrovskii prominently associates Kinopanorama with the “presence effect”. See “Effekt prisutstviia”, *Tekhnika-molodezhi*, No. 12, 1956, pp. 20-21.

Nearly all periodical sources about the new widescreen system reference the “presence effect”, which is typically described as “a psychological sensation of presence in the setting where the film was shot”.<sup>14</sup> The experience of presence was attributed to how Kinopanorama’s massive, curving screen activated the viewer’s peripheral vision. The American inventor Fred Willis (1886–1954) had developed Cinerama based on his conviction that the illusion of three-

<sup>14</sup> “...spособnost’ vzyvat’ v zritele psikhologicheskoe oshchushchenie prsiutstviia v toi obstanovke, v kotoroi proizvodilas’ kinos”emka.” Dombrovskii, Kirill. “Effekt prisutstviia”, *Tekhnika-molodezhi*, No. 12, 1956, 20. For other references to “effekt prisutstviia” see: Ivanov, A. “Sovetskaia ‘Sinorama’”, *Izvestiia*, No. 19, 23 January, 1957, p. 3; Anon. “Sovetskoe panoramnoe kino”, *Izvestiia*, No. 114, 15 May, 1957, p. 2; Goldovskii, Evsei, “Sovetskaia kinopanorama”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 5, May 1957, p. 100-103; Gorokhov, Viktor, “Zritel’ vkhodit v kadr”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 3, March 1958, p. 31-35; Dombrovskii, Kirill, “Novye khudozhestvennye sredstva”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 3, March 1958, p. 36-38; Anon. “Krugovaia kinopanorama”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 5, May 1959, p. 44.

dimensionality depended heavily on peripheral vision.<sup>15</sup> Kinopanorama extended the field of vision to between 120° and 146°, as opposed to 35° in the standard 1.37:1 aspect ratio and 90° in the anamorphic widescreen format. Texts about panoramic cinema would visualize this difference through images that depicted the different fields of vision each format offered, which were set off on the page against the background of a film frame.

The Soviet emphasis on the experience of presence resembles similar claims in American publicity and advertising for Cinerama and CinemaScope, which likewise stressed that the new production and exhibition systems enhanced the illusion of viewers' participation in the onscreen action. There were, however, widely divergent motivations behind these homologous assertions. In the Hollywood film industry, as Ariel Rogers has shown, these qualities were ascribed to Cinerama as pleasures resulting from technical innovations which made cinema, as a form of entertainment, superior to the black and white television images broadcast on television.<sup>16</sup> The new technologies that promised to sweep viewers into the pictures were meant to tempt audiences to keep attending film theaters after attendance rates dramatically fell off between the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>17</sup>

No such competition for audiences existed in the Soviet Union. Instead Soviet publicity for Kinopanorama ascribed a didactic function to the "presence effect" since the first panoramic films were meant to showcase Communist progress through documentary subjects. Whereas publicity for Kinopanorama defined films like *This Is Cinerama* (Merian C. Cooper, 1952) and *Cinerama Holiday* (Robert L. Bendick and Philippe De Lacy, 1955) as nothing more than

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<sup>15</sup> Krukones, James H., "Peacefully Coexisting on a Wide Screen: Kinopanorama vs. Cinerama, 1952–66," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2010, p. 285.

<sup>16</sup> Rogers, Ariel. "'Smothered in Baked Alaska': The Anxious Appeal of Widescreen Cinema". *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 3, Spring 2012, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Belton, John, "Technology and Innovation" in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 265.

attractions, the first Soviet panoramic film, *Great Is My Country* was said to utilize the presence effect to connect viewers with the nation and its people. In his review of the film, Viktor Gorokhov directly addresses the reader with this message. “You, Soviet viewer, Soviet man, are a participant and the hero of this film [...] and what the film poeticizes is our inseparable connection with the country and its people.”<sup>18</sup> As opposed to the recreational activities featured in Cinerama films, *Great Is My Country* brought viewers to the opening of new hydroelectric power plants, expos of new agricultural products, and onboard new jetliners. The selection of the well-known documentary filmmaker Roman Karmen to direct the first Kinopanorama feature-length film lent an air of authenticity and ideological legitimacy to the new system. A dogmatic Communist, Karmen was famous for his frontline filmmaking during the Spanish Civil War and World War II.

In addition to the contrast between the commercial interests of the Hollywood film industry and the Soviet promotion of Communist progress, publicity for Kinopanorama distinguished the domestic system from its American predecessors by highlighting formal and technical differences. Evincing anxiety over being seen as simply copying Cinerama, it was claimed that developers of Kinopanorama declined to look at “foreign” patents for panoramic cinema and worked independently.<sup>19</sup> The Soviet system was touted as having stabilized the panoramic image, as opposed to Cinerama’s reputed wobbliness, while also reducing the joint lines between three screen panels, which were said to be apparent in the American system. Along with these improvements, Kinopanorama also featured a nine-track stereophonic system, two more than its American competition.

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<sup>18</sup> “Sovetskii zritel', sovetskii chelovek, ty i est' uchastnik i geroi etogo fil'ma... I to, chto fil'm poetiziruet, eto nashe oshchushchenie nerazryvnoi svyazi so stranoi, s narodom...”, Gorokhov, “Zritel' vkhodit v kadr”, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> Goldovskii, “Sovetskaia kinopanorama”, 102.

Soviet publicity described the experience of presence almost universally through vehicular motion that viewers viscerally experienced. Early accounts of panoramic cinema in *Pravda* and *Izvestiia* relate a scene in which the viewer is situated in the back of a car driving along the Black Sea coast. The scene in question was one of the first to be shot for *Great Is My Country* and was screened at NIKFI in March of 1957. The experience is described through the landscape quickly passing by as the car makes sharp turns down the winding road. In *Iskusstvo kino*'s coverage of panoramic cinema, the experience of movement expands to include sailing on a ship through rough waters, floating on a raft down the river Tissa, and flying in an airplane across the Soviet Union. In each instance, the viewer is said to experience these travels viscerally, suffering lightheadedness from the drive and seasickness from the sea, feeling gusts of wind and instinctively moving one's head to avoid objects on the screen. As in the travel films of early cinema, such as Edison's *Panorama of George Railway* (1900), viewers of *Great Is My Country* are described as passengers surveying the rapidly passing landscape from moving vehicles. By revealing the expanse and continuity of these landscapes, such movement serves to activate the pro-filmic space and establish the depth of the image.

Along with the visceral experience of the new technology, Soviet publicity for Kinopanorama defined the impression of reality it generated in terms of how viewers were spatially positioned in relation to the screen. Kirill Dombrovskii locates Kinopanorama in the centuries-long development of the audience's relationship to the stage, which evolved from the external position of viewers in Ancient Greek tragedy to the complete immersion of panoramic cinema that envelops the viewer.<sup>20</sup> He traces the roots of locating viewers outside the action in the design of ancient Greek and Roman amphitheaters, where the audience was positioned

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<sup>20</sup> Dombrovskii, "Novye khudozhestvennye sredstva", p. 36.

around the performance. Addressing the design of modern theaters, Dombrovskii equates the use of the stage, the proscenium arc and the screen to separate viewers from the action of actors. The rectangular edges of the modern projection cinemas also demarcate the external position of spectators, delimiting the viewer's involvement. The impression of reality (*deistvitel'nost'*) associated with Kinopanorama is based on its capacity to envelop the viewer in an image that wraps around them.

In addition to relating Kinopanorama to previous forms of positioning the audience in relation to the action on the screen or the stage, Soviet publicity positioned Kinopanorama within cinema's presumed trajectory toward greater immersion. Dombrovskii cites the "Psychic Attack" sequence from *Chapaev* (1934) to illustrate the positioning of viewers in traditional Soviet cinema. In this sequence, General Kappel's White Army regiment advances on Chapaev's troops on foot. Tension is built through a shot-counter shot editing structure. Shots of the approaching dark-clad officers, marching in unison, are followed by reaction shots of the partisans. After two of Chapaev's men first marvel at the way Kappel's officers are marching, another partisan demonstrates the effect of the "psychic attack" by jumping up, bearing his chest, and begging the officers to shoot him. Dombrovskii claims, that whereas viewers watched from the outside how Chapaev led his troops against General Kappel's forces, in panoramic cinema the viewer will be positioned within the chain of Red Army soldiers repulsing the "psychic" attack.<sup>21</sup> Dombrovskii's choice of example is telling because *Chapaev* established the model for the individual biography films that would dominate the Stalinist era of Soviet cinema. Stephen Crofts has argued that *Chapaev's* "camera style is generally functional and naturalistic", meaning that the formal elements

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<sup>21</sup> "Esli ran'she zritel' nabludali so storony... kak vedet v boi svoi voiska Chapaev, to v novom kino zritel' dolzhen iz nabludatel'ia prevratit'sia v uchastnika etikh sobytii". Dombrovskii, "Novye khudozhestvennye sredstva", p. 38.

of the film are not obtrusive and do not make viewers aware that they are watching a film. In this regard, *Chapaev* establishes a closed formal structure that maintains a distance between the film and the viewers.<sup>22</sup>

As opposed to the distance maintained in *Chapaev*, Dombrovskii identifies Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* as a predecessor to Kinopanorama's "presence effect", citing specifically the "Odessa Steps" sequence as an instance in which viewers were inserted into the action by means of formal devices. Dombrovskii here invokes Eisenstein's understanding of pathos as a means of enabling the spectator to participate fully in the aesthetic experience.<sup>23</sup> In "The Structure of the Film", Eisenstein wrote: "Pathos shows its affect — when the spectator is compelled to jump from his seat. When he is compelled to collapse where he stands. When he is compelled to applaud, to cry out."<sup>24</sup> Eisenstein defined pathos as the viewer's emphatic reflex—a response to a stimulus and without conscious thought—to each scene of suffering.<sup>25</sup> In this regards, Dombrovskii's reference to the "Odessa Steps" sequence as forerunner to Kinopanorama's "presence effect" defines the illusion of inhabiting the filmic space as an experience triggered by the visual strategies. In other words, this affect is a reaction to sensory stimulation unprocessed by logical thought.

In light of Kinopanorama's "presence effect" and Dombrovskii's references to *Chapaev* and *Potemkin*, I argue that the visual style of Kalatozov and Urusevskii's films is meant to increase

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<sup>22</sup> Crofts, Stephen. "Ideology and form: Soviet Socialist Realism and Chapayev", *Essays in Poetics*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1977, p. 58.

<sup>23</sup> For an explanation of Eisenstein's understanding of pathos see Ian Aiken, "Determinism and Symbolism in the Film Theory of Eisenstein" in *European Film Theory and Cinema: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2001), p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei. "The Structure of the Film" in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, translated and edited by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1969), p. 166.

<sup>25</sup> Goodwin, James. "Battleship Potemkin" in *Eisenstein, Cinema, and History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 62.

the appeal of visual representation by aiming for greater sensory stimulation. Instead of simply returning to the archive of the avantgarde, Kalatozov and Urusevskii exploited new camera technologies like the Konvas-Avtomat handheld apparatus to produce a visual address and sense of realism that relied on physiological reactions. Urusevskii, particularly, imagined these visceral responses to the moving image as producing an experience of both presence and participation. Although the reception of *The Cranes Are Flying* associated participation more with narrative and character development, making hand-held camera movements ancillary to viewer investment in the plot, the methods Kalatozov and Urusevskii employed to produce *The Letter Never Sent* would demonstrate their belief that jarring, graphic compositions and camera movement could move viewers even more forcefully to experience a greater sense of participation.

## **II. Participation through Narrative in *The Cranes Are Flying***

Along with its widespread critical and financial success, *The Cranes Are Flying* astonished audiences with its cinematographic qualities, particularly the mobile frame shots Sergei Urusevskii filmed with the handheld Konvas-Avtomat camera. As David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's define it, mobile framing:

means that the framing of the object changes. The mobile frame changes the camera angle, level, height, or distance during the shot. Further, since the framing orients us to the material in the image, we often see ourselves as moving along with the frame. Through such framing, we may approach the object or retreat from it, circle it, or move past it.<sup>26</sup>

Using the Konvas-Avtomat camera, Urusevskii developed a distinct style of mobile framing that soon became known as "Urusevskii's subjective camera". His use of this newly developed Soviet apparatus was preceded by the exploitation of handheld cameras in Soviet cinema of 1920s.

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<sup>26</sup> Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, Eighth Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), p. 195.

According to Philip Cavendish, cinematographers of that period exploited handheld cameras to communicate physiological sensations, various emotional states, as well as to replicate the experience of motion and spontaneous movements of the body. Particularly with shots of moving bodies, Cavendish notes an interest in provoking “a sense of immediacy and dynamism on the part of the spectator”.<sup>27</sup> Thaw-era critics and filmmakers would subsequently assert that the cinematographic qualities of *The Cranes Are Flying*, most of all the handheld shots filmed with the Konvas-Avtomat, stimulated an experience of participating in the film.

Critics used strikingly similar formulations to describe the experience of participation in *The Cranes Are Flying*: “The viewer... is turned from an external observer into one of its *participants*.”<sup>28</sup> (Here and further the italics are mine.) “Seemingly not aware of it himself, the viewer becomes an immediate *co-participant* of the film’s action and events.”<sup>29</sup> “The viewers were transformed into *participants* of the action; they traveled together with the characters on a dangerous journey.”<sup>30</sup> How this affect of participation was defined reveals the conflict between the film techniques on display in *The Cranes Are Flying* and *The Letter Never Sent*, the new critical demands of the Thaw, and the critical response of standard, conservative expectations. Divergent aesthetic theories competed for authority in this conflict. Along with Urusevskii’s assertion about the experience of viewers, *participation was* varyingly defined according to notions of narrative function, the effacement of previously dominant conventions, and the sensuous appeal of moving images.

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<sup>27</sup> Cavendish, Philip. “The delirious vision: the vogue for the hand-held camera in Soviet cinema of the 1920s”, *Studies in Russian & Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2013, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> “Zritel’... kak by vvoditsia vnutr’ stseny i iz storonnego nabliudatel’ia slovno prevrashchaetsia v odnogo iz ee uchastnikov.” Lidiia Dyko, “Novye raboty kinooperatore”, *Iskusstvo kino* 2, 1958, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> “Kak by sam togo ne zamechaia, zritel’ stanovitsia neposredstvennym souchastnikom deistviia i sobytii fil’ma”. R. Il’in “Pocherk operatora”, *Iskusstvo kino* 5, May 1962, p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> “Zriteli prevratilis’ v uchastnikov deistviia, oni vmeste s geroiami prodelali opasnyi put’.” Maia Merkel’. “Dolzhen li operator ‘videt’?”, *Iskusstvo kino* 10, 1961, p. 52

Nearly all claims about participation dealing with *The Cranes Are Flying* are contingent upon the origins and capacities of the celebrated “Konvas-Avtomat” camera. Officially titled “1KSR”, the camera received its sobriquet from the last and first name of its chief designer, Vasilii Dmitrievich Konstantinov, who worked in Moscow as both a documentary cameraman at Sovkino’s newsreel division in the 1920s and as camera developer in the technical equipment workshop of the All-Union Newsreel Factory. Developed primarily for documentary filmmaking, the “Konvas-Avtomat” entered mass production in 1955 at the Moscow Works of Cinema Equipment (Moskinap). The camera was designed to satisfy a range of competing demands, including being lightweight enough to be comfortably handled during filming (5.7 kilograms or 12.6 pounds), and durable enough to function reliably in various outdoors settings and conditions, having easily adjustable components, including a three-lens turret, and a mirror-reflex shutter, and also holding ample film for long takes (its easy-to-change film magazine held loads of 60 meters, or slightly less than 200 feet). Although nearly identical to the 1929 Bell & Howell Eyemo camera, a major innovation of the Konvas-Avtomat was its shutter system, which allowed operators to view through the lens exactly what was being captured on film, as opposed to viewfinder cameras, where the image could be significantly different from what was filmed.

Although Urusevskii and Kalatozov did not begin to collaborate until 1955, their work together was informed by mutual links to the avant-garde cinema of the 1920s.<sup>31</sup> As Philip Cavendish and others have pointed out, both Urusevskii and Kalatozov were familiar with visually expressive style of the earlier period of Soviet Cinema on account of their formative education and professional development. A member of the Georgian branch of LEF (Left Front

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<sup>31</sup> See, Cavendish. “The Delirious Vision: the vogue for the hand-held camera in Soviet cinema of the 1920s”, pp. 23–24; Condee, Nancy. “Rape and Medium Specificity in *The Cranes are Flying*”, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2009. pp. 173–183; I. Bogdanov, “Kamera v dvizhenii”, *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 5, May 1960, pp. 117-124

of Art), Kalatozov had begun his career as a cameraman in the Georgian film industry. His early films *Salt for Svanetia* (*Sol' Svanetii*, 1930) and *Nail in the Boot* (*Gvozd' v sapoge*, 1932) feature a range of avant-garde techniques, including the interplay of sharp, unexpected camera angles, the effects of light and shadow, dramatic juxtapositions, the use of striking close-ups and diagonal compositions. The younger Urusevskii was a student of the graphic artist and theoretician Vladimir Favorskii and the Constructivist photographer and designer Aleksandr Rodchenko at the Higher Art-Technical Institute (VKhUTEIN - Vysshii khudozhestvenno-tekhnicheskii institut). Urusevskii's later camerawork bares traces of Favorskii's and Rodchenko's influences. His use of oblique angles, cropping, foreshortening and dislocation of viewpoint is stylistically related to Rodchenko's photographic technique. Favorskii's lectures on the theory of composition led Urusevskii to consider how graphic compositions portray space and time.<sup>32</sup> According to the cinematographer, Favorskii's lectures at VKhUTEIN specifically led him to perceive rhythm as a key component of filmmaking, a notion that became fully realized in the production of *The Letter Never Sent*.<sup>33</sup>

Urusevskii first used the Konvas-Avtomat for handheld shots on the set of *The First Echelon* (*Pervyi eshelon*, 1955), the film that first brought him together with Kalatozov. He joined the production after the original cinematographer, Iurii Ekel'chik, became ill, and Kalatozov asked specifically for Urusevskii.<sup>34</sup> During the production of this film about a Komsomol group that heads eastward as part of the campaign to cultivate the so-called Virgin Lands, Urusevskii faced the task of filming an early scene set inside a crowded railway car. As he prepared to film a shot in which two men enter the car's main compartment from the vestibule, Urusevskii faced the

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<sup>32</sup> Gorjaev, V. "Prostranstvo Urusevskogo", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 3, March 1980, p. 80-81.

<sup>33</sup> Urusevskii, Sergei. "O forme", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 2, February 1966, p. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Merkel', *Dialogi s Urusevskim*, p. 37.

difficulty of filming from a tripod in such a cramped space. He dismantled the camera from the tripod and was able to follow the characters through the railway car. Additionally, while shooting the scene, Urusevskii intentionally swung the camera to suggest the swaying motion of a railway car. When he later watched the rushes, Urusevskii realized that in addition to swinging the Konvas-Avtomat, he had unconsciously moved the camera toward and away from his subjects, along with swiveling it, which for him produced the impression that he was not only filming the action but experiencing it (“uzhe ne prosto snimal deistvie, a perezhival ego”).<sup>35</sup>

Whereas the handheld use of the Konvas-Avtomat in *The First Echelon* was limited to solving the constraints of a particular setting, the camera’s capacity for varied kinds of mobility was exploited in *The Cranes Are Flying* to subjectivize the moving image, saturating it with the presence and emotions of the filmmakers. The film’s visual language marks Urusevskii’s great technical skill and creativity with the Konvas-Avtomat most prominently in a 35.68-second shot, 24 minutes into the film, that transitions through three different stages, following the character Veronika (Tat’iana Samoilova) outside from the enclosed space of a bus, through a crowd, and finally craning up to keep her visible as long as possible, as she runs between a column of tanks. After Veronika looks out the bus window she stands up, and the camera rises and pans left 180° to follow her as she exists. Emerging from the bus after Veronika, the camera completes two 90° pans, the first to follow her when she moves left once outside, and the second to follow her as she goes around a car stopped in front of the bus. As Veronika turns right and weaves through a crowd, she moves away from the camera into full shot scale. The camera and Veronika intersect at the edge of the crowd bordering the street. She is again in a medium close-up. A pause here allows Urusevskii to step on to a crane platform, after which the camera cranes up while

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<sup>35</sup> Urusevskii, Sergei. “Zhivaia’ kamera”, *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, March 11, 1961, p. 4.

Veronika darts into the street and runs into the background. In this single take, the moving camera juxtaposes a succession of shot scales drastically opposing the intimate medium close-up with the extreme long shot. The long take most directly achieves a dramatic contrast between the individual and the collective, emphasizing Veronika's desperation through the shifts in spatial orientation and changes in perspective. On another level, this single take clearly marks the role of the camera operator in this production as the mobile frame takes on characteristics of bodily movement and unsteady, mobile vision. Lastly, the take's spatial and temporal continuity allows the camera's subjectivity to establish itself in lived time.

The mobile frame of the Konvas-Avtomat is selectively employed throughout *The Cranes Are Flying* to visually project emotional experiences, ranging from exuberance to desperation. An early instance of this comes in a shot of Boris (Aleksi Batalov) running up the stairs to arrange his next rendezvous with Veronika, 5 minutes into the film. In a shot lasting 10.6 seconds, the camera rapidly pans 720° following Boris at a medium to medium-long shot scale as he races up five flights of stairs. The staircase, equivalent to that of a three-story building, was built on the set at Mosfilm, and for this shot, a steel column with an attached rotating and rising platform was inserted down its center. Seated on the platform and holding the Konvas-Avtomat in his hands, Urusevskii followed Batalov's movements rising and rotating around the column. The tempo of the movement parallels that of Boris, communicating the character's emotional exuberance. Later in the film there is an almost identical shot during Boris's fantasy sequence. Now dressed in a soldier's coat, Boris is again seen running up the stairs as the camera completes two complete circular pans within the staircase. In both instances, the tempo of the camera movement inscribes Boris' exuberance in the moving frame. Discussing the affect of participation, critics claimed that viewers came to identify with such expressions of emotion through the camera's own exuberance.

At the other end of the emotional range, Urusevskii and Kalatozov rely on handheld camera movement to communicate Veronika's suicidal desperation late in the film. The “suicide run” sequence of 20 shots, ASL 4.2 seconds, begins with a canted close-up of Veronika, the kind of shot traditionally used to portray psychological uneasiness or tension. When she begins to run the film cuts to a medium shot. As her speed increases the camera movement matches her quickening pace, shot lengths decrease, and the succession of shots becomes quicker, all of which leads to an almost complete loss of visual clarity by the end of the sequence. Along with intercutting close-ups of Veronika's distraught face and medium shots of her running, the sequence includes trembling point-of-view shots that were filmed by Tat'iana Samoilova running as she held the Konvas-Avtomat. In this manner, Kalatozov and Urusevskii bound the camera's subjectivity with Veronika's own, exploiting the actress' unskilled handling of the camera to capture authentic tremors of the mobile frame. Discussing Veronika's run, Urusevskii ascribes the potential of this scene to both the position and movement of the camera as well the increasing speed of the actress's and camera's movement. Accelerating to a rate where the moving images transform into “non-objective flickering” (*bespredmetnoe mel'kanie*), Urusevskii claimed that this sequence was meant to both express Veronika's emotional state and also draw the viewer into the action, inducing the viewer to run with the character and sympathize with her.

A number of critics defined shots filmed with the Konvas-Avtomat in *The Cranes Are Flying* as having the narrative function of communicating the emotional experiences of characters. In this model, the handheld shots constituted dramatic peaks of the narrative throughout the film. Plot developments and established character traits provided the psychological motivations for these experiences. The claimed result was that viewers experiencing a sense of participation would better comprehend the film's characters and its narrative, along with grasping the film's

didactic message about personal redemption. This approach is most clearly evident in a selection of *Iskusstvo kino* articles, including Lidiia Dyko's "New Work of the Cinematographers"<sup>36</sup> and "The Creative Endeavors of Sergei Urusevskii"<sup>37</sup> as well as Manana Andronnikova's "A History of the Mobile Camera"<sup>38</sup>.

Both Dyko and Andronnikova assert that participation is achieved via camera movement.

Discussing the film's "Departure for the Front" episode, Dyko argues:

The scene's tension and action are emphasized by the fact that the camera is moving the whole time, accompanying the actors. The camera's point of view and direction of movement are chosen in such a way that the viewer, always seeing the action from the point of view of the film apparatus, is brought inside the scene...<sup>39</sup>

According to Andronnikova, "The moving camera transforms the viewer into a participant of what is occurring on the screen, letting him into the inner life of the characters."<sup>40</sup> Participation brings viewers inside the film's diegetic world and the minds and bodies of characters, as they "experience what the film's characters go through and suffer together with them".<sup>41</sup> In this manner, the viewer imagines that they are personally experiencing events inside the audio-visual reality constructed by the film. Camera movement is thus ascribed the capacity completely to efface the distance between the viewer and screen.

In addition to the presence of the viewers, the mobile frame in *The Cranes Are Flying* is credited with marking the attitude of Urusevskii and Kalatozov toward the characters and events

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<sup>36</sup> Dyko, Lidiia, "Novye raboty kinooperatore", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 2, February 1958, p. 112-129.

<sup>37</sup> Dyko, Lidiia, "Tvorcheskie poiski Sergeia Urusevskogo", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 7, February 1961, p. 102-112

<sup>38</sup> Andronnikova, Manana. "Istoriia dvizhushcheisia kamery", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 4, April 1964, p. 87-97

<sup>39</sup> "Napriazhennost' i dinamika stseny podcherkivaiutsia tem, chto i zdes' s'emochnyi apparat vse vremia nakhoditsia v dvizhenii, soprovozhdaet akterov. Tochki s'emki i napravlenie dvizheniia kamery vybiraiutsia tak, chto zritel', vseгда vidiashchii deistvie s tochki zreniia s'emochnogo apparata, kak by vvoditsia vnutr' stseny..."; Dyko, "Novye raboty kinooperatora", p. 116.

<sup>40</sup> Andronnikova, p. 96

<sup>41</sup> "Zritel' perezhivaiut to zhe, chto i geroi fil'ma, vmeste s nimi stradaiut". Ibid.

of the film. Dyko described the spectator becoming a “witness to how the excited narrator, deeply moved by the fate of people dearest and closest to him—the film’s heroes, narrates to us their fates from the screen.”<sup>42</sup> In turn, Andronnikova asserts that *The Cranes Are Flying* demonstrates cinema’s capacity “to reproduce with camera movement the movement of the artist’s thoughts”.<sup>43</sup> In this manner, participation entails four-part identification, first of the camera with the characters, second of the viewer with the camera, third of the camera with its operator, and fourth of the operator with the viewer. These multiple identifications saturate the mobile frame with multiple subjectivities. The production of these connections lead the viewer to experience physiological sensations and emotional experience that mimic those depicted on the screen.

Dyko’s and Andronnikova’s emphasis on the psychological dimension of the participation affect aligns the film and its provocative visual style within accepted stylistic trends of Soviet cinema in order to safeguard it against ideological criticism. Discussions of the film at Mosfilm studios and later under the auspices of the Union of Soviet Film Workers demonstrate that, despite the formal concerns of the film’s aesthetic innovations, these were framed as unobjectionable and said to be in the service of the film’s story and themes. At the Mosfilm discussion of the film, on August 27, 1957, Mikhail Romm stated that none of the film’s visual elements were executed out of formal interest alone, a view seconded by Rostislav Iurenev at the Union of Soviet Film Workers discussion of the film on November 20, 1957 and in his *Iskusstvo kino* review of *The Cranes Are Flying*. In their statements, these leading figures asserted the absence

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<sup>42</sup> “My stanovimsia svideteliami togo, kak vzvolnovannyi rasskazchik, gluboko potriasennyi sud’bami samykh dorogikh i samykh blizkikh emu liudei—geroev fil’ma, povestvuet nam s ekrana ob ikh sud’bakh...”. Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>43</sup> “...peredavat’ dvizheniem kamery dvizhenie mysli khudozhnika”. Andronnikova, “Istoriia dvizhushcheisia kamery”, p. 96.

of purely formalist intentions after discussing episodes in the film where the image provides visual information (i.e., “content”) that exceeds narrative requirements. Prior to his assertion, Romm ran through a list of scenes that feature shots with pronounced formal qualities.<sup>44</sup> One of these is the bravura, handheld shot that trails Veronika from the bus through a crowd and into the midst of the tank column. Romm claims that the filmmakers brilliantly reproduced those events described in Rozov’s screenplay, even though the text provides no clear justification for such camera movement. In fact, in the literary script, Veronika rushes along the sidewalk and does not wade into the street.<sup>45</sup> Iurenev discusses the connections between cinematographic qualities and the film’s narrative in relation to the opening shots of the film.<sup>46</sup> Here great depth and extreme camera angles by far surpass the need to show a couple walking together through the city. Iurenev reasons that this initial visual excess is meant to prime the viewer to experience developments in the plot more emotionally. According to this logic, the set-up of the early high-angle shot of Boris and Veronika is repeated ten minutes later to emphasize the differences between Boris and his cousin Mark, as well as the more general ones between peace and war.

Even more attentive to the visual qualities of *The Cranes Are Flying* than Romm and Iurenev, Dyko’s and Andronikova’s psychological reading of the affect of camera movement subordinates visual technique to the development of the film’s characters and the definition of their values, beliefs, and actions. Flashy visual aesthetics are allowed as long as they are informed by the biography and motivations of the characters. Within this model, realism is defined as the capacity to evoke a strong emotional response from the audience through what the character says

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<sup>44</sup> RGALI Fond 2453, op. 3, delo 620, August 27, 1957.

<sup>45</sup> RGALI Fond 2453, op. 3, delo 616, Literaturnyi stsenarii Viktora Sergeevicha Rozova “Letiat zhuravli”.

<sup>46</sup> RGALI Fond 2936, op. 1, delo 352, November 20, 1957.

and does. The exposition of character motivations and articulation of their personalities deepens and extends viewer immersion.

### **III. Participation through the Image in *The Letter Never Sent***

In the psychological model of participation, camera movement cannot bring viewers to experience participating in the film if they do not understand the characters' actions and histories. This reasoning becomes fully apparent in Dyko's criticism of Kalatozov's and Urusevskii's next film, *The Letter Never Sent*, included at the end of her essay "The Creative Endeavors of Sergei Urusevskii". She launches her assessment of the film's perceived failure to connect with viewers by asking why the spectator "watches the film, but doesn't live the life of its heroes, as it happened, for example, with *The Cranes are Flying*".<sup>47</sup> Dyko attributes the viewers' inability to identify with characters or experience a sense of presence to a lack of character development in *The Letter Never Sent*: "The personalities of the heroes are not revealed under the influence of circumstances, (they) don't change: in the end of the film our knowledge of the heroes is the same as at the beginning."<sup>48</sup> Dyko here rehearses a line of criticism levied against *The Letter Never Sent* since its release, which held that the film did not sufficiently 'psychologize' its characters. She faults this lack for the spectator's inability to experience a sense of participation in relation to both the characters and the events on the screen. Urusevskii's response to such charges will be considered in this section through the cinematographer's own conceptualization of participation.

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<sup>47</sup> "Pochemu zritel'... smotrit fil'm, a ne zhivet zhizn'iu geroev, kak eto bylo, naprimer, pri prosmotre fil'ma 'Letiat zhuravli'?" Dyko, "Tvorcheskie poiski Sergeia Urusevskogo", p. 111-2.

<sup>48</sup> "Kharaktery geroev ne rasskryvaiutsia pod vlianiem obstoiatel'stv, ne dvizhutsia: v kontse fil'm my znaem o geroiakh, po sushchestvu, tol'ko to chto znali o nikh i v nachale." Ibid, p. 112.

Even some critics, who appeared to stress the role of camera technology and visual strategies over narrative function in the construction of a more immersive film experience, critiqued the development of characters *The Letter Never Sent*. In his 1962 essay, “The Cinematographer’s Signature”, R. Il’in aligns camera movement and handheld camera work with the use of longer takes and wide-angle lenses to produce a sense that the viewer is watching a small segment of real life, viewed and captured by the artist. The viewer’s experience of presence in this replication of physical reality is ascribed to the supposedly newfound capacities of camera movement. Il’in writes:

Now cameras can really “be agitated”, can really “run”, “jump”, “freeze”, or “burn in the fire”, can be hopelessly passive or be found in the state of heightened emotional tension... And all of these delicate emotions are communicated from the screen without the help of imposed words, exciting in the viewer a corresponding mood toward what he sees in the film. This engenders in the viewer an acute sensitivity to what is occurring on the screen. Likely not noticing this, the viewer becomes a direct participant of the film’s actions and events.<sup>49</sup>

But when Il’in turns his attention to *The Letter Never Sent*, he locates the main production of meaning in the characters and the narratives involving them, defining the actors and the definition of their characters as the film’s most important components. Judging the visual style of *The Letter Never Sent* to depend excessively on the handheld camera, he claims that the “monotonous and excessively active use of the ‘emotional camera’ ... *distracts us from the main point*

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<sup>49</sup> “Teper’ kinokamera deistvitel’no mozhet “volnovat’sia”, “begat”, “prygat”, “merznut”, ili “goret’ v ogne”, byt’ beznadezhno passivnoi ili nakhodit’sia v sostoianii vysochaishego emotsional’nogo napriazheniia... I vse eto tonkie emotsii peredaiutsia s ekrana bez pomoshchi naviazchivvykh slov, vzbuzhdaia u zritelei sootvetstvuiushchuiu nastroennost’ k tomu, chto on seichas vidit v fil’m. Eto porozhdaet u zritelei obostrennuiu vospriimchivost’ k tomu, chto proiskhodit na ekrane. Kak by sam togo ne zamechaia, zritel’ stanovitsia neposredstvennym souchastnikom deistviia i sobytii fil’ma”. Il’in, “Pocherk operatora”, p. 114.

— *the people and their character on the screen*” (My emphasis).<sup>50</sup> This assessment both follows the standard repudiation of *The Letter Never Sent* and ultimately subordinates visual technique to the performance of actors and the narrative definition of characters. As the subsequent discussion of Urusevskii’s methods will show, both Dyko’s and Il’in’s claims failed to take into account the aesthetic and physiological understandings of the participation effect.

*The Letter Never Sent* was to be a story of a geological expedition seeking Kimberlite pipes containing diamonds in the Siberian taiga. After finding diamonds the party of three geologists and their guide are confronted by a massive forest fire that kills one of them and forces the others to contend with the unforgiving landscape. Everyone except for the expedition leader dies in the wilderness. Although he was originally also supposed to perish in the wilderness, the nearly frozen expedition leader is rescued in the film’s finale.

Kalatozov’s and Urusevskii’s next film was highly anticipated at home and abroad. The film’s eight-month-long production in the taiga was periodically covered in the Soviet press.<sup>51</sup> Anticipating another box-office hit, European companies signed distribution contracts for *The Letter Never Sent* before the film was completed.<sup>52</sup> But, as early as the post-production discussions at Mosfilm, the film came under increasing scrutiny for its visual style and narrative. In the run-up to the film’s release, the condemnation continued to grow fierce. *The Letter Never Sent* was widely criticized for failing sufficiently to define the psychologies of its characters, a view later developed

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<sup>50</sup> “I v to zhe vremia v fil’me ‘Neotpravlennoe pis’mo’, odnobraznoe i neumerenno aktivnoe nagnietanie priema ‘emotsional’noi kamery’... otvlekaet nas ot glavnogo — ot liudei i ikh kharakterov na ekrane”, Il’in, “Pocherk operatora”, p. 115.

<sup>51</sup> C.f. Vladimirova, T., “V Saianskikh gorakh”, *Sovetskaia kul’tura*, 25 July, 1959; Shevkunenko, Iu., “Pokoris’, Enisei!”, *Moskovskaia pravda*, 29 August, 1959; “Krapivnitskii, S. “Cherez ogon’ i vodu...”, *Literatura i zhizn’*, 10 January, 1960; Gal’kovskii, Iu., “Tak snimalsia fil’m ‘Neotpravlennoe pis’mo’”, *Tuvinskaia Pravda*, 18 February, 1960;

<sup>52</sup> Kremlev, *Kalatozov* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964), p. 204.

by Dyko and Il'in. Such arguments applied standard narrative expectations and ignored how the film's visual style was conceived.

A letter from a certain V. Dzavakov written on July 15, 1960 and mailed to the editors of the Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil* complicates the contemporary understanding of the affect of participation as it shifts emphasis from characters to visual strategy. The letter begins with a description of the viewing experience: "Over the course of two hours you will be soaked together with the characters both from below and from above; you will stand against a background of flames and, like a devil in a vessel, you will remain whole and unhurt; you will be smothered by snow and, after shaking it off, you will continue your journey even if shaking for effect..."<sup>53</sup>

Through the intimate, second-person singular phrasing of suffering the same hardships as the film's characters, V. Dzavakov's letter describes the viewer's visceral experience of participating in the events unfolding on the screen. The film's visual style involves the viewer and positions his or her reaction inside the space projected on the screen. Yet, this introduction is followed by a scathing condemnation of the film's inability to communicate a didactic message, which raises doubt about the success of the film's visual strategy. V. Dzavakov questions what this film is about, asserting that he feels shame for those who produced *The Letter Never Sent* since it seems not to contain any useful message. What this letter then suggests is that the film was able, on the one hand, to produce a "participation effect", but, on the other hand, its message and purpose was lost on the audience. Despite the letter's overall negative assessment of the film, V. Dzavakov's initial description suggests an alternative way of understanding participation, as an effect rather than as a result of psychological character definition.

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<sup>53</sup> RGALI fond 2453, op. 1, delo 666.

In his defense of *The Letter Never Sent*, Sergei Urusevskii argued against what he called the formulaic argument that the film presented silhouettes instead of defined characters by pointing out that he and Kalatozov always intended to make a different film from what was expected. “We considered it impossible to make [*The Letter Never Sent*] according to the rules of psychological drama with a detailed portrayal of everyday life and the development of characters.”<sup>54</sup> Instead of relying on actors as the main expressive force of the film, Urusevskii asserted the importance of other creative solutions, principally the use of the handheld camera to film nearly eighty percent of the film. The decision to film most of *The Letter Never Sent* with the Konvas-Avtomat relied upon the camera’s practical design that made it conducive to filming in extreme natural settings while also exploiting the camera’s expressive potential. The visual strategy of *The Letter Never Sent* reveals how the handheld camera was exploited to produce the impression of moving through the landscape, simulating body movements, and replicating emotional states. In this manner, the film departs from the standard style of Soviet dramatic films, expanding beyond the psychological drama centered on the performance of actors toward a drama based on the affective capacity of the visual image. Dedicating their film to pioneers and trailblazers, Kalatozov and Urusevskii mobilized the handheld camera to convey the physical and emotional experiences of explorers who face natural forces and confront their own limits. The viewer is immersed into this encounter to experience this confrontation viscerally.

The source material for *The Letter Never Sent* presents nascent textual descriptions of the experiences Kalatozov and Urusevskii would convey visually. The film was primarily adapted from Valerii Osipov’s eponymous short story, first published in the magazine *Iunost*.<sup>55</sup> Aspects of

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<sup>54</sup> “Etot fil’m my schitali nevozmozhnym delat’ po zakonom psikhologicheskoi dramy so podrobnym bytoopisaniem i razvitiem kharakterov geroev”. Urusevskii, Sergei, “O forme”, *Iskusstvo kino*, p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> Osipov, Valerii. “Neotpralennoe pis’mo”, *Iunost*, No. 8, 1957, p. 50-56

two other Osipov stories, “Without Witnesses” (“Bez svidetelei”) and “Kind Wings” (“Dobrye kryl’ia”) were also incorporated in the film’s plot, most importantly the forest fire episode in “Without Witnesses” and the physical experiences of characters in both stories. All three stories were set in the Siberian *taiga* and featured characters that were either members of geological expeditions or worked in support of these ventures. Kalatozov proposed the project to Mosfilm and suggested Osipov along with the screenwriter Grigorii Koltunov to write the literary scenario. At the Mosfilm discussion of the initial literary script on June 8, 1958, Kalatozov expressed disappointment with the first draft Osipov and Koltunov produced because it included intermixed romantic relationships and had characters relating contradictory versions of events.<sup>56</sup> Viktor Rozov was brought into the fold to help produce the next draft. The romantic intrigue and narrative structure originally proposed by Osipov and Koltunov were absent from Kalatozov’s director’s script, submitted on December 22, 1958. Early in 1959, after several scouting trips, the Saian Mountains of Southern Siberia were chosen as the location of the production. The production crew set off from Moscow at the end of March 1959 and spent the next eight months filming on locations. The film was completed and submitted to Mosfilm December 22, 1959.

Kalatozov and Urusevskii’s decision to film *The Letter Never Sent* on location was motivated by the expressivity and destructive agency ascribed to nature in Osipov’s short stories. Along with the film’s lead production designer, David Vinitskii, the director and cinematographer searched for a landscape that could be expressive even without actors, as opposed to filming in more controlled surrounding such as on a sound stage at Mosfilm or in the environs around Moscow.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> RGALI fond 2453, op. 1, delo 662.

<sup>57</sup> “...priroda nastol’ko vyrazitel’na, chto mozhet «rabotat’» samostoiatel’no, to est’ inogda dazhe bez aktera.” Vinitskii, D. *Iz dnevnika khudozhnika-postanovshchika* (Moscow: Isskustvo, 1980), p. 66.

Importantly, this search was not guided by a desire for authenticity. Rather, the director and his cameraman sought to produce an image of the human experience of nature, which would elicit the affect of participation on the part of viewers. An authentic experience of traversing the taiga would have relied on spontaneously following actors through the landscape while filming with the Konvas Avtomat, but the filmmakers did something very opposite. Handheld sequences were extensively planned and rehearsed, while camera platforms were jury-rigged to attain specific angles and scales. Filming on location in the Siberian taiga created many challenges for the film crew, especially for Urusevskii's cinematographic designs. The crew was limited in the kind of equipment they could bring with them, and further constrained when they went into the mountains to shoot. In addition to the Konvas-Avtomat, they clearly brought tracks and a dolly system as well as portable lighting equipment. Requests sent to Mosfilm during the production suggest the crew was, however, without cranes or camera towers.<sup>58</sup> Platforms for high angle shots were improvised from available resources.

The production of the disaster and attempted rescue sequences illustrate the process of technical improvisation and careful planning. It took hours safely to set up shots in which characters run through the burning forest landscape, as the paths of the actors and the camera crew had to be carefully choreographed.<sup>59</sup> Planning also included the experience of participation: for the forest fire episode Urusevskii resolved to be covered in fireproof asbestos so that he could film from inside the flames. In his diary, an unnamed member of the crew wrote: "Sergei Pavlovich devised a shot completely without considering his own combustibility—to place himself

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<sup>58</sup> RGALI fond 2453, op. 1, delo 667.

<sup>59</sup> Urusevskii, "Bolgarskie vstrechi" in *S kinokameroi i za mol'bertom*, A. I. Lipkov and I. S. Urusevskaia, Eds. (Moskva : Algoritm, 2002), p. 216.

with the camera inside the flame, at the very center of the fire. How they will then marvel at the 'presence effect', if the camera operator with his camera burned in the fire."<sup>60</sup>

After a completed cut of *The Letter Never Sent* was submitted to Mosfilm, the studio discussion of the film on January 23, 1960 centered on concerns over how the film would be received and how to define its didactic message. The eminent film director Mikhail Romm asserted that the film's methods would not be accepted by all equally: *The Letter Never Sent* would appear strange to those advocating a turn in Soviet cinema toward quotidian realism and closer observation of ordinary people.<sup>61</sup> Instead of looking closer at reality, the film's task, according to Romm, is "to exert psychic pressure on the viewer by going beyond the realistic boundaries of emotional experience."<sup>62</sup> This characterization of the film's address emphasizes its appeal to the viewer not through its laconic narrative but through the viewer's sensual experience. "Everything is brought to a certain, extreme simplicity. Cold, hunger, fire. In turn, each of these circumstances is concisely and uniformly solved, but with a huge emotional pressure and expressiveness."<sup>63</sup> In this interpretation of the film, the bare economy of the narrative gave room for new formal means of expressivity. Recognizing the challenge the film would pose to audiences, Romm characterized the film as innovative yet belonging to traditions of Soviet cinema, particularly in its primary address through visual means, which originated with Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin*.

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Merkel', *Dialogi s Urusevskim*, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> "Eta vsia metodika ne budet vsemi odinakovo priniata. Dlia ochen' mnogikh storonnikov, ili dlia riada ochen' uvazhaemykh mnoiu liudei, razvivaiushchikh seichas takie traditsii realisticheski bytovye, podrobnoe nabliudenie za chelovekom eta kartina pokazhetsia chuzhdoi, ili ne po doroge". RGALI fond 2453, op. 1, delo 663.

<sup>62</sup> "On (Kalatozov) stremitsia, chtoby kazhdyi kusok okazyval emotsional'noe davlenie na psikhiku". Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> "Vse chrezvychaino dovedeno do opredelennoi prostoty. Kholod, golod, pozhar. Pri chem kazhdoe iz etikh obstoiatel'stv lakonichno i odnoobrazno reshaetsia, no zato s ogromnym emotsional'nym naporom i vyrazitel'nost'iu". Ibid.

Other members of Mosfilm's third production group expressed concern that the film would not engage the mass public because of its laconic narrative and lack of character development. The production group's director N. M. Kiva was the first to question the underdevelopment of characters and their psychological motivations, but allowed for the possibility that aspects of the adventure genre justified this narrative strategy.<sup>64</sup> Script writer Iurii Shevkunenko cautioned that the film would have many opponents because it lacked fully defined interpersonal relationships between its characters.<sup>65</sup> Building off of these comments, Grigorii Koltunov, one of the film's original scriptwriters, rejected the final version of *The Letter Never Sent* and asserted that only aesthetically educated viewers would be able to appreciate the "cold" visual strategies of Kalatozov and Urusevskii.<sup>66</sup> Dyko and Il'in would later extend this accusation of frigidity into the claim that the film failed to produce a sensation of participation. V. N. Surin, Mosfilm director at the time, further expanded upon the criticism by asserting that the film lacked patriotic sentiment. He argued that it was necessary to find moments in the film where its message could be clearly articulated and where its characters could be defined as true Soviets.<sup>67</sup> In response to these critiques, Mikhail Kalatozov, present at the Mosfilm discussion of the film, expressed concern about the film's possible inability to engage mass audiences. While stating that

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<sup>64</sup> "Mne kazalos', chto i po linii aktorskoï igry na protiazhenii vsego fil'ma nekhvataet neskol'ko emotsional'nogo psikhologicheskogo resheniia zadachi... Ia ne utverzhdaiu, chto ia prav, ibo, mozhnet byt', zdes' zhanrovy osobennosti, mozhnet byt', nekotoraia pripodniatost' kak raz snimaet vozmozhnost' resheniia takim obrazom". Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "U etoi kartiny budet i bol'shoe kolichestvo protivnikov... Malen'kaia poluchilas' istoriia vnutri etoi gruppy po svoei dramaturgicheskoi i psikhologicheskoi nagruzke". Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> "Ia ne ubezhden, chto kartina budet shirokie massy zritelei tak trogat', kak zritel'ia bolee iskushennogo, bolee esteticheski vospitannogo... Po vyrazitel'nosti est' prekrasnye veshchi. Ty smotrish' prekrasnoe, no kholodnoe. Kazhdyi kusok napolnen ogromnym tvorcheskim temperamentom, no gde—to v seredine po chelovecheski stanovitsia kholodno". Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> "My govorili, chto nuzhno naiti mesto v kartine, kotoroe-by raskryvalo glavnyi smysl, glavnuu ideiu kartiny. Ia zadal vopros: takaia kartina mogla-by poiavit'sia v drugoi strane?... Kakie zhe eto geroi, chem oni otlichaiutsia?... my ne nashli odnogo vyrazheniia, chto eto proiskhodit v sovetskoi deistvitel'nosti, chto idet razgovor v nashu kommunisticheskuiu epokhu". Ibid.

he would look to add two or three “details” to the second half of the film to make it more appealing, he clearly resented calls to alter the narrative of the film by the inclusion of new scenes and dialogues that would better define the characters.

Except for minor final edits, *The Letter Never Sent* was not significantly altered after the Mosfilm discussion and the film was approved for domestic release. However, months before its premiere the film became embroiled in a more extensive critical debate, having become the topic of extensive discussion at the Third Plenary Session of the USSR Film Workers Union on February 16-19, 1960. On the eve of the plenary session there was a meeting organized by the Party Bureau of the Directorate for the Production of Films, an organ of the Ministry of Culture (Partiinoe biuro Upravleniia po proizvodstvu fil'mov Ministerstva kul'tury SSSR). At this special session, a succession of speakers denounced the film. Even though at this point the film had only been screened at Mosfilm, Dom kino, and the Ministry of Culture, nearly everyone spoke with certainty of how the film would be received by the public. In retrospect these denunciations reveal the film professionals' didactic and stylistic expectations, which informed the reception of the film, and disclose an anxiety over what messages foreign viewers would interpret about the Soviet Union from the film.

Among the denunciations, speakers like A. D. Segedi, one of the directorate's senior editors, asserted that *The Letter Never Sent* failed to engage viewers emotionally because the motivations and fates of the film's characters were obscured by the filmmakers' visual experimentation.<sup>68</sup> Without this engagement, viewers could not empathize with characters as

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<sup>68</sup> “Fil'm ne vyzyvaet nikakikh emotsional'nykh dvizhenii dushi u zritelia. Zritel' s kholodnym ravnodushiem smotrit na reshennye formal'nye epizody gibeli deistvuiushchikh lits... V rasskaze, kotoryi posluzhil dlia sozdaniia takogo fil'ma, byla kakaia—to estafeta chelovecheskikh voli, bylo chelovecheskoe stremlenie donesti etu kartu liudiam... V fil'me vse eto skryto ot zritelei kakim—to formal'nymi izyskaniiami i mnogoe ostaetsia prosto neponiatnym, teriaetsia”. RGALI fond 2453, op. 1, delo 664.

they suffer and eventually perish in the film. Another senior editor, S. F. Antonov, asserted that *The Letter Never Sent* failed to inform viewers about anything significant, being solely interested in formal methods.<sup>69</sup> The film's visual style was further found to be old fashioned and to belong to the silent era because it ignored the essential elements of modern cinematography, namely the human voice and film's capacity to replicate sound. The filmmakers' insistence on filming on location in Siberia, furthermore, distracted viewers, according to V. A. Pozner, another senior editor, by presenting unusual images that drew attention away from the story. Instead, Pozner cautioned, Kalatozov and Urusevskii should have utilized rear projection, which would have focused attention on the performance of the actors.<sup>70</sup> Such criticism was coupled with assertions that the film was made to placate foreign, bourgeois audiences and their tastes for stylish images. Complaints about the pessimistic portrayal of Soviet geologists and their characterization as weak and feeble display a sense of anxiety as to how fragile the film's characters are made to appear in face of nature. In their aggregate, all of these failings were asserted as grounds for not allowing the film to be released abroad.

Support for the film was rare before and after it was released on June 27, 1960.

Newspapers reviews of *The Letter Never Sent* in large part extended the criticism of character development asserted during the Mosfil'm discussion and later at the Third Plenary Session of the USSR Film Workers Union. A number of reviews took aim at the film's visual address and how it impacted the viewer's reception. Writing for *Sovetskaia Rossiia* on September 17, 1960, S. Bakhmet'eva faults the film for not developing its characters through moral conflicts or interpersonal relationships. After first describing the glory of full sacrifice in dying for others, she

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<sup>69</sup> "Beda, na moi vzgliad, zakliuchaetsia v tom, chto mnogie i mnogie epizody stali lish' formoi...". Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> "Nel'zia, naprimer, snimat' pozhar taigi s akterami, nastoiashchii pozhar. Nuzhno snimat' na rir-ekran. Oni khoteli dokazat' obratnoe i vot, eto poluchilos'. Aktor idet po pozharishchu, a my ne verim, potomu chto my privykli videt' sovsem inoi rakurs". Ibid.

asserts how the deaths in *The Letter Never Sent* do not provoke emotional responses from the viewer. Like earlier detractors, Bakhmet'eva credits this failure to the characters' lack of psychological depth. The film's visual strategies are said to distract the viewer from the narrative.

As a matter of fact, it's difficult to follow the characters and events if the narrative is interrupted with beautiful landscapes... In three minutes, we see the characters and the taiga from five different angles. The people have a hard time maneuvering through the taiga, but the viewer has practically forgotten about them, his attention has been consumed by the stunning phantasmagoria of the forest fire, whirlwinds, and the dance of winds, leaves, and clouds. In the most dramatic moments we are distracted by unexpected, amazing camera angles.<sup>71</sup>

Writing in *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, on October 2, 1960, Vsevolod Kochetov also targeted Urusevskii's camerawork as a distracting shortcoming of the film.

Long, tumultuous flickering on the screen, movement this way and that, the crisscrossing or juxtaposing of arms, legs, torsos, distorted grimaces, lashing flames, and skewed tree trunks: all of was intended by the filmmakers to express the strain of prospecting, but for some viewers this simply causes dizziness while others perceived this as a reckless camera trick...<sup>72</sup>

Kochetov dismissed Urusevskii and Kalatozov's visual strategy in *Letter Never Sent* as not constituting any kind of new formal innovations. They merely exploited and overused what they had achieved with *The Cranes are Flying*. In terms of how the visual style of the two films was received there is a great difference. As opposed to *The Cranes are Flying*, where handheld camerawork was thought to support the visual strategy, in *Letter Never Sent* it is treated as an

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<sup>71</sup> “V samom dele, trudno sledit' za gerioiami i sobytiiami, esli povestvovanie to i delo preryvaetsia krasivymi peizazhami... Tri minuty na ekrane geroi i piat' – ugolki taiga. Liudiam trudno probirat'sia cherez taigu, no zritel' pochtii zabyl o nikh, ego vnimanie poglotila oshelomliaiushchaia fantasmagoriia lesnogo pozhara, vikhir' i tanets vetvei, list'ev, oblakov. V samye dramaticheskie momenty nas vdrug otvlekaiut neobychnym, udivitel'nym rakursom...”. Bakhmat'eva, S. “Taiga i liudi”, *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, 17 September, 1960, 3.

<sup>72</sup> “Dlitel'noe, sumatoshnoe mel'kanie na ekrane i tak i etak perekreshchivaiushchikhsia lomov, ruk, nog, torsov, iskazhennykh grimasami lits, iazykov plameni, kosykh drevesnykh stvolov, chto po zamyslu postanovshchikov dolzhno peredavat' napriazhenie poiskovykh rabot, u odnikh zritelei vyzyvaet prostonaprostogo golovokruzhenie, a drugimi vosprinimaetsia kak likhoi triuk kinematograficheskoi tekhniki”. Kochetov, Vsevolod. “Neotpravlennoe pis'mo”, *Komsomol'skaia pravda*, 2 October, 1960, 4.

obtrusive hindrance, which undermines the viewer's ability to focus on the narrative development.

While the most prominent criticism of *The Letter Never Sent* concerned its lack of character development, it would seem that the official discourse over the film marked a significant reversal in attitudes toward Urusevskii's camerawork. Whereas in 1957 the use of the handheld Konvas Avtomat was hailed as revolutionary, by 1960 critics had grown used to, if not tired of, the mobile frame. *Iskusstvo kino* articles like Maia Merkel's "Should the Camera Operator See" and V. Shumskii's "False Immersion" began to criticize the growing tendency for handheld sequences.<sup>73</sup> Referring to Shumskii's text, R. Il'in suggests that Urusevskii is guilty of overusing the camera technique that worked so well in *The Cranes are Flying*. Although overuse and standardization might be a reason critics did not respond well to the visual style of *The Letter Never Sent*, the concentrated criticism of the film's laconic narrative suggests a signal given from the authorities and filtered through editors to criticize the film's formalist tendencies. Any possibility of going beyond the conventions of the psychological drama was disallowed. Critics like Dyko and Il'in elaborated on Kalatozov and Urusevskii's sins of character underdevelopment and formalist excess by claiming *The Letter Never Sent* failed to produce the affect of participation.

Although Urusevskii never directly responded to this criticism, his statements about methods used during the production of *The Letter Never Sent* and the film's visual qualities show that the participation affect greatly influenced the production of the film. Using the Konvas Avtomat to film nearly eighty percent of the film, the capacities of the handheld camera were exploited visually to simulate the body movements and emotional states of a person moving through the environment of the Siberian taiga. In handheld cameras Urusevskii perceived the

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<sup>73</sup> Merkel', Maia. "Dolzhno li operator videt'?", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 10, October 1961, 51-57; Shumskii's, V. "Lozhnye uvlecheniia", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 4, April 1962, 98.

best means for “communicating emotion, wonderment, passion and temperament.”<sup>74</sup> Kalatozov and Urusevskii relied on this expressive capacity to communicate man’s encounter with nature in *Letter Never Sent* predominantly through the film’s visual address and use of the natural landscape. The cinematographer defined these factors as determining the drama of *Letter Never Sent* through graphic means (“reshit’ dramaturgiuu izobrazitel’nymi sredstvami”), presenting the collision between men and natural forces in images as opposed to using actors to verbally communicate this experience.<sup>75</sup> Urusevskii conceptualized his work with the handheld camera and other cinematographic elements as performing together with the actor. For him it was not enough to simply move or run with the actor when filming with the handheld camera. “It’s not just a matter of running with [actors]. Camera movement is very active. I express my attitude toward what is happening through the camera and it becomes a *co-participant*. The viewer also.”<sup>76</sup> Thus the operator brings his camera and the viewer into a participatory position through the perspective of the apparatus, its rhythm and speed of movement.

The opening sequence of *Letter Never Sent* establishes the parameters of the body’s relationship to natural space. In the first shot, the camera, mounted on a helicopter, pulls back to reveal the landscape of the taiga. The characters, whose bodies are initially fully visible in the scale of a long shot, are reduced by the end of the shot to dots on the surface, made to look miniscule in the vast scale of the taiga. The characters are shown standing on the edge of an island within a broad expanse of water. In the next three shots, the film comes closer to the human body, positioning the characters against the vast wilderness. After two, low-angle long

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<sup>74</sup> Urusevskii, Sergei, “Bolgarskie vstrechi” in *S kinokameroi i za mol’bertom* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2002), 200.

<sup>75</sup> Urusevskii, “Bolgarskie vstrechi”, 188.

<sup>76</sup> “...delo ne tol’ko v tom, chto bezhish’ s nimi. Dvizhenie kamery ochen’ aktivno. Cherez kameru ia vyrazhaiu svoe otnoshenie k sobytiuu, I ona stanovitsia souchastnikom. Zritel’ – tozhe.” Merkel’, *Dialogi s Urusevskimi*, 58.

shots in which the characters are seen lugging their equipment to shore, in the film's fourth shot the handheld camera is used to follow the leader of the expedition, Sabinin, and guide Sergei Stepanovich, through a thicket of trees near the water's edge. The dense network of branches constrains the movement of the characters and of the handheld camera following them. Sabinin and Sergei are interchangeably seen from the proximity of a close up and a long shot. The camera parallels their wandering movement, and when they push past stalks and branches, the frame's unstable, jerky movement matches that of the characters. Lending the mobile frame qualities of bodily movement, the camera locates the viewer alongside the film's characters. The variations in the quality and dimensions of the shot emphasize the film's attention to and simulation of the human body.



Figures 2.2: Frame enlargements from a single handheld shot in *The Unsent Letter*. The camera follows the characters through a dense network of branches.

Coupled with an almost complete absence of establishing shots throughout the film, save for the opening helicopter shot, the camera's relational movement to that of the characters' also shapes what viewers know and can expect from the spaces of the film. At the start of the forest fire episode, the extent of the fire is only evident through the limited viewpoint of the characters. Such limitation on vision denies the viewer full knowledge of the conditions that surround the characters; but the gradual recognition of the severity of the blaze, by contrast, mimics the dawning realization of the characters. These limits are established through the elision of any

information about how the fire spread, for instance through an establishing shot. In Valerii Osipov's short story "Without Witnesses" ("Bez svidetelei"), which served as source material for the forest fire episode, the beginning of the fire is noted and explained. At the beginning of the scene, the handheld camera emerges from a dark tent, following the characters outside to find the forest on fire. The viewer's experience is thus aligned with that of the characters and the trailing, relational camera movement places both on the run through the burning forest.

As the camera perpendicularly trails Sergei, Andrei, and Tania who head for their inflatable boats, the three are kept mostly in the center of the frame, but their individual reactions and experience of the scene are emphasized when the camera individually isolates their faces in the frame. These moments of reduced motion constitute a strategy utilized throughout the film in mobile sequences, which allows for the reframing of characters. These shots entail extensive preparation and careful planning. Instead of just running with actors, Urusevskii's asserted that it was necessary to "think through the scale of shots, the rhythm of (the character's) movements, the arrangement of these fragments, and the rhythm of the camera".<sup>77</sup> All of these aspects were determined before the camera began rolling and the operator started moving. The relational movements of the actors, camera, and the crew had to be previously rehearsed, so that actors knew where to move, how quickly, and where to stop and so that Urusevskii and his assistants knew what lens to use and when to adjust aperture and focus. An assistant holding three reflector lamps also trailed the camera and actors.

Whereas the moments of reduced motion allow the camera to register the emotional reactions of characters. These are brief and do not wholly interrupt the rhythm of movement. Full stops of the camera movement are held for the end of episodes. In the forest fire sequence,

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<sup>77</sup> "Neobkhodimo bylo obdumat' i krupnost' planov, i ritm dvizheniia, i montazh etikh otryvkov, i ritm s'emok", Urusevskii, "Bolgarskiie vstrechi", 216.

for example, the motion of the camera matches the strides of the characters, and these parallel movements combine with a quicker editing pace to raise the suspense. A climax is reached with Sergei's off-screen death. The episode's denouement is handled with static close-up shots of Sabinin, Tania, and Andrei. As Igor' Bogdanov writes, through the opposition with the preceding mobility, these fixed shots intensify their reactions.<sup>78</sup> In this regard, the subsequent sequence develops from this dead stop of the camera. As Sabinin, Tania, and Andrei continue moving, the camera follows them at a slower pace and noticeably on a track. This change lessens the suspense. Handheld camera movement returns in scenes of renewed tension, namely when the characters hear a search helicopter flying overhead, when Sabinin and Tania search for Andrei, and later when they also hear a plane.

Along with replicating the experience of moving through space under duress, the mobile camera in *Letter Never Sent* is also used to communicate emotional exuberance through a combination of movement and rhythm. In a scene whose emotion directly contrasts with Veronika's suicide run from *The Cranes Are Flying*, the pair of younger geologists, Andrei and Tania, take off running in jubilation after discovering diamonds. Like Veronika's run, the exuberant run of Andrei and Tania gradually builds up speed. The two are first seen from a high angle shot, in which the camera pans right to follow their course. In the next shots, the camera, at eye level on the ground, first pans and then tracks them as they keep running. The following shot returns to a high angle and again tracks the couple. The fourth shot of the sequence is under-cranked, making its speed considerably faster than the previous three. In it the handheld camera first follows Andrei and Tania from the rear and then comes to face them from the side, racing with the couple through the forest. The speed in the final, fifth shot of the sequence

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<sup>78</sup> Bogdanov, I. "Kamera v dvizhenii", *Iskutstvo kino*, No. 5 May 1960, p. 122.

increases even further, as the characters and the leaves begin to blur into streaks. Along with utilizing camera movement and accelerating the frame rate, this celebration sequence also features the use of high-speed infrared film stock to alter the appearance of the forest vegetation and make it appear brighter and livelier on black-and-white film stock.

A final example of participation in *Letter Never Sent* is found in the use of the handheld camera to simulate the physical effects of violent confrontations and manual exertions. The mobile frame in these shots moves sharply to communicate either extreme physical duress or exertion. Doubling the movement depicted in the frame, the handheld camera intensifies the physicality of these shots. When Sergei slaps Andrei in the hunting scene, the camera recoils with a whip pan to mimic movement of Andrei's stricken head. By mimicking the movement of Andrei's body the mobile frame assumes an extreme physicality. Speaking to Maiia Merkel' in 1979, Urusevskii asserted: "I still experience sensations from that turn, as if I had been hit". While this claim points to the affective force of the mobile frame, similar camera movement later in the film clarifies the basis for this visual strategy. During the montage sequence of digging for diamonds, the camera follows the movement of Sergei's pickaxe and Andrei's shovel. The sequence's dramatic score, its rapid editing, and the overlapping of flames over the shots of Sergei and Andrei amplify the drama of manual exertion simulated by the moving frame. These layers give a dense graphic quality to the mobile frame and remind the viewer of the film's artifice. But although they offer the aesthetic pleasure of announcing their construction, which Urusevskii valued as a form of viewer engagement, the primary goal of these aesthetically dense shots is to create what the cinematographer referred to as the "hyperbolic" image. Through their exaggeration of physical movement and the kinetic energy of the camera movement, these shots convey a physical experience that elicits from the viewer a somatic reaction to the arduous labor.

#### **IV. Conclusion: The Hyperbolic Sense of Presence and Participation**

As the critical backlash suggests, the concept of participation that informed the visual strategies of *The Letter Never Sent* was at odds with the notions of viewer immersion through narrative and the acting performance that had been standard in Soviet film discourse since the mid-1930s. Valuing above all else clear articulations of character motivations and strict narrative development, the rigid expectations of Soviet dramatic films could not account for how *The Letter Never Sent* produces a sense of participation through the movements of the handheld camera. Instead of verbal description or narration, the capacity to simulate physical experiences and emotional sensations with the Konvas-Avtomat was much closer to the appeal of the monumental Kinopanorama screen. Both the widescreen format and the handheld camera produced images that appealed to more than just the viewer's visual perception. In their respective ways, both models of address were designed to overwhelm the senses.

Considering their assumed capacity to immerse the viewer in the diegetic world of the film, the discourse that delineated Kinopanorama's "presence effect" and Kalatozov and Urusevskii's pursuit of participation are connected by a logic of hyperbolism. In both instances, public discourse exaggerated the relationship between the viewer and screen to emphasize how new film technology addressed viewers. The sheer size of the Kinopanorama screen -- so expansive as to envelop the viewers' vision and immerse them in the image -- betrays a belief in the technical capacity to inundate sensory receptors. Although Kinopanorama's intensified illusion of immediacy was activated by means of triggering the viewer's peripheral vision, accounts of viewing panoramic films imply that the experience involved a range of physiological reactions as viewers not only saw and heard but also felt the force of motion or the gust of winds. The hyperbolic images Kalatozov and Urusevskii composed using the Konvas-Avtomat in *Letter*

*Never Sent* magnified the film's visual address to produce a sense of motion along with generating physical sensations that registered the heat of the forest blaze, the muck of the mud, and the freezing temperatures of Siberian winters.<sup>79</sup>

Manana Andronnikova described the impact of Urusevskii's camerawork as a transmogrification of the viewing experience that took on the dimension of Kinopanorama. As a result of the camera movement, she wrote: "The form of the screen changes before the (viewer's) eyes—the screen's flat rectangle begins to cave in, it acquires spherical contours and stretches into the distance—the film image begins to encircle the space of the auditorium, in the center of which the viewer is located." Andronnikova's description of Urusevskii's handheld camera coincides with the latest Soviet widescreen system -- Circular Kinopanorama [Krugovaia Kinopanorama], which expanded Panoramic Cinema to offer a 360° horizontal image – for which a special, circular theater with two rows of eleven screens was built on the site of the All-Russia Exhibition Centre in 1959, the year *The Letter Never Sent* was in production. Initial films for the Circular Kinopanorama system utilized twenty-two Konvas Avtomat cameras mounted on a circular platform. Thus apparatuses designed for handheld usage were amalgamated to produce an overwhelming, completely enveloping image.<sup>80</sup> Andronnikova's recourse to the language of Kinopanorama to describe the impact of handheld shots demonstrates how notions of immediacy and immersion were linked in the critical discussions of Kinopanorama and Kalatozov and

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<sup>79</sup> "A nam khotelos' sdelat' etot fil'm v drugom zhanre, po-drugomu, drugimi sredstvami, delaia upor ne na razvitie kharakterov, na sozdanie iarkikh obrazov i giperbol." Urusevskii, "Bolgarskie vstrechi", p. 189.

<sup>80</sup> "Na glazakh meniaetsia i forma ekrana – ploskii priamougol'nik ekrannogo polotna progibaetsia, on priobretaet sfericheskie ochertaniia, vytiagivaetsia v shirinu – kinoizobrazhenie nakhinaet opoiasyvat' krug po prostranstvu zala, v tsentre kotorogo nakhoditsia zritel'." Andronnikova, "Isotriia dvizhushcheisia kamery", p. 96.

Urusevskii's handheld camerawork to make intelligible the sensory experience and affective reactions provoked by new film technologies.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SINCERE REALISM

#### **I. "Our intentions were always most sincere."**

The opening and closing of Marlen Khutsiev's *Ilich's Gate* (*Zastava Il'icha*), released in 1964 as *I am Twenty* (*Mne dvadtsat' let*), feature groups of three soldiers patrolling Moscow streets. The initial three are Red Guard soldiers from the era of the October Revolution. In the finale they are three Red Army men from the Second World War and three honor guards of Lenin's mausoleum. Visually and symbolically, these soldiers present the heroic and historic models for the three main protagonists of *Ilich's Gate's*, young men of early 1960s Moscow. At the same time, these antecedents also emphasize the contrast between preceding historical periods and the Moscow of *Ilich's Gate*. In the aftermath of Stalin's brutal reign, the 1960s were an unheroic time and Soviet belief in the communist project was at a nadir. In the film's present historical moment, Khutsiev's characters are not faced with wars to fight, but must establish a new, Post-Stalinist hierarchy of values and locate themselves in a revised social and political order.

In addition to the cultural values scrutinized in the film, *Ilich's Gate* also foregrounds a concern with how a society represents and sees itself. At stake in this concern is the notion of socialist realism in Soviet cinema, whose role in varnishing reality under Stalin was criticized by Nikita Khrushchev at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956. Looking to expand the ways reality was represented in Soviet cinema, *Ilich's Gate* mobilizes new methods to enact an experience of audiovisual realism that, in the discourse of the time, was frequently described as 'sincere. This chapter examines how that "sincere realism" was informed and shaped by the aesthetic and ideological discourse in the Soviet Union of the early 1960s. I take sincerity to have distinct

aesthetic implications in relation to film practices during the Thaw. As with the concepts of intimacy and authenticity, which are covered in the preceding and the subsequent chapter, I study how sincerity functioned as a film affect to delineate a new subjective position within Soviet cinema.

*Ilich's Gate* presents the challenges facing the generation of the 1960s from the perspective of twenty-three year-old Sergei Zhuravlev, who returns home from military duty and looks to resume his usual life. The film is divided into two episodes. In the first, Sergei gets a job, prepares for further studies, falls in love, and spends time with his childhood friends. But soon Sergei begins to feel a growing dissatisfaction. Although he describes himself as a "proper person" (pravil'nyi chelovek), one who works, goes to school, and even agitates for the state, he feels a lack of purpose. Unlike previous generations of Soviets, Sergei cannot realize himself as a historical subject. The Soviet revolution originally held out the promise of raising "the participating individual to the level of a historical subject who in his daily life helped implement history's progression toward the perfect future".<sup>1</sup> Sergei, however, seems unable to locate himself in what Jochan Hellbeck calls the "loose matrix of subjectivization produced by the Soviet Revolution."<sup>2</sup> In the film's second episode, Sergei's discontent deepens. He struggles with his girlfriend's lack of socialist principles and protests against his friend's endorsement of indifference toward greater, social concerns. He is most upset by the individualistic worldview of his girlfriend's father, who advises Sergei that he can only rely on himself since people don't give a damn about each other.

Sergei's dissatisfaction comes to a head when he is pushed to define his specific set of values to a coterie of young, cynical intellectuals. Asserting what he takes seriously does not, however, mark the development of a revolutionary consciousness, as required of a traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Hellbeck, Jochen. *Revolution on My Mind* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2006), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 52.

Socialist Realist hero. Sergei is left searching and even turns in a Hamlet-like fantasy sequence to the ghost of his slain father, a soldier killed during World War II. However, when he realizes that his father was only twenty-one when he died, the twenty-three year-old Sergei is confronted with the need to determine his own path. In this manner the film asserts a generational shift, marking a new historical period in which received knowledge is inadequate. Although Sergei is left facing the question of how to live, his search at the end of the film is framed within the social network of his friends.

In the final sequence of the film, the camera follows Sergei and his friends on their way to work. Over tracking and hand-held shots the voices of Sergei and his friends, Kolia and Slava are heard pledging their bonds of friendship and their resolve to meet the future together. Almost completely shot on location in Moscow, *Ilich's Gate* thus ends with an emphasis on mobility through Moscow's streets, which is symbolically grounded within the development of communism by the very last shot, a long-take, which the changing of the honor guards at Lenin's mausoleum. As suggested by the preceding groups of soldiers, this movement parallels that of previous generations, but is made specific through the film's focus on the contemporary and the everyday. The generation of 1960s Soviet youth is furthermore distinguished from their predecessors by the inclusion of their internal monologues. Combining the duration of the hand-held camera movement and inner monologues, *Ilich's Gate* generates a density of mental and physiological experience that foregrounds its characters' searching mobility and examination of their environment.

A purely formal analysis of the narrative and visual style of *Ilich's Gate* might suffice as an intellectual exercise. But this would only be half of the story. The film, its production, revision, and reception reveal deep fractures in the aesthetic discourse of Soviet art in the 1960s. In spring

of 1963, Marlen Khutsiev and his scriptwriter Genadii Shpalikov faced rancorous condemnation for their yet unreleased *Ilich's Gate*. The vitriol against the film was led by none other than First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev, who, at a meeting between Party leaders, artists, and writers on March 8, 1963, criticized *Ilich's Gate* for presenting ideas about the social and personal lives of the Soviet youth that were foreign to Soviet society. Protesting how the film's three main protagonists were shown not knowing how to live or what to aspire for, Khrushchev asserted that *Ilich's Gate* lacked the civil courage to expose and denounce the social parasites it depicted.<sup>3</sup> In one meeting after another, filmmakers, actors, supervisors, and Party members at the Gorky Film Studio followed Khrushchev's line of criticism, claiming that the film's three main protagonists were isolated from Soviet society and that the artists, for their part, approached life cerebrally (*umozritel'no*) without taking a stand on social problems.

Khutsiev spent much of 1963 defending *Ilich's Gate* at protracted discussions within Gorky Film Studio. He consistently asserted that his and Shpalikov's intentions were to make a film that carried on the battle with negative remnants of the past, namely Stalin's cult of personality. But in addition to defending the themes and subject matter of the film, Khutsiev also had to justify the film's aesthetics. This necessity was motivated by the ongoing discourse over socialist realism and the proper ideological function of art. The Party had recently begun to reassert itself in the field of cultural production. During a series of conferences organized between December of 1962 and March of 1963, three themes were heavily promoted: 1) Party control over the arts, 2) rejection of western (and/or modernist) influence and 3) the denial of anything close to a generation gap in Soviet society.<sup>4</sup> Soviet Cinema was pulled into the fray with Khrushchev's

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<sup>3</sup> Khrushchev, Nikita. "Rech' na vstreche rukovoditelei partii i pravitel'stva s deiateliami literatury i ikusstva. 8 marta 1963 goda (vyderzhki)". *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 100.

<sup>4</sup> Woll, Josephine. *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 108.

attack on *Ilich's Gate*. These conferences and the subsequent debates surrounding Khutsiev's film identified contending ideological definitions of film aesthetics, specifically film realism.

While formal innovations in Thaw cinema of the late 1950s and 1960s offered a range of stylistic approaches to film realism, these efforts were collectively opposed by the Party-backed conservative approach to film style, which promoted the didactic function of socialist realism.<sup>5</sup> In terms of plot, Soviet individuals were supposed to be shown, under the tutelage of seasoned Party worker, attaining a greater understanding of themselves, the world around them, the tasks of building communism, class struggle, and constant vigilance.<sup>6</sup> In formal terms, such acquisition of consciousness was supposed to be depicted in a self-effacing style. Soviet cinema was expected to conceal its artifice through the use of a functional camera style and continuity editing. Film techniques were only meant to present characters, add plot exposition, and maintain the integrity of diegetic space. Deviation from either the prescribed content or style led to charges of "anti-realism" or "formalism", a serious offense given the Party's renewed desire to shape a singular method of Soviet art.

Khutsiev defended the theme and subject matter of *Ilich's Gate* by locating the film within the approved discourse on art. Pledging to revise the film in response to the Krushchev-led criticism, Khutsiev claimed he wanted *Ilich's Gate* to take part in the struggle for communism and a common Soviet future. However, the director never renounced the style of *Ilich's Gate*. Most poignantly, the director responded to suggestions that his film was "anti-realist" by asserting "Our

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<sup>5</sup> Woll, *Real Images*, 110.

<sup>6</sup> Kenez, Peter. *Cinema and Soviet Society from the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 144.

intentions were always most sincere" ("Nashi namereniia vseгда byli samymi iskrennimi").<sup>7</sup> This specific assertion was in response to a protracted endorsement of the Party's critique of the film, delivered on March 12, 1963 by film director Sergei Gerasimov at one of the Gorky Studio discussions. Gerasimov had opened the meeting by pontificating on the dangers of "anti-realist" art which "hides from people the true beliefs of the artists, disguising them in a form that gives each [viewer] the right to interpret according to their taste the work, which supposedly does not represent a public purpose, but something personally belonging to one artist".<sup>8</sup> Such deceptions departed from the ideological purpose of Soviet art. Furthermore, under the guise of anti-Stalinism, works of art such as *Ilich's Gate*, according to Gerasimov, tried to smuggle in a wholesale critique of the Soviet system.

On the surface, Khutsiev's assertion of sincerity might appear simply as a claim of ideologically pure artistic intention. In fact, in his retort to Gerasimov, Khutsiev continues to assert his desire for *Ilich's Gate* to contribute to the struggle against remnants of the Stalin's cult of personality. But the choice of words is not without its own baggage. Sincerity was one of the dominant concepts of the Post-Stalinist Thaw. It was associated with the cultural values of this period, its cultural production, and the mode of subsequent writing about the Thaw. As a term "sincerity" ("iskrennost'") was reintroduced into the cultural discourse through discussions of literature. Although preceded by Ol'ga Bergol'ts' calls for sincere expressions of feelings in poetry, Vladimir Pomerantsev's article "Sincerity in Literature" ("Ob iskrennosti v literature"), published in the final issue of the literary journal *Novyi Mir* in 1953, elevated the concept of sincerity as a

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<sup>7</sup> Khutsiev, Marlen. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia kinostudii imeni M. Gor'kogo po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma rezhissera M. Khutsieva 'Zastava Il'icha' ot 12 marta 1963 goda." *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 102.

<sup>8</sup> Gerasimov, Sergei. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia kinostudii imeni M. Gor'kogo po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma rezhissera M. Khutsieva 'Zastava Il'icha' ot 12 marta 1963 goda." *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 101.

cultural value in essence because of the debate that subsequently erupted in response to the text. Following Pomerantsev's lead, Thaw writers, poets, and filmmakers sought to valorize the Leninist revolutionary ideals through an emphasis on sincerity, which translated into the revision of conventions of socialist realism.

Thaw era filmmakers are said to have searched for sincerity in the "self-referential film language" of the Soviet avantgarde of the 1920s. This cultural history symbolized for Thaw artists authentic and sincere self-expression. The poetics of 1920s avant-garde cinema were associated with originality, innovation, and a focus on material reality, all of which stood in opposition to the varnished reality of late-Stalinist cinema.<sup>9</sup> *Ilich's Gate* however does not make any overt reference to the Soviet film avantgarde. Instead, Khutsiev's assertion of sincerity invites the study of this concept as an aesthetic category. This approach to sincerity is partly guided by the word's Russian etymology. As opposed to the English term *sincerity*, whose Latin root *sincerus* implies the meaning "clean" or "pure" (as in someone's pure intentions), the Russian noun *iskrennost'* is derived from the Old East Slavic *iskr'*, which meant "closely" or "close to".<sup>10</sup> The notion of closeness implied by *iskrennost'* suggests an epistemological proximity to reality, its details and transience, which I take to work in tandem with a sensual understanding that relies on reception and recognition of the intended sincerity. This approach in turn raises a series of questions: What does it mean for a film to be sincere? What cinematic techniques can filmmakers mobilize to evoke sincerity? And finally, how do viewers experience this quality?

Khutsiev's assertion was not an isolated instance of ascribing sincerity to *Ilich's Gate*.

Discourse about the film involved questioning the sincerity of the filmmakers and the critics.

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<sup>9</sup> Prokhorov, Alexander. *Inherited Discourses: Stalinist Tropes in Thaw Culture*. PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2002, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Vasmer, Max, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka*, O.N. Trubachev (trans.), B.A. Larin (ed.), Moskva: Progress, 1964-1973), 141.

Before asserting his sincere intentions, Khutsiev rejected suggestions that the production group took any insincere positions regarding the Soviet Union, its people, and the Party ("my ne na sekundu ni v kakoi mere ne pytalis' stoiat' na kakikh-to neiskrennix pozitsiakh").<sup>11</sup> Speaking immediately after him, Genadii Shpalikov, the film's other scriptwriter, challenged the sincerity of the critics who attacked *Ilich's Gate* and its makers under the guise of being "well-wishers", who wanted the film to be revised according to the demands of the Party ("so storony nashikh 'dobrozhelatelei', kotorye ne osobenno iskrenny v otsenkakh").<sup>12</sup> The notion of what it means to be sincere was at stake in these Studio discussions. Consequently, when V. Maron, a Gorky Studio producer, described Khustiev as a "sincere Soviet artist" ("eto slova sovetskogo iskrennego khudozhnika"), he ascribes this quality as a desired trait for Soviet artistic production.<sup>13</sup>

Hard-line critics like film director Tatiana Lioznova, however, distinguished at the May 6, 1963 meeting of the Gorky Studio First Production Group between Khutsiev's sincerity and his failing to present positive characters who emoted the energetic vigor of model workers. Picking up on an earlier comment at the same meeting, which voiced a disbelief in the presentation of the young men of the 1960s generation, Lioznova asserted that she believed in Khutsiev's sincerity ("my verim v tvoiu iskrennost"), but it was the depiction of the film's main three protagonist that she could not believe.<sup>14</sup> According to her, these were vulgar idiots, who could listen to Bach, but didn't know how to build their country. What was missing from *Ilich's*

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<sup>11</sup> Khutsiev, "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia", 102.

<sup>12</sup> Shpalikov, Genadii. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia kinostudii imeni M. Gor'kogo po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma rezhissera M. Khutsieva 'Zastava Il'icha' ot 12 marta 1963 goda." *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 103.

<sup>13</sup> Maron, V. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia kinostudii imeni M. Gor'kogo po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma rezhissera M. Khutsieva 'Zastava Il'icha' ot 12 marta 1963 goda." *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 111.

<sup>14</sup> Lioznova, Tatiana. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia kinostudii imeni M. Gor'kogo po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma rezhissera M. Khutsieva 'Zastava Il'icha' ot 12 marta 1963 goda." *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 107.

*Gate* for the hard-liners was the orthodox Socialist Realist dictum of representing "reality in its revolutionary development" in the form of inspired, young workers. For Tatiana Lioznova and others, Khutsiev's sincerity was faulty because it failed to denounce the unmotivated youth. Nevertheless, this parsing of sincerity and ideological intentions suggests how *Ilich's Gate* constituted a revision of film whose goal was to establish a new set of parameters for using film art to analyze social conditions.

When the film was finally released in 1964 as *I am Twenty*, among the criticisms there were reviews that discussed the film's sincerity. Viktor Nekrasov described the concept of the film, its directorial style, and cinematography as "great, contemporary art—truthful, sincere, honest" ("vse eto nastoiashchee, bol'shoe iskusstvo—pravdivoe, iskrennee, chestnoe").<sup>15</sup> For Nekrasov, these qualities are attached to the film's presentation of contemporary Moscow and enactment of the young generation. The audiovisual elements of the film produce an affect of sincerity. Actor Sergei Iurskii also associated sincerity with the style of *I am Twenty*. After setting apart Khutsiev's use of the film medium from adaptations of literary or theatrical texts, Iurskii asserts that the film does not reduce complicated questions for spectators. Instead, the film speaks with spectators as with equals, "Sincerely. Wisely. Passionately." ("Iskrenne. Umno. Strastno.").<sup>16</sup> Thus sincerity is again associated with the way the film addresses spectators and this quality is posited as a key aspect of *Ilich's Gate*.

In lieu of these discussions of sincerity and with the intention of working through the earlier questions regarding sincerity's relation to film form and its reception, I take *Ilich's Gate* to be the leading example of a specific approach to film realism, which located significance and

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<sup>15</sup> Nekrasov, Viktor. "Po obe storony okeana" in *V rodnom gorode: Sobranie sochinenii v trekh knigakh. Kniga vtoraiia* (Moskva: IzografB, 2005), 584.

<sup>16</sup> Iurskii, Sergei. "Mne dvadtsat' let", *Iskusstvo Kino* No. 4 (April 1965): 36.

sincerity in the experience of audiovisual realism. At the same time, this style was part of socialist realism. Khutsiev's film stands as an attempt to revise the methods of representing Soviet reality in response to the felt inadequacies of socialist realist conventions to account for emerging emotions and interest in the Soviet everyday. I locate *Ilich's Gate* within a project of moving away from structuring literary and cinematic plots around key images or concentrated symbols that organized their meaning or outcomes. Instead, the focus turned to the perceptual experience made possible by the film medium. This shift toward perception is animated in *Ilich's Gate* through the use of camera movement accompanied by the inner monologues of characters. I contend that shots of characters moving through Moscow streets produced an affect of sincerity, which shaped the relationship of spectators to these images and influenced their interpretation of the film. In this manner, *Ilich's Gate* deliberately brings about a plurality of personal, social, and historical parameters. From this density of associations, the film asserts a new mode of subjectivity that mediates between the individual and the community.

## **II. From Verbal to Visual Experiences**

Among the stakes in my discussion of *Ilich's Gate* and the concept of sincere realism is the difficulty of transferring a concept that originated in literary discussion to non-verbal media, such as film. Oksana Bulgakowa notes that delineating this transference is difficult "because here [sincerity] connected with the *materialization* of the individual gaze", a conception of authorship that clashed with the "canonical notion of collective identity."<sup>17</sup> Were citations of the 1920s revolutionary avant-garde the only recourse for Thaw-era filmmakers pursuing sincerity in their

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<sup>17</sup> Bulgakowa, "Cine-Weathers: Soviet Thaw Cinema in the International Context" in *The Thaw: Soviet Society and Culture during the 1950s and 1960s*, (Eds.) Denis Kozlov and Eleonory Gilburd (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 436.

artistic expression? Before considering what techniques *Ilich's Gate* relies upon to produce an affect of sincerity, it's necessary to delineate the transference of sincerity from verbal to a visual media, and how this transfer encoded sincerity in film.

The long history of work on affect and emotions requires a brief delineation how these terms will be used here. Following contemporary research on the matter, I follow the definition of affects as embodied sensations or bodily states, experienced in relation to stimuli, prior to the subject's rational and emotional responses ~~to affecting and being affected~~. When startle and reflex responses are provoked, affect is registered as intensity, but affect also coincides with feelings of hot or cold, aftertaste following eating or drinking, and general anxiety. As Carl Plantinga writes, affects "include desires, emotions, pleasures, moods, and all manner of feelings and sensations."<sup>18</sup> Emotions extend from affect because they involve an appraisal of the embodied sensation. They involve a higher degree of cognitive processing, as opposed to affect, and are more clearly identified as internal mental states, which tend toward outward expression. In their relational capacity, affects serve to focus our attention on something very specific—a particular sensation such as danger, absence, or presence. This specificity, nevertheless, occurs within a system, and affects are continuously amplifying, dampening, or otherwise modifying some other affect, or drive, or perception, or thought process, or act or behavior.<sup>19</sup> Barbara Klinger calls this the "ignition of associations", in reference to the visual media's ability to stimulate associations, some which are calculated while others are unpredictable and depend upon the spectator's experiential memory. Within this conceptual context, I posit sincerity as an affect whereas trust is the felt emotion shaped by cognitive processing. In as much as trust involves an assessment based on

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<sup>18</sup> Plantinga, Carl. *Moving Viewers: American Film and the Spectator's Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 29.

<sup>19</sup> Flatley, Jonathan. "Glossary" in *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), 16.

perception, thoughts, ideas, habits, and instincts, sincerity is a reaction to the implied emotional relation. The subsequent task is then to identify how *Ilich's Gate* produces this affect.

Initial emphasis on the affect of sincerity can be grounded in one of the earliest calls for greater sincerity in Soviet art following Stalin's death. Pomerantsev's article "On Sincerity in Literature" criticized the stale, formulaic paradigms of Soviet prose, and called for writers to embrace a more progressive role in the fight for socialism. Instead of standardized, hollow plots and contrived, dispassionate dialogue, he advocated the representation of the natural flow of human speech and the investigation of the values Soviet readers hold dear. Pomerantsev's central assertions include: "(1) the writer should express his own sincere feelings instead of just echoing official decrees; (2) the immediacy of emotions is the ultimate measure of literary value; (3) the positive hero of Stalinist literature is the epitome of insincerity."<sup>20</sup> Such emphasis on reproducing the natural flow of speech, observing details, and conveying feelings proposes that a revised form of Socialist realism is meant to provoke the affect of sincerity. The wealth of details and expressions of feelings are intended to stimulate a confidence in their authenticity.

In the wake of Pomerantsev's call for sincerity in literature, the sincerity of *Ilich's Gate* develops as the culmination of literary and cinema trends of the 1950s. Transference of sincerity from literature to film came about during the shift from the literary-oriented early-Thaw cinema to a more visual emphasis in the 1960s. Before the shift, the turn to the quotidian experience and individual realities of The Great Patriotic War first occurred in literature. In the latter half of the 1950s, the discourse on sincerity expanded to film through adaptations of literature. According to Evgenii Margolit, the literary works adapted to the screen in the 1950s emphasized quotidian experiences and mobilized a journalistic prose style, which represented the everyday as the

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<sup>20</sup> Prokhorov 2002, *Inherited Discourses*, 95-6.

proper province for the discussion of social problems and themes hushed over during Late Stalinism.<sup>21</sup> This was a revelatory kind of realism, revealing the hidden subjects of the Stalin years. Along with turning to prose works as source material for films, early Thaw cinema also began to incorporate an increasing number of writers, who would play active roles in adopting their prose to the screen.

The rhetorical shift from literary sincerity to a visual one commences with Viktor Nekrasov's article "Great Words and Simple Ones" ("Slova 'velikie' i 'prostye'"), published in the May 1959 issue of *Iskusstvo kino*. Nekrasov questioned Soviet cinema's monumental and romantic tendencies by comparing the "prosaic style" of Khutsiev's and Mironer's *The Two Fedors* (*Dva Fedora*, 1958) with the "high-poetic" style of Iulia Solntseva's *Poem of the Sea* (*Poema o more*, 1958), a project that was widely attributed to her late husband Aleksandr Dovzhenko (who had died in 1956). Stemming from the overbearing allegorization and sentimentality of late-Stalinist films, the "poetic" mode was associated with mass spectacles, and the stilted, romantic representation of heroic individuals. The "prosaic" mode was defined, from the Latin concept of "prosa" or "proversa oratio", as unrestricted, "straightforward discourse." In opposition to the "poetic" focus on the exceptional and grandiose, "prosaic" films of the Thaw relied on turning away from mass parades and spectacles toward the unadorned representation of the everyday and its quotidian details. The effect of Nekrasov's article on Thaw-era film criticism was to introduce a stylistic split that established a vertical differentiation between Stalinist and Thaw-era film style.

At the center of the difference between the style of Late-Stalinist and Thaw cinema, Nekrasov also posits the affect of sincerity. Nekrasov narrates his article in first person and asserts himself as the spectator of both *Poem of the Sea* and *Two Fedors*. The experiential difference

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<sup>21</sup> Margolit, Evgenii. "Kinematograf 'ottepeli': K portretu fenomena." *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, No. 61, 2002, 207.

between the two films boils down to Nekrasov's inability to trust the sincerity of the characters in *Poem of the Sea* ("geroev, iskrennosti kotoryx ia, k sozhaleniiu, ne vseгда veriu"). His critique of *Poem of the Sea* is based on a rejection of its conventionality (uslovnost'), that is, its conventionalized representation of pathos through the highly stylized oration of its principal characters, which is perceptibly meant to trigger an emphatic reflex in the viewer. On the other hand, Nekrasov's preference for *Two Fedors* rests on the film's choice to leave open possibilities and think through some of what is presented on the screen ("kogda mne ostavliaiut dodumat' chto-to samomu"). He locates this openness in the soldier-character played by Vasili Shukshin, who speaks little but, for Nekrasov, manages to express his emotional state by his facial expressions. In this manner, the film produces the affect of sincerity through its presentation of characters. One of the main formal differences between *Poem of the Sea* and *Two Fedors* is the consistent use in the latter of close-up shots of Vasili Shukshin's recently decommissioned soldier who is faced with rebuilding his family and home, after both were destroyed in the war. Judging from Nekrasov's text, bringing the spectator in closer relationship to Shukshin's character through the close-up produces the affect of sincerity, which triggers an introspective, evaluative process responding to the audiovisual experience.

Nekrasov's insistence on the sincerity of one film and the lack thereof in the other was challenged in the same issue of *Iskusstvo Kino* by Iakov Varshavskii, further revealing the tension over the meaning of sincerity in Thaw cinema discourse. Varshavskii attacks Nekrasov for failing to explain his inability to trust the sincerity of characters in *Poem of the Sea*, asserting that it's difficult in art to imagine a more sincere word than that of Dovzhenko ("trudno predstavit' sebe

bolee iskrennee slovo v iskusstve, chem slovo Dovzhenko").<sup>22</sup> Varskavskii defends this assertion by claiming that Dovzhenko never indulged in false idylls. Dovzhenko, the claim continues, saw life as complicated, full of tragedy and beauty ("Nikogda on ne greshil po chasti fal'shivvykh idillii. On videl zhizn' slozhnoi, polnoi tragedii i prekrasnoi").<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, as Vladimir Semerchuk points out, Dovzhenko espoused a particular understanding of film realism predicated on an idealized notion of beauty, which he opposed to naturalism.<sup>24</sup>

Nekrasov's logocentric dichotomy was subsequently elaborated by other film critics in progressively more visual terms. The journalistic style of literature and attention to the everyday were rendered into a visual style that featured documentary tropes. Instead of the 'fixed Late-Stalinist artifice', the use of hand-held camera movement, real locations, less makeup, and more natural lighting was motivated by the desire to represent everyday reality as spontaneous, as history in progress rather than as history-completed. These visual strategies were coupled with increasingly fragmentary narratives that lack "specific dramatic events" ("osobyie dramaticheskie sobytia"), in the terminology of Viktor Demin.<sup>25</sup> Late-Stalinist and early Thaw cinema relied on dramatic events to motivate and structure all the events of the film, whereas the fragmentary narrative of later Thaw cinema "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."<sup>26</sup> I contend that in addition to these stylistic markers, the visual turn in Thaw cinema included developments in the way films affected viewers and elicited

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<sup>22</sup> Varshavskii, Iakov. "Nado razobrat'sia", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 5, May 1959, 64.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Semerchuk, Vladimir. "Slova velikie i prostye" in *Kinematograf ottepeli. Kniga vtoraiia*. Vitalii Troianovskii, Ed. (Moskva: Materik, 2002), 64.

<sup>25</sup> Demin, Viktor. *Fil'm bez intrigi* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1966), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Prokhorov, Alexander. "The Unknown New-Wave: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s", in *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s*, University of Pittsburgh, Russian Film Symposium in May-June 2001, 17.

particular emotional responses from them, all of which suggests a new type of spectatorial experience.

Nekrasov's article thus posits a shift, if not a rejection, of earlier conceptions of film affect and elicitation of emotion. This shift is made obvious when Nekrasov's article is read against Sergei Eisenstein's critique of Nekrasov's novella *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* (*V okopakh Stalingrada* 1946). Eisenstein's delivered his critique as part of a lecture titled "Questions of Composition" ("Voprosy kompozitsii"), which was published posthumously (Eisenstein died in 1948) in 1954, in the collection *Question of Film Dramaturgy* (*Voprosy kinodramaturgii*). Eisenstein's criticized Nekrasov's novella for its "detached, technical and documentary description of facts", which boils down to a lack of "accented motivation" or a "striking composition". In this manner, Nekrasov's novella lacked for Eisenstein a focused appeal to the readers' emotions, or pathos, and was essentially loose and incoherent.<sup>27</sup> Although Eisenstein's theories regarding pathos, emotion and affect evolved over time, he consistently asserted that 'engineering the emotions' of viewers was the task of the filmmaker.<sup>28</sup> He conceptualized emotions as pre-conscious physical reflexes, and believed that evoking emotions implied a kind of automatism conditioned through social training. Since these conditioned responses rested on chains of associations, Eisenstein sought to create new chains of associations based on existing ones.<sup>29</sup> This involved sharpening the possible associations viewers may have with an object so that an image would most directly evoke the appropriate response in the audience. It was crucial to evoke appropriate responses in the audience efficiently and with little delay as possible. Eisenstein's emphasis on the immediacy and economy of the

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<sup>27</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei. "Voprosy kompozitsii" in *Na urokakh rezhissuri Eisenshteina* (Moskova: Iskusstvo, 1958), 195.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Greg. "Moving Explosions: Metaphors of Emotion in Sergei Eisenstein's Writings", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2010, 304.

<sup>29</sup> Eisenstein, Sergei. *Towards a Theory of Montage*, Trans. Michael Glenny, Eds. Michael Glenny and Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1991), 260.

resources expended in the elicitation of affects implies the kind of automatism that Nekrasov and other Thaw critics and filmmakers thought to be overbearing and heavily determined.

### **III. Continuity of Vision in the Making of *Ilich's Gate***

A full version of *Ilich's Gate* was not publicly screened until 1988. This was a restoration of the film that had provoked the ire of Khrushchev and the Party in 1963. From Khutsiev's original idea to the authoritative restoration, the film had transformed many times over, attesting to shifts in artistic concerns involving subject matter and medium concerns during the Thaw, the conservative pushback against these paradigmatic changes, and finally the reevaluation of the Thaw during the Perestroika period of the 1980s. Marlen Khutsiev initially conceived the project while making his first feature, *Spring on Zarechnaia Street* (*Vesna na zarechnoi ulitse*, 1956) in Odessa, Ukraine.<sup>30</sup> The original plot revolved around a steel plant, its war-hero director, and three steel worker friends. Descriptions of this early version exhibit many elements of a production drama, a Soviet film genre originating in the 1920s, which focuses on problems of production and entails the socialist realist arc of heroes acquiring revolutionary consciousness. These similarities are furthered by Khutsiev's original title choice, *Metal*, which evokes production drama titles from the past such as *Cement* (*Tsement*, Vladimir Vil'ner, 1927).

After finishing *Spring on Zarechnaia Street*, Khutsiev began to research steel factories in Moscow, and subsequently the setting of the film and its title were relocated to the capitol. Having surveyed the steel factory "Hammer and Sickle" (Serp i molot) in Moscow, Khutsiev adopted the popular appellation of the factory's neighborhood—*Ilich's Gate* (*Zastava Il'icha*)—as the title of his project. Conveniently, this sobriquet also bears Lenin's famous patronymic, leading

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<sup>30</sup> Khlopliankina, Tat'iana Mikhailovna. *Zastava Il'icha* (Moskva: Soiuz kinematografistov SSSR, 1989), 23.

some scholars to translate the film title as "Lenin's Guard".<sup>31</sup> According to the initial prospectus for the literary script, which Khutsiev wrote with his then writing and directing partner, Feliks Mironer, the film was going to follow the *Bildungsroman* plotline of Socialist Realist films. As in the original conception of the project, three worker friends were going to acquire an increased understanding of themselves, their society, and the task of building communism under the tutelage of the seasoned Party worker, a war-hero director of the steel factory.<sup>32</sup>

After Gorky Film Studio accepted the *Ilich's Gate* prospectus and ordered a full script in February 1960, Mironer left the project, officially due to other commitments. The true reasons for Mironer's departure appear grounded in the kind of script Khutsiev sought to write, "a new type of script, one that downplayed narrativity and emphasized atmosphere and characters' emotionalities."<sup>33</sup> Although they had known each other since film school, Khutsiev's vision of the script clashed with Mironer's preference for strong, plot-driven narratives, straining their relationship. According to Khutsiev, the two intensely argued about the composition of certain scenes in the script. Mironer challenged the lack of dramatic motivations in scenes such as when Sergei first sees Ania, his future girlfriend, and proceeds to follow her through Moscow. For Mironer this scene lacked action. He wanted Sergei to come up to Ania, talk to her, and for her to snub him. Khutsiev, instead, opted to emphasize vision and use very little dialogue in the scene.

The final form of this scene in the restored version *Ilich's Gate* remains true to Khutsiev's original intent. As they ride on the bus, Sergei spots Ania reading a book and proceeds to study her. On the cramped bus, the film cuts between medium close-ups and close-ups of the two to

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<sup>31</sup> Prokhorov, "The Unknown New-Wave: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s", 13.

<sup>32</sup> RGALI, fond 2468, opis 5, edinitsa khraneniia 41.

<sup>33</sup> Prokhorov, "The Unknown New-Wave: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s", 15.

establish how Sergei is observing the young woman unaware of his attention. Extreme close-ups of Ania's face suggest his growing attraction. When she bounds off the bus, he briefly hesitates, almost forlorn, but then pushes past boarding passengers to follow her. Outside, the camera repeatedly pans to follow Ania walking in the street. The panning motion also serves either to reveal Sergei or to demarcate a visual space he can enter. From the street, the pair get on the metro, where the camera uses reflections of Sergei's and Ania's face on the train door window to establish their proximity (He stands behind her, while she reads, again unaware of his presence), and also to set up their alighting from the train. When the train doors open, the camera exits the train as if assuming the perspective of either Sergei or Ania, or maybe both. In the final part of this pursuit, as Sergei follows Ania to her building, proximity between them as well as the scale of shot diminishes as they are shown in first long shots and then extreme long shot. All together Sergei's study and pursuit of Ania lasts 7 minutes and 12 seconds. While the bus sequence was staged, the street sequence was shot on locations amidst real crowds, judging by the number of passersbys who look puzzlingly straight into the camera. These connected sequences feature very little dialogue and none from Ania or Sergei. Their almost pure visuality emphasizes visual scrutiny and movement through the city. In relation to the original arguments between Khutsiev and Mironer over the composition of the script for *Ilich's Gate*, the scene suggests the continuity of Khutsiev's stylistic strategy from the script to the screen.



Figures 3.1: A Moscow pedestrian notices the camera in *Ilich's Gate*.

After Mironer left the project, Khutsiev found a more suitable collaborator in Genadii Shpalikov, who was still a student of screenwriting at Moscow's All-Union Institute of Cinematography when he was hired in October 1960 to be co-scriptwriter. Twenty-four years old at the time, Shpalikov contributed a contemporary perspective to the initial conception of the film. Like Khutsiev, he was interested in the urban spaces of Moscow and in mediating through characters, situations, and lines of dialogue a sense of the time, the elusive matter of everyday life in postwar Moscow.<sup>34</sup> The version of the script Shpalikov produced with Khutsiev departed from the original focus on production and work life, and centered on the daily experiences of three childhood friends on the cusp of assuming their position in Soviet society.<sup>35</sup> The project was renamed *I Am Twenty*, reflecting the shift from existence being defined solely by work to the lives and experience of Soviet individuals. Also, by emphasizing age and youthfulness, the new Shpalikov-Khutsiev script foregrounded a generational specificity, putting in focus the Soviet

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<sup>34</sup> Balandina, Natal'ia Petrovna. *Obrazy goroda i doma v kinoiskusstve: na materiale otechestvennogo i frantsuzskogo kino kontsa 50-kh - 60-kh godov*. Vserossiiskii gosudarstvennyi institut kinoiskusstva imenii S. A. Gerasimova. PhD Dissertaion, 2008, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Shaplikov's poetry can be taken as evidence of the perspective and tone he contributed to the film. Most of his early poems focus on themes of friendship, romance, and everyday experiences.

youth coming of age in the 1960s. When Khutsiev subsequently composed the shooting script for the film, he revived the *Ilich's Gate* title, conceivably to frame the film about the 1960s generation within a historical context greater than itself.

In early discussion at Gorky Studio, the *I Am Twenty* literary script and the *Ilich's Gate* shooting script were mostly praised for their contemporaneity in dealing with the concerns of the young generation. One discussant, scriptwriter Valentin Ezhov, asserted, "This is the first profound and major examination of our contemporary life."<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, stenographic records show that even at this stage of production, the film came under scrutiny for its depiction of Soviet youth as well as its departure from the conventions of Socialist Realism. Sergei Gerasimov, who, as already mentioned, played a considerable part in later reception of the film, criticized the literary and shooting script for having melancholy protagonists, whose main fault is that they are much too contemplative and not men of action.<sup>37</sup> The Soviet Ministry of Culture also wrote to the director of Gorky Film Studio expressing concern over the depiction of young workers in the film. In defense of the film's characters, Khutsiev argued that they did not narrowly demonstrate the fate of an individual, but the dynamics of the historical situation. Thus, one of the main characters, Nikolai Fokin, was meant to represent the figure of the "idiot ("durak"), who is unconcerned with social problems, lacks education, and lives comfortably only chasing after women. The film's central protagonist, on the other hand, through the questions he poses, represents the consciousness of the 1960s generation. In this manner, Khutsiev was asserting "the right to an individual truth, which does not necessarily contradict the communal truth but may differ from it."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Woll, *Real Images*, 144.

<sup>37</sup> RGALI file, fond 2468, opis 5, edinitsa khraneniia 43.

<sup>38</sup> Prokhorov, "The Unknown New-Wave: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s", 14.

In addition to these early thematic concerns, Khutsiev's shooting script was also criticized for what was perceived as an attempt to "observe life in its natural flow" (*nabliudat' zhizn' v ee natural'nom potoke*). For Gerasimov, the script exhibited a complete breakdown of form and content, with characters only walking around, speaking to, and following one another. This encompassing approach was taken to be a rejection of motivated subject matter and plot, in favor of a kind of indiscriminate naturalism, in which details no longer transmit concrete aspects of action and all sense of unifying purpose is lost. This line of criticism, which would escalate following Khrushchev's criticism of the film, disregards or simply cannot account for Khutsiev's stylistic choice to emphasize vision as opposed to narrative motivations for the plot. The conservative response that this is naturalism and indiscriminate is obviously indiscriminate itself.

While critics like Gerasimov could hardly stand the notion of individual values different but parallel to communal values, asking them to engage with a visual approaches to physical reality seemed antithetical. Gerasimov, as the head of the First Production Group at Gorky Studio refused to give his approval of the director's script, before it was sent to the studio's Artistic Council that bore responsibility for releasing films into production. In Stalin's era, this would have likely signaled the death of the project. However, as a sign of the more liberal times, the committee of the First Production Group decided to send the final director's script to the Artistic Council for approval without Gerasimov's signature. The shooting script was approved in April 1961 and preparations were made to being production on May 1, 1961.

In the interval between the heated debates of the First Production Group and the beginning of the production, Khutsiev decided upon Margarita Pilikhina as the film's director of photography. According to Khutsiev, Pilikhina approached him when the director's script was approved and expressed a desire to shoot the film. Pilikhina was a rare female cinematographer

in Soviet cinema. *Ilich's Gate* was her seventh feature, all of which she made at Gorky Film Studio. Filming began on May 1, 1961 and continued into the summer of 1962. Prior to working with Khutsiev, Pilikhina had earned a reputation as a cinematographer with a talent for expressive camera movement. Her cinematography in *Foma Gordeev* (Donskoi, 1959), was noted for its use of stark lighting contrasts, abrupt transitions, bold visuals. Working on *Ilich's Gate*, Pilikhina adjusted her style to suit Khutsiev's designs. For certain scenes, her camera had to enter the subjectivity of a passerby and in order to do this its movement had to be as unconstrained and unaffected as breathing.<sup>39</sup> In other parts of the film, Pilikhina's camera had to echo the verbal expressiveness of poetic recitation.

In the autumn of 1962, Khutsiev started to edit together early cuts of the film and it was one of these that Nikita Khrushchev watched prior to the meeting between Party leaders, artists, and writers on March 8, 1963. The transcripts of the marathon meetings of 1963 reveal the process by which *Ilich's Gate* was altered, and ultimately renamed back to *I Am Twenty*. One of the major changes that was threatened during the process of revising the film in 1963 was the reduction or wholesale exclusion of the scene titled the "Poets' Evening", which featured the recitations of several young Thaw poets in front of a captive audience at Moscow's Polytechnical Museum. Filmed during the height of the popularity of public poetry readings, this scene represents a sense of the cultural and historical moment of the early 1960s in the Soviet Union, which was emphasized by participants at a meeting of Gorky Studio's script-editorial board on August 6, 1963. Although the poetry reading was dramatized for the film, in the 1980s and 1990s, it was shown on TV as a documentary footage of the era.<sup>40</sup> The scene was meant to be a

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<sup>39</sup> Kolesnikova, N. "Stupeni masterstva", *Sovetskii ekran*, No. 3, 1965, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Prokhorov, "The Unknown New Wave: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s", 15.

culminating moment of the film's second episode.<sup>41</sup> Several participants described the scene as the representation of the cultural life of Moscow. Although the scene remains in the final 1965 version of *I Am Twenty*, it is reduced and lacks the camera movement, which Khutsiev and Pilikhina wanted to combine with the recited poetry. During the scene, he wanted to match camera movement with the rhythm of the poems being intoned. Khutsiev describes the camera movement during this scene as responding to the vocal patterns, soaring (parit'), floating (plyt'), and paralleling the movements of the poetic lines.<sup>42</sup> Despite the reduced sweep of the camera movement the released version of the film was still able to elicit certain responses from viewers. Along with the criticism leveled at the original version, the reception of *I Am Twenty* suggests how the film was able to generate a different kind of affective response, which challenged received notions of film realism.

#### **IV. Amplifying Perception**

Despite the ideological nature of the criticism against *Ilich's Gate* and Khutsiev, critiques of the film focusing on its supposed formal failures help to identify the characteristics of sincere realism. Along with criticisms of the film, positive responses to *Ilich's Gate*, once it was released as *I Am Twenty* in 1964, also demand to be considered because they acknowledge the affect of sincerity produced by these new methods. The friction between these views identifies how the film departs from previous conventions of socialist realism through the mobilization of different capacities of the film medium for the sake of amplifying the process of perception. Although accused of indiscriminate observation, the film demonstrates a conscious and deliberate organization of vision, which foregrounds the experience of viewing and motivates introspection. In this manner,

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<sup>41</sup> Khlopliankina, *Zastava Il'icha*, 36.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

the representational strategies of *Ilich's Gate* affect how spectators relate to the film image and how they interpret its audiovisual realism. Spectators are moved to reflect upon a plurality of parameters regarding the individual's relation to the community, the links of the present moment to history, and ultimately film's capacity to inform these tensions.

During the marathon discussion of the film inside Gorky Film Studio, film director Mark Donskoi did not miss an opportunity to criticize Khutsiev for the perceived stylistic shortcomings of *Ilich's Gate*. Donskoi's comments are particularly striking because of his own realist strategies and reliance on camera movement in films such as *Gorky's Childhood* (*Detstvo Gor'kogo*, 1938), *The Village Teacher* (*Sel'skaia Uchitel'nitsa*, 1947), and *Foma Gordeev* (1959), which were credited with concreteness and materiality for embracing details from physical reality. Like many other critics, Donskoi disparaged *Ilich's Gate* for its contemplative mode, which he equated with self-absorption and even indifference. More importantly for the sake of the present argument, this mode is formally disparaged as the tendency of Khutsiev's protagonists to "walk and walk", while the camera meanders after them. Donskoi interprets such sequences as being intended to evoke an "indifferent meditation," essentially a narcissistic tendency isolating the protagonist from society ("Tvoi geroi khodiat, khodiat. Ty dumaesh', v etom bezrazlichii razdum'e").<sup>43</sup> In relation to these 'walking' sequences, Donskoi chastised Khutsiev for the film's sheer length, suggesting that the director did not know how to structure his film dramatically. He asserted that Khutsiev wanted to show everything, and cut nothing. At one point, Donskoi even offered to take scissors to *Ilich's Gate* and cut out at least 800 meters (or 10 minutes) out of the film to make it more dynamic.

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<sup>43</sup> Donskoi, Mark. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Pervogo tvorcheskogo ob"edineniia kinostudii imeni M. Gor'kogo po obsuzhdeniiu fil'ma rezhissera M. Khutsieva 'Zastava Il'icha' ot 12 marta 1963 goda." *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 6, 1988, 114.



Figure 3.2: Frame enlargement from a tracking shot in *Ilich's Gate*. In the extended shot, which lasts 48.64 seconds, the camera follows Sergei and his friends as they walk through a park.

While these comments establish a stylistic difference between Khutsiev and Donskoi, the latter's claim of *Ilich's Gate's* indiscriminate approach to the material reality of the everyday, points toward not just a shift in the conventions of realism, but also a shift in the way affects were elicited. Touching on the length and formal qualities of the film's shots, Donskoi questions the film's capacity to deliver a sufficiently strong emotional impact. In this manner he echoes Eisenstein's critique of Nekrasov's *In the Trenches of Stalingrad* for not selecting and accentuating the most meaningful lines in his text, lines that could generalize the attitude of the Nekrasov's protagonists to the level of all the Soviet defenders of Stalingrad. Instead, Nekrasov allows lines expressing the Soviet will to resist the German siege to "drown in the general course of the narrative" ("utonut' v obshchem khode povestvovaniia"). This "general course" is filled with meaningless details ("neznachitel'nye detali").<sup>44</sup> Selection of key details represents for Eisenstein the key function of artistic composition, which is echoed in his assertion, "The art of placing a

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<sup>44</sup> Eisenstein, "Voprosy kompozitsii", 193.

period in the proper place is a great art' ('Iskusstvo postavit' tochku tam, gde ona dolzhna byt', — eto bol'shoe iskusstvo').<sup>45</sup>

With films marked by a kind of acute concentration of meaning, Donskoi's style of realism follows Eisenstein's compositional method. Take for instance the presence of the Christ icon in the scene from *Foma Gordeev*, when the titular character discusses with his godfather, Iakov Tarasovich Maiakin, why his father, Ignat Gordeev, built a house for the poor. The overbearing presence of the icon in this sequence, specifically the focus on its eyes, emphasizes the domination of societal and religious influences over the titular Foma. As the son of a wealthy merchant, Foma is expected to embrace the exploitative capitalism that made his father rich. Furthermore, his father early in the film explains to a young Foma that this winner-take all system is sanctioned by God. In her review of *Foma Gordeev*, K. Paramonova draws attention to Donskoi's selection of such important details as the icon in his search for the embodiment of vital facts. "In Donskoi's directing everything serves a specific idea. He recreates life without naturalistic details of everyday life, but with exact, keenly observed features".<sup>46</sup> Paramonova opposes Donskoi's realism to the indiscriminate embrace of details from everyday life, which causes them to lose the capacity to transmit concrete meaning. "There a lot of mundane items [in *Foma Gordeev*], but they are subject to a single task - to create a certain image of the secular merchant, to reveal its essence."<sup>47</sup>

The difference then, between Donskoi's realism and the naturalism Paramonova attacks, is the hierarchy of meaning organized through selection in *Foma Gordeev*. Lacking a similar hierarchy, *Ilich's Gate* is suffused with mundane elements like the drowning of emphatic phrases in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Paramonova, K. "Snova v poiskakh", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 2, 1960, 33.

<sup>47</sup> Paramonova, "Snova v poiskakh", 34.

Nekrasov's text. An example of this can be seen in the scene, where Sergei first spots Ania. As Sergei watches Ania read, we see both characters participate in an everyday ritual of passing money to the off-screen ticket-seller and then passing a ticket in opposite direction. The passing of the money and then the ticket does not distract either from their activity nor does the whole process contribute any new information to the scene. It's an everyday ritual, which heightens the perceptual experience of viewers, as they follow the items passed from hand to hand but also keep track of Sergei's engagement with Ania. But with its focus on such details, the film, for Donskoi, was far from being sincere, and instead became merely boring.

This was not the case for everyone, and certain reviewers celebrated these strategies for the affect they elicited. For Iakov Varshavskii it was important that the filmmakers did not rush the contemplations of their central protagonist Sergei Zhruravlev. Describing *Il'ich's Gate* as film of slow action ("fil'm zamedlennogo deistva"), Varshavskii emphasizes the documentary attention to events in the film, no one of which is more important than the other.<sup>48</sup> This allows the film to make existence ("bytie") more immanent through the visual and aural layers that develop in time. For Varshavskii and several other reviewers it was crucial to observe the film's characters struggling with their emotions and inhabiting Moscow's urban space. A nocturnal scene in the film's second episode, in which Sergei wakes up and goes to meet Ania, allowed viewers to observe the film's central protagonist ambling through night-time Moscow. Over the course of six minutes viewers see Sergei walk down a succession of Moscow streets and hear him recite fragments of one of Mayakovsky's final poems, left untitled, but usually referred to as "It's already two. No doubt, you've gone to sleep." ("Uzhe vtoroi. Dolzhno byt' ty legla"). The length of shots in this sequence allows for the contemplative duration of these instants of time. The sequence has

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<sup>48</sup> Varshavskii, Iakov. "Fil'm zamedlennogo deistva", in *Ekran 1964* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1964), 44.

an average shot length of 14.86 seconds, and these longer takes suggest a sense of greater continuity and the observation of movement that generates a greater sense of corporeality and presence of the character. Longer shot lengths allow time for Sergei to walk past and then away from the camera into the background of the image. As the camera continues to pan and track him, these images assert the depth of the image and the continuity of the dramatic space. These movements of the camera and the character through the image coupled with Sergei's voiceover establish a dense relationship between character and space, which reveals the character's internal state, drawing the spectator into an affective relationship with the character on screen.



Figure 3.3: Sergei's nighttime passage through Moscow's empty streets in *Ilich's Gate*.

Like the other internal monologues in the film, Sergei's recitation is meant to evoke a sense of sincerity by giving the viewer access to the character's thoughts, which contributes to the viewer's trust in the character's representation. Internal monologues became a prominent strategy in the Soviet cinema of the 1960s, to suggest greater, direct access to the self-expression of film characters.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, a blanket explanation of this stylistic trend does not account for all implications of its particular use in *Ilich's Gate*. The duality of Mayakovsky's position – pillar of

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<sup>49</sup> Margolit, Evgenii. "Kinematograf ottepeli: epokha vizual'nogo kino" in *Zhivye i mertvoe: zametki k istorii sovetskogo kino 1920-1960-kh godov* (Sankt-Peterburg: Seans, 2012), 448.

Sovietness and yet marker of something authentic, sincere – suggests a kind of coexistence between individual and communal values. In this regard, Vitalii Troianovskii has written, the hero of the sixties is able to live for the community, but also remain an individual.<sup>50</sup> It's exactly this kind of plurality that Donskoi and the other conservative critics who charged *Ilich's Gate* with an indiscriminate approach to reality themselves were discriminating against.

The lines Sergei intones and the implications of those left unsaid in this scene also suggest a careful orchestration of associations. Two partial lines are repeated several times, "what calm there is in the world" ("kakaia v mire tish") and "with an express telegram" ("molniiami telegram"). The first suggests an individual's encounter with the empty world grown still and quiet. Alone in the night, the poet takes comfort in remembering his beloved, embracing all that is left after their parting—an idyllic sense of love and interpersonal connection. The latter fragment comes from the line "there is no point in me // waking and disturbing you // with an express telegram" ("..i molniiami telegramm // Mne nezachem tebia budit' i bespokoit"). Through its clear reference to a medium of communication, this fragment questions the capacity of expressing one's internal emotional state. The demand to do so is implied by the lines from Maiakovskii's poem left unsaid, particularly "the ship of love has crashed against the everyday" ("liubovnaia lodka razbilas' o byt"). Most Soviet viewers would have known the poem in its entirety, particularly for its relevance as one of Maiakovskii's last works. Thus, even without this tragic line, the poem would have suggested the deeply personal conflict between the ideal and the everyday. If one of the resonances of Maiakovskii's lines in *Ilich's Gate* is to invoke his suicide, it suggests by extension the possibility that Sergei's ideals might also crash on "shores of the everyday".

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<sup>50</sup> Troianovskii, Vitalii. "Chelovek ottepeli (1950ye)," in *Kinematograf ottepeli*. Kniga pervaiia (Moscow: Materik, 1996), 75.

Donskoi would have likely cut this scene or staged it in a 3-shot sequence, in which the character wakes up, goes out on the street, and meets his romantic interest. This concise breakdown of the sequence would have privileged the completion of action. Instead, the affect of the sequence is predicated on the extended observation of the character, which establishes a different relation between the film image and the spectator. As Sergei's emotional experience is projected on the cityscape, the length and depth of these images provoke an affective response. For Anatolii Grebnev this scene has a lyrical quality, which arises from the combination of broad, empty streets, Sergei's slow gait, the blinking streetlights, and lines of Maiakovskii.<sup>51</sup> The different layers bring about a tension between romantic themes, historical references, and everyday existence. For Vasilii Shukshin, the same streets, traffic lights, and manner of walking instantiate a young man in love. According to Shukshin, viewers aren't hit over the head with the message that the young man is in love, but are simply given the opportunity to observe him in this state ("No ia khochu videt' kak idet vliublennyi chelovek, kak on neset svoiu liubov").<sup>52</sup> N. Kolesnikova writes that the rhythm of movement resolved the scene. As Sergei's footsteps resound in the empty darkness, the unconstrained and unaffected movements of the camera merge with them, entering a perceptual subjectivity.<sup>53</sup> While these responses indicate a desire to experience the duration of events and observe the movements of characters, they also reveal that by imbuing the image with greater continuity and duration this scene elicits an affect of sincerity. This sincerity is attached to the way the film externalizes Sergei's emotional state by means of formal techniques. In turn this affect is rationalized as the emotion of trust in the audiovisual realism of the image.

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<sup>51</sup> Grebnev, Anatolii. "Muzyka zhizni", *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 30 January, 1965, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Shukshin, Vasilii. "Est' dva roda tishiny...", *Sovetskaia kul'tura*, 27 August, 1988, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Kolesnikova, N. "Stupeni masterstva", *Sovetskii ekran*, No. 3, 1965, 9.

The affective charge of Sergei's nighttime passage through Moscow's deserted streets relies on the repetition of the same kind of movement over course of the film. On the one hand, Sergei's ambulatory rhythm parallels that of the army patrols at the beginning and end of the film. On the other hand, the "Nighttime Passage" sequence echoes the scenes where Sergei moves through Moscow streets together with his friends as well as in pursuit of Ania. In this manner, *Ilich's Gate* exemplifies the trend of registering the new bodily movements of young people. Oksana Bulgakowa asserts that Soviet films of the 1960s increasingly "thematized" and assimilated differentiated walking, which was used to form the physiognomy and motility of a new type of heroes.<sup>54</sup> Suggesting Giorgio Agamben's notion of gesture as an exhibition of mediality, Bulgakowa asserts that Valentin Popov (Sergei), Nikolai Gubenko (Kolia), and Stanislav Liubshin (Slava) create the characters with their gait. Both Bulgakowa and Alexander Prokhorov have essentially claimed that body language provides the most efficient way to be sincere and to convey the inner self in cinema of the Thaw.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, how bodies were framed and shot in films was just as, if not more, important to eliciting the affect of sincerity. The organization of visual and audio elements in *Ilich's Gate*, and particularly in the "Night Passage" sequence, indicates how this film animated the embodied experience of viewing to elicit this affect.

## **V. Conclusion: Movement and Specificity of Ilich's Gate**

*Ilich's Gate* was not the only film to feature characters moving through streets and urban spaces. Nevertheless, the staging of this movement in the film created a different appeal to the viewers.

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<sup>54</sup> Bulgakowa, "Cine-Weathers: Soviet Thaw Cinema in the International Context", 466.

<sup>55</sup> Prokhorov, *Inherited Discourses*, 230.

Khutsiev's and Pilikhina's visual strategies were soon taken up by other directors and cinematographers, most immediately by Georgii Daneliia and Vadim Iusov in *Walking the Streets of Moscow* (*Ia shagaiu po Moskve*, 1963), which was scripted by Genadii Shpalikov during the production of *Ilich's Gate*. *Walking* and *Ilich's Gate* are often linked together and said to have similar visual strategies. But *Walking* confronts its spectators with modalities of movement in order to generate in the viewer a sense of making and appropriating the urban environment, which in turn was perceived as a practice of subjective liberation.<sup>56</sup> Nesting her argument in the architectural theory of Vladimir Paperny, which stratifies Soviet culture into three separate groupings according to movement and immobility, Lida Oukaderova positions *Walking* within a "conformist-oppositional" framework that reads the movement of the film's character as overturning and opposing the Stalinist system of forced immobility.

Oukaderova's reading might appear applicable to *Ilich's Gate*, if one takes into account and takes for granted the official criticism of Khutsiev's film. However movement in *Walking* lacks the affect of *Ilich's Gate* because the characters of Daneliia's film do not possess the same kind of concerns and plights of the latter film. As a comedy, *Walking* presents characters whose experience of the "unfixable flow" and spontaneity of Moscow streets is predicated on achieving comedic effect (confusion of identity, practical jokes, and romantic triangles). Furthermore, sequences of movement in *Walking* are punctuated with verbal and visual gags, whereas in *Ilich's Gate*, movement is predicated on establishing an experience of the emotional, moral, and ethic side of human existence. Furthermore, the affective response prompted by the film's visual style bore the experience of sincerity.

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<sup>56</sup> Oukaderova, Lida. "The Sense of Movement in Georgii Daneliia's *Walking the Streets of Moscow*", *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2010, 16.

This experience greatly relied on the foregrounding of sheer chance and spontaneity of the street. As if taking Siegfried Kracauer's notion of the street as "an unfixable flow which carries fearful uncertainties and alluring excitements", *Ilich's Gate* emphasizes spontaneity and open temporalities of Moscow streets as the spaces of merger between the natural and social, where the 'natural' is constituted by life's spontaneity and the 'social' is represented by the way the main characters grapple with their individual role within the community. Evgenii Margolit asserts that the merger of the natural and the social became the ultimate aim for Soviet cinema of the 1960s, motivated by the separation of man from nature during the Stalinist period. In *Ilich's Gate*, Margolit claims that Sergei "feels himself [to be] a drop in the free-flowing 'stream of everyday life'."<sup>57</sup> Moscow is the site of the merger of the social and natural, as the space where the film's characters question their role and responsibilities to society, but also as the space that is transformed into a natural entity, like a river, according to Margolit.

The social-natural merger is most explicit during the May-Day Parade sequence at the end of the film's first episode. Whereas crowds in Soviet cinema tend to be either disordered and vulnerable, like the fleeing masses in *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin*, Eisenstein, 1935) or highly organized and arranged into geometric forms, like the protagonists in the finale of Aleksandrov's *Circus* (*Tsirk*, 1936), the people marching in *Ilich's Gate* are depicted as a collection of distinct individuals.<sup>58</sup> This impression is largely due to Pilikhina's camerawork. Weaving through the marching multitude, Pilikhina's handheld camera follows the principal characters during the sequence but also shows other, unknown individuals. This visual technique parallels the spontaneity and freedom of movement of Moscovites enjoying themselves in the

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<sup>57</sup> Margolit, Evgenii. "Landscape, with Hero" in *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s*, University of Pittsburgh, Russian Film Symposium in May-June 2001, 43.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

parade. Pilikhina's handheld camera work establishes a difference between intimate shots within the marching multitude of people and external, extreme long shots of the parade from the perspective of a removed observer that shapes the marchers into a mass body. The hand-held shots capture impulsive movement, suggesting how the multitude of marchers is like a coursing river. This sense of spontaneity and impulsiveness momentarily crystallizes when an assistant cameraman is caught in the frame for a couple of seconds, running with a camera to get ahead of the film's main characters. In this manner, *Ilich's Gate* foregrounds the mediation of the pro-filmic event and calls attention to this process.



Figure 3.4: The beginning of the May-Day parade in *Ilich's Gate*.



Figures 3.5: Inside the May-Day parade in *Ilich's Gate*.

The use of natural metaphors in discussing *Ilich's Gate* should not suggest a lack of artifice or any sort of naive realism on the part of Khutsiev and Pilikhina. How would characters inhabit their surroundings, how would the camera move through this space and how would spectators come to experience it were the question that guided their planning of shots. During the production, Khutsiev and Pilikhina drove around Moscow at night scouting streets and boulevards for the film, where Sergei, Nikolai, and Slava would walk. In other words, careful attention and deliberate organization went into staging and filming the searching movements of characters in the film. The film's style oscillates between stylized camera movement and hand-held work to equally make use of the continuity of the dramatic space. On the one hand, there are scenes such as when Sergei follows Ania through the city or the parade sequence discussed above. These are largely organized by hand-held camera work. At the same time scenes like the film's introductory sequence or Sergei's night passage through Moscow feature very stylized camera work using frequent panning and dolly shots that track the movement of characters in space.

The two camera techniques favored in *Ilich's Gate* are not at odds with each other. Whereas the hand-held camera work suggests immediacy to the physical reality, the more stylized panning shots reflect a respect for the continuity of the dramatic space, utilizing the depth and duration of the shot. The function of both is to elicit the affect of sincerity. This kind of stylistic duality corresponds to the plurality of parameters the film asserts on multiple levels. On the level of subject, this included the significance of individual desires that were distinct but parallel to those of the community. On the level of form this sense of plurality informed the filmmaker's approach to physical reality—the desire to film a multitude of details and imbue the film image with depth and time. These formal and narrative strategies constitute parameters precisely because they were informed by the goal of revising cultural and aesthetic values after Stalin.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE DOCUMENTARY STYLE IN LATE THAW CINEMA

Over the course the 1960s, Soviet feature-length fiction films were increasingly discussed in terms of their perceived documentary qualities. Attempting to specify these qualities, filmmakers and critics invoked a range of production and aesthetic strategies, including the use of new wide-angle 18mm and 22mm lenses, multiple camera setups, film plots without conflict, and the use of non-professional actors. What was described as the collision of fictional and factual interests was addressed with the abstract noun *dokumental'nost'*, and sometimes *dokumentalizm*. Although no uniform definition was adopted, the appeal to veracity and authenticity through *dokumental'nost'* expressed a renewed engagement with the problem of referentiality.

To a certain extent, the question of *dokumental'nost'* or “documentary-ness” was a response to the growing distrust in the use of media to depict conditions and social attitudes. Along with indicting at the Twentieth Party Congress how late-Stalinist film represented the events of World War II, Khrushchev also took aim at Stalin-era images of collective farms, asserting that Stalin knew the country and agriculture only from films. “And these films had dressed up and beautified the existing situation in agriculture. Many films so pictured collective farm life that the tables groaned beneath the weight of turkeys and geese.”<sup>1</sup> Delineating a rift between true social conditions and the cinematic representation of reality, Khrushchev prompted film critics and filmmakers to question how cinema’s revelatory capacity could be used to provide knowledge of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Leyda, Jay. *Kino: A History of Russian and Soviet Film* (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 401.

The Soviet director, Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii, invoked the ongoing discourse over “documentary-ness” when he wrote in January 1967 that ideally he would have liked to have filmed his second film as a newsreel documentary (khronikal’nyi fil’m). For this project about contemporary life on a collective farm, which came to be called *The Story of Asia Kliachina, Who Loved but Did Not Marry* (*Istoriia Asi Kliachinoi, kotoraiia liubila da ne vyshla zamuzh*), the director envisioned getting villagers to play themselves and composing the film from footage shot in the observational mode. “In the process of recording real life [fiksatsii real’noi zhizni], occurring independent of us, I would like to be passive and assume the active role of a director only during the editing process and the selection of shots necessary for the plot.”<sup>2</sup> Konchalovskii went on to cast non-professional actors for all but three roles in *Asia Kliachina* and shot his film entirely on-location in the Gor’kii region village of Bezvodnoe. This tells of a belief that filming on location and using non-professional actors increases the spectator’s access to truth. *Asia Kliachina* interlaces the authenticity of non-professional actors and production on-location with post-production sound, cinematographic elements, and editing conventions to generate the impression of looking at and overhearing the lived experience of others. By itself this film might appear to only aspire for a look of reality or a kind of surface realism, but when considered with Konchalovskii’s debut film, *The First Teacher* (*Pervyi uchitel’*, 1966), *The Story of Asia Kliachina* reveals pronounced referential ambitions. In this regard, Konchalovskii’s second feature, which was shelved for close to twenty years, becomes instrumental in understanding the development of documentary realism as a visual style in Soviet fiction film.

Konchalovskii’s pursuit of documentary aesthetics in the 1960s emerges against a background of prior films about Soviet collective farms. The use of non-professional actors,

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<sup>2</sup> Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii, Andrei. “Nekotorye soobrazheniia po postanovke ‘Pervogo uchitel’ia’”, *Iskusstvo kino*, January 1967, p. 44.

multiple and hidden camera set-ups, and shooting on location in *Bezvodnoe* laid claim to a more authentic representation in lieu of developed archetypes. Looking to avoid the stock representations of previous *kolkhoz* films as well as the audio-visual strategies he used in *The First Teacher*, Konchalovskii and his crew concentrated on the physical experiences and material reality of a collective farm in the 1960s, endeavoring to produce images and sounds representing social and natural hardship. In this regard, *Asia Kliachina* depicted what Konchalovskii would later, in his memoirs, call “the roughness of Russian life” (*grubost’ russkoi zhizni*).<sup>3</sup> This “rough” quality crucially pertained not only to the habits of characters and the land they inhabited—the people and spaces removed from the Russian cultural centers—but also to the aesthetics of this film. Not only did Konchalovskii describe the characters in *Asia Kliachina* as *grubovaty*, but he also referred to the film’s methods and conditions of production with another adjective for roughness, *surovyi*, best defined as “severe” in English.<sup>4</sup> Along with these descriptors, critics like Semyon Freilikh mobilized the adjective *zhestokii* and the noun *zhestokost’*, both implying an intense severity, to describe both the style and subject matter of *Asia Kliachina*.<sup>5</sup> These terms, especially the adjective *surovyi*, bring to mind the concurrent movement in Russian painting, called “Severe Style” (*Surovyi stil’*), defined, in general terms, by a flattening of the pictorial space, the use of simplified forms, and a turn toward quotidian subject matter.<sup>6</sup> The conceptualization of “roughness” or “severity”

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<sup>3</sup> Konchalovskii, Andrei, *Vozvyshaiushchii obman* (Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno, 1999), p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> Konchalovskii refers to the inhabitants of *Bezvodnoe* as “*grubovaty*” in his “Nekotorye soobrazheniia po postanovke ‘Pervogo uchitel’ia’”, p. 43; For Konchalovskii’s use of “*surovyi*” see “Stenogramma obsuzhdeniia khudozhestvennogo fil’ma ‘Istoriia Asia Kliachinoi, kotoraiia liubila da ne vyshla zamuzh’”, RGALI 2936.4.521, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> RGALI 2936.4.521, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> See Aleksei Bobrikov, “Surovyi stil’: mobilizatsiia i revoliutsiia”, *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal*, No. 51/52. <http://xz.gif.ru/numbers/51-52/surovo/>. Accessed May 23, 2016. Also “Surovyi stil’ i pozdnesovetskoe iskusstvo” in Dikovich, Anna et al., *Gosudarstvennaia Tret’iakovskaia galereia na Krymskom Valu: Iskusstvo XX veka Putovoditel’*, Kirill Svetliakov, Ed. (Moscow: Paulsen, 2004), p. 183.

in Soviet painting as a wholesale stylistic movement makes even more pertinent the relation between these categories and Konchalovskii's development of a "documentary style".

Mirroring the lack of consensus in Soviet public discourse regarding the "documentary-ness" of fiction films, critics and filmmakers attributed notions of "roughness" and "severity" to *The First Teacher* and *Asia Kliachina* with both pejorative and complimentary connotations. *Grubost'*, for example, progressed from scriptwriter Ivan Bakuranskii's usage of this word to negatively characterize parts of *Asia Kliachina*'s dialogue, during the initial review of the script, all the way to Konchalovskii adopting this term to characterize how his film represented life on the collective farm and its people.<sup>7</sup> Bearing in mind these competing discursive frameworks, the aim of this chapter is to interrogate what audio-visual means informed both positive and negative ascriptions of "roughness/severity" and "documentary-ness," and how the former quality informed the development of a documentary style in Konchalovskii's early films. The secondary goal is to delineate how these films addressed viewers by means of technologies and techniques appropriated from documentary cinema. These analyses will be grounded in the public discourse over *The First Teacher* and *Asia Kliachina*, since different understandings of roughness and documentary-ness greatly influenced their production, specifically *First Teacher's* delayed release and the eventual banning of *Asia Kliachina*. From these competing ascriptions of rough and documentary qualities to Konchalovskii's early films it becomes apparent that in the latter half of the 1960s these attributes were referenced to define a developing brand of realism whose attested goal was to renew cinema's link to actual events, persons, and/or social conditions.

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<sup>7</sup> For Bakuranskii's usage of "grubost'" see RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 9.

## **I. Documentary Pursuits & Expressive Mise en scène in *The First Teacher***

*The First Teacher* begins with Diuishen, a demobilized Red Army soldier, arriving at the remote village of Kurkureu on the Kyrgyzstan side of the Tian Shan mountain range with orders from the Komsomol to establish a primary school there. Although barely educated himself, Diuishen gathers the children of the village in an abandoned barn and begins to teach them about Lenin and the Revolution. As he endures the suspicion and mockery of the locals, Diuishen develops feelings for Altynai, an older girl in the village. When her relatives give Altynai to a local *bai* (here meaning a wealthy horse and camel breeder), Diuishen tries to intercede, going against Kyrgyz customs, for which he is beaten up by the man's relatives. In response, Diushen has the regional police arrest the *bai* and brings Altinai back to the village. After Altinai's aunt debases herself and curses her niece for breaking custom, Diushen sends the girl to the provincial capital to be educated in the new system. Returning to the village after seeing Altynai off, Diuishen discovers that the villagers burned down his school and that one of his students died in the fire. The film ends with Diushen chopping down the sole tree in the village in order to gather wood for the construction of a new school.

An introductory title card, reading “Kirgizia – the first years of Soviet rule”, geographically positions *The First Teacher*, in the newly Soviet Kyrgyz region of (then) Turkestan. News of Lenin's passing on January 21, 1924, reported later in the film, provides its precise temporal coordinates. Considered together this where and when define the film's referential ambition, locating the events, characters, discourses, and states of affairs in a specific historical moment and space. How this narrative of modernization, education, and emancipation was historicized in *The First Teacher* was frequently discussed during its production and in subsequent reviews of the film. Expectations of referential authenticity informed both negative and positive

views of the film's visual style and its critiques. While some filmmakers and critics ascribed referential authenticity to the film, calling it documentary and truthful, others objected to the film on symbolic and aesthetic grounds, claiming it was not documentary enough. Kyrgyz Party officials took issue with a perceived negative portrayal of Kyrgyz people as uncouth wildings and with the historical accuracy of costumes in the film. Furthermore, they did not want *The First Teacher* to be considered a Kyrgyz film, but instead a Soviet one, which would incorporate the people of the Kyrgyz region into the fold of the Soviet Union. Significant cuts were demanded before the film was finally released, over a year after it was initially submitted. Overwhelmingly these cuts targeted shots exhibiting the butchery of animals and unruly behavior, which some critics interpreted as details of “cruel authenticity” [zhestokaia dostovernost'] and “documentary-ness” [dokumental'nost'], representing the historical everyday of a Kyrgyz village in 1924.<sup>8</sup> Instead of distorting veracity, these images of roughness were meant to shock viewers and affectively frame the struggle of early Soviet evangelists.

Based on one of Chingiz Aitmatov's stories from the compilation *Tales of the Mountains and Steppes* (1963), for which the author received a Lenin Prize for Literature in 1963, *First Teacher* was a co-production of the Kyrgyzfilm and Mosfilm studios. After initial problems with the production, an order issued on January 29, 1964 by Aleksei Romanov, chairman of the State Committee for Cinematography (1963-1972), turned what had originally been a Kyrgyzfilm-only production, which had progressed as far as developing the director's script, with Sultan-Akhmet Khodzhikov named as the director, into a co-production that heavily relied on the resources of Mosfilm. Along with dictating that *The First Teacher* was to be a co-production, the order named Andrei Konchalovskii as the film's director, assigned creative oversight to Mosfilm's sixth

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<sup>8</sup> Gosfilmofond, delo 1701.

production unit, and required Mosfilm's director Vladimir Surin to provide highly qualified specialists for the production, as well as technical support and access to sound stages. After receiving his assignment, Konchalovskii collaborated with Aitmatov and Boris Dobrodeev on the literary script, which wound up departing from the source material by dropping the story's flashback structure, Altinai's narratorial perspective, and adding new episodes to the narrative. The literary script was approved by Kyrgyzfilm and Mosfilm studios at the beginning of March 1964. The subsequent approval of Konchalovskii's director's script mandated the standard 2700 meters length and provided a generous six and half months production period, from July 1964 to the middle of January 1965. During preparations for the production, a suitable, natural setting for the film proved difficult to find, as the crew looked to simulate the historical conditions of the Kurkureu village in the early 1920s. Most of the film was shot on location in the village Kirchin, 700 kilometers from the republic's capital Frunze (now Bishkek) in the Tian Shan mountain range. This remote landscape 2600 meters above sea level lacked signs of modernization, such as telegraph wires, new roofs, and brick sheepfolds, befitting the atmosphere of a film set in 1924.

A slew of problems marred the production. In his report on the film's budget and expenses, production manager M. A. Volovik reported delays in the preparation of shots by the initial PM, the mishandling of rushes and negative prints at Kyrgyzfilm, the removal of Mosfilm editors from the project which caused delays in editing, and the irregular availability of actors. Along with administrative and logistical obstacles, the crew also encountered problems with their camera equipment. Volovik, Konchalovskii, and the film's cinematographer, Georgii Rerberg, all complained that their "Druzhba" model camera was unreliable for filming crowd shots, damaging the film or completely breaking down; About 559 meters of film was damaged due to problems with the camera or errors in the Kyrgyzfilm lab. Along with these problems,

Konchalovskii became ill during the shoot and his marriage to Natal'ia Arinbasarova, the film's female lead from Kazakhstan who played Altinai, brought about problems involving her parents, the police, and Kazakh Party officials. Altogether these problems delayed the completion of the initial print until April 29, 1965 and pushed the film significantly over budget by approximately 35,000 rubles. More than a year would pass before the film was finally approved for release. During this time Konchalovskii was forced to make many edits to his film. Even Chingiz Aitmatov became involved in securing the film's release, as he paid visits to Mikhail Suslov, who wielded great power in the Central Committee when Leonid Brezhnev rose to power. The final edits to the film were reported on May 19, 1966 and the film was officially released later that year on August 15.<sup>9</sup> After the film premiered it earned international recognition at the Venice Film Festival in 1966.

In reviews of *The First Teacher*, during the production and afterward, the film was touted for its documentary style. At the November 9, 1964 Mosfilm review of completed footage, among other speakers who praised the material, Aleksei Parkhomenko and N. A. Rudakova asserted being pleased that the material was “authentic” [Material ochen' dostovernyi]. Grigorii Baklanov asserted that the footage contained “a correct sense of truth” [s tochnym oshchusheniem pravdy].<sup>10</sup> In their resolution regarding *The First Teacher*, which was certified by the leaders of Mosfilm's sixth production group, Iurii Bondarev and N. A. Rudakova characterized the film's camerawork as “almost documentary” [pochti dokumntal'naia manera operatorskoi raboty].<sup>11</sup> After the film's release, some reviewers echoed this claim, ascribing the film a verisimilitude of

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<sup>9</sup> “Letopis' soiuza kinematografistov. 1966 god. III chast'.” Soiuz kinematografistov rossiiskoi federatsii. Web. Accessed May 4, 2015. <http://www.unikino.ru/history/item/1558--летопись-союза-кинematграфистов-1966-год-iii-часть-май-август.html>

<sup>10</sup> Gosfilmofond, delo 1701.

<sup>11</sup> Gosfilmofond, delo 1701.

historical reality. Natella Lordkipanidze, in her *Iskusstvo kino* review of *The First Teacher*, wrote: “Everyday life, the living conditions of those years are very important to [Konchalovskii]. He recreates them with all possible concreteness and with all possible care.”<sup>12</sup> This perception of *The First Teacher* has survived in subsequent accounts of the film. Both Josephine Woll and B. Tench Coxe have discussed the film’s “documentary style”.<sup>13</sup>

Writing in 1967, Konchalovskii attributed a documentary quality to certain parts of *The First Teacher* such as the bai’s feast episode, an addition to Aitmatov’s original narrative. Consisting of 101 shots (out the film’s 382 total), this episode presents a festive gathering of Kurkureu villagers, which is interrupted by a physical confrontation. A real feast was organized and, according to the director, almost no preparations were made as to how the episode would be shot. “When we chose the most auspicious moment [to film], there was no time to think about how one would light this.”<sup>14</sup> Long-focus lenses were used to film the episode from a distance, allowing the frame to resonate with a sense of contingency. But not everything was left up to chance. The episode breaks down into a set of sequences: Altinai walking through the crowd; the slaughter and carving of a horse; Altinai again walking through the crowd and being teased by other girls; the arrival of the *bai* and his party; medium and close-up shots of villagers and their children feasting and drinking *kumis*; the flirtation between Burma, another village girl, and the *bai*; Diushen and his Red Army veteran friends; Diushen calling to Altinai; the initial conflict between a villager and the *bai*’s drunken brother; the *bai* lecturing the villagers on what they owe

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<sup>12</sup> Lordkipanidze, Natella. “Drugimi glazami.” *Iskusstvo kino*. 12 (1965), 17.

<sup>13</sup> For Josephine Woll’s discussion of *The First Teacher*’s documentary style see *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), pp. 195-197; For B. Tench Coxe’s discussion see “Sonic Hierarchies and the Clash of Discourses in Andrei Mikhalkov-Konchalovsky’s “First Teacher””, *Urbandus Review*, Vol. 7, 2003, pp. 107-121.

<sup>14</sup> Konchalovskii, Andrei “Nekotorye soobrazheniia po postanovke ‘Pervogo uchitella’”, *Iskusstvo kino*, January 1967, 40.

him; Diushen confronting the *bai*, the *bai* and Diushen's stand-in fight on horseback. In this manner, the *bai*'s feast episode combines shots of narrative consequence, such as the one of Altinai searching, presumably for Diushen, which serve narrative progress, alongside ones like the slaughter and carving of the horse sequence or shots of villagers and children drinking and eating, which don't have direct bearing on narrative, but provide details of material reality.

Aside from long shots used to establish spatial positioning, most of the *bai*'s celebration episode is filmed in the medium to close-up shot range. These shots are congested with bodies and the camera's perspective is almost always at least partially obscured. As a result of this, in the eight shots showing the slaughter and carving of a horse, the process is visible only in fragmentary details. After the initial and only long shot of this sequence, in which several men force a horse to the ground, the rest of the shots truncate the body of the animal and those of the people carving the carcass. As visibility of the horse is obscured, it would appear that these shots lack clear and coherent composition. Yet, by emphasizing the truncation, keeping this process in the center of the frame even when the horse is covered up by surrounding bodies, a clear cinematographic decision is evident—process instead of the dead animal—indicating that even within documentary style significant choices are being made.



Figure 4.1: The slaughter and carving of a horse (full shot).



Figure 4.2: The slaughter and carving of a horse (medium close up).



Figure 4.3: The slaughter and carving of a horse (Close up).

Wholesale qualifications of *First Teacher* as having a documentary style disregard how this film is emphatically punctuated by shots with a stringently stylized mise en scene. These shots include rotational symmetry, which is visible in the opening shot of the teacher Diushen and the villagers. Introducing himself to the people of Kurkureu, the teacher stands in the center of the foreground, while the villagers loop around him in almost a perfect circle. An axial symmetry is visible when Diushen comes to recruit Altinai for his school at the beginning of the film. In the long shot, Altinai stands in the foreground banging a post downward, most likely pounding grain. Behind her stand Diushen, on the left, and her aunt, on the right, arguing about whether the girl should go to school. Symmetry is again used at the end of the film, when in a long shot Diushen stands in a doorway of the burned down school, the heavily balanced composition visually emphasizing his vow to rebuild what was destroyed. The director and cinematographer Georgii Rerberg believed that these shots would produce a vivid impression on the viewer. "We believe that these culminating shots by their primitiveness and simplicity of symmetry would be especially memorable [zapomniatsia naibolee iarko]."<sup>15</sup> This visual strategy, which Lev Anninskii

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<sup>15</sup> Konchalovskii, "“Nekotorye soobrazheniia”, 40.

would go on to call “geometric”, emphasized static composition over camera movement or mobile framing.<sup>16</sup> After making *First Teacher* Konchalovskii asserted that a shift had taken place away from cinematographic qualities of the late 1950s. “If ten years ago the operator's work was marked by pretentiously complex lighting patterns, spectacular close-ups, and undecipherable camera movements, now the most important quality of camera work is its ‘invisibility’; The most truthful account of the object will be provided by organic camera movement.”<sup>17</sup>



Figure 4.4: The opening symmetrical shot in *The First Teacher*.



Figure 4.5: A balanced shot of opposing forces in *The First Teacher*.

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<sup>16</sup> Anninski, Lev. “Asino neschast’e”. *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 12 October, 1988, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Konchalovskii, “Nekotorye soobrazheniia”, 40.



Figures 4.6: Symmetry at the end of *The First Teacher*.

These heavily stylized shots were part of a carefully planned visual strategy meant to elicit responses from viewers. According to Konchalovskii, for *The First Teacher* he “drew mise en scenes, storyboarded the theme of the ‘hero and mass’, tracing the stages of its development, the rise and resolution of their conflict from the moment of his arrival to the village down to the very end [of the film]”.<sup>18</sup> The spatial mapping of the conflict between Diuishen and the villagers was bolstered through elaborations to the graphic quality of the pro-filmic material. In his memoirs, the director states that the film’s production designer Mikhail Romadin proposed that all of the film’s pro-filmic material, from props to costumes, should be made black and white, since *The First Teacher* was to be shot on black and white film stock.<sup>19</sup> Costumes were purportedly made from solely black or white materials and shadows were accentuated by black paint for the sake of greater contrast.

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<sup>18</sup> Konchalovskii, *Vozvyshaiushchii obman*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

In relation to documentary and naturalistic shots, the official response of Kyrgyz Party officials was that *The First Teacher* did not appropriately conform to historical facts. The cuts these officials mandated suggest expectations that the film would refer to a particular view of the conditions and habits of the past. According to the Resolution of the State Committee for Cinema of the Kyrgyz SSR Council of Ministers, *The First Teacher* was to represent with documentary authenticity “the life of a dark, backward village and the fight of lone enthusiasts for the spiritual progress of the people.”<sup>20</sup> However, this reference to documentary was followed by a lengthy list of required cuts of shots that distorted historical veracity. The Kyrgyz State Committee for Cinema sought to remove from the initial version of the film, submitted to Kyrgyzfilm on April 29, 1965, with the original length of 2900 meters, a host of violent and bloody depictions of the Kyrgyz everyday. These included: shortening the fight between Altynai’s aunt and her husband; the complete removal of the sequence in which wolves attack Diuishen and kill his horse; from the *bai*’s celebration sequence, the removal of a shot in which the horse is decapitated, as well as other ones where the locals are seen drinking *kumis* or appear to be already inebriated; from later in the film, the removal of a shot in which Altynai’s aunt beats a dog and ones where she rips off her dress.

The required cuts exhibited the Stalinist mindset of “lacquering” over reality. They followed the sentiments of the Kyrgyz Secretary for Ideological Questions, one T. B. Murataliev, who voiced his displeasure directly to Konchalovskii regarding the general conception of the film, the depiction of the main hero, and the allegedly ahistorical costumes worn in the film.<sup>21</sup> Already during the production of the film another local official had taken exception to Konchalovskii’s characterization of *The First Teacher* as a Kyrgyz film, instead of a Soviet one, which implied a

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<sup>20</sup> RGALI delo fil'ma *Pervyi uchitel'*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> RGALI 2944.4.574, p. 8.

kind of symbolic removal of Kyrgyzstan from the modernizing Bolshevik project.<sup>22</sup> After the film was screened in Frunze (now Bishkek), the Central Committee in Moscow received a letter from the Kyrgyz Communist Party, which protested the depiction of the Kyrgyz people in the film as wild and uncivilized.<sup>23</sup> The main State Committee for Cinema agreed, for the most part, with the cuts the Kyrgyz committee demanded from Konchalovskii. In a letter dated from July 14, 1965, I. Kokoreva, deputy director of the main State Committee for Cinema, and A. Segedi, a member of the Script Editorial Board, wrote that Konchalovskii had exaggerated [*sgustil kraski*] certain aspects of the historical conditions and behaviors of his characters. At the same time, they faulted the film for exhibiting naturalism, especially in shots from the bai's celebration episode which was said to present only isolated details of the slaughter of the horse, the carving of its carcass, and the distribution of the meat. The charge of naturalism essentially implied that the film was providing a fragmentary and superficial account of social practices, instead of tying them to general historical conditions.<sup>24</sup> Kokoreva and Segedin strongly encouraged the director to consider the expediency of this approach ["tselesoobraznost"] and make the necessary changes, after which the film could be released.

Konchalovskii complied with all of the cuts demanded by the Kyrgyz State Committee for Cinema, as well as subsequent ones required by Goskino. In these edits, some of the most violent images were excised from the film. At the beginning of the bai's celebration sequence, an eight shot sequence still shows the slaughter and carving of a horse, and in the following scene, when the bai comes to discuss terms with Altynai's aunt for her hand in marriage, the girl's uncle is visible skinning and eviscerating a sheep. These are the goriest images that remained in the

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<sup>22</sup> Konchalovskii, Andrei, *Vozvyshaiushchii obman*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>24</sup> RGALI 2944.4.574, p. 36.

film when it was released. Yet, despite the excision of many gory shots, reviewers like Konstantin Simonov asserted that even more scenes of brutality and harshness could and should have been cut. In his review of the film, published in *Pravda* on December 13, 1965, Konstantin Simonov argued that cutting some of the film's difficult and violent parts would not have altered the meaning of the original conflict.<sup>25</sup>



Figure 4.7: Skinning and eviscerating a sheep in *The First Teacher*.

As opposed to the criticism that charged the film with distorting historical veracity, Konchalovskii defended his use of traditions and ritual activities for the purpose of visual expression, with which to address the viewer. In the studio discussion of completed footage on November 9, 1964, Konchalovskii explained: “Those shots are very important for me; the viewer should be imbued with this spirit [Eti kadry dlia menia ochen’ tsennye, zritel’ dolzhen proniknut’sia etim dukhom].”<sup>26</sup> Konchalovskii’s visual strategy was appreciated by some reviewers. Regarding the representation of historical conditions of a Kyrgyz village, Stanislav Rassadin asserted that some viewers might be shocked by the rough or crude elements

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<sup>25</sup> Simonov, Konstantin, “Zemnaia pravda romantiki”, *Pravda*, December 13, 1965, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Gosfilmofond, 1701.

[grubostiami] of the film, but that details of “national texture” and the “expressiveness of national everyday” served to highlight the conflict between the old and the new.<sup>27</sup> In her discussion of the film N. Tolchenova, described an embodied reaction to the film’s visual strategy that she claimed rejected the “fashionable smoothness” [*otvergaet modnuiu gladkopis’*]. In a rhetorical flourish, Tolchenova discusses the film’s visual style in terms of skinning an animal. “Even though at times it’s painful to watch the film, physically painful, this pain is always justified. Without polite disregard, the director sharply and roughly strips [*sdiraet* – a term referring to skinning an animal] from the Red Army-man Diushen’s story... the entire outer coating of decency [*blagopristoinosti*].”<sup>28</sup> In this manner, Tolchenova characterizes the film as having the peculiar intention of shocking the viewer’s sensibilities. Although referring to the cultural practices such as the slaughter of animals in terms of roughness or *grubost’* might suggest a kind of primitivism and underdevelopment, this alternative reading focuses on how the film ventures to establish veracity by showing the transformation of the animal into meat and framing the slaughter of animals for human consumption as part of the culture. Like Eisenstein in *Strike* (*Stachka*, 1925), Konchalovskii mined this process for a graphic quality with which to address viewers. But whereas Eisenstein used dialectical montage editing to elicit a response from viewers in the process producing allegorical meaning, Konchalovskii mobilizes images of roughness and severity in *The First Teacher* to generate a textured and varied style of graphic qualities that address the viewer with an embodied experience of historical conditions.

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<sup>27</sup> Rassadin, St. “Vo imia dobra”, *Sovetskii ekran*, No. 22, 1965, 15.

<sup>28</sup> “I khotia kartinu vremenami bol’no smotret’, bol’no fizicheski, eta bol’ vsegda byvaet opravdanna. Rezhisser bez vezhlivykh umolchani, rezko i grubo sdiraet s istorii zhiznii krasnoarmeitsa Diushena... vse pokrovy vneshnei blagopristoinosti.” Tolchenova, N. “Vozniknovenie kinoreputatsii”, *Ogonek*, No. 39, September 21, 1966, 28.

## II. The Discourse on *Dokumental'nost'*

If *First Teacher* presents Konchalovskii's initial pursuit of documentary aesthetics, his close relationship and exchange of ideas with Andrei Tarkovskii in the 1960s presents another source of ideas for making *Asia Kliachina* in the style a newsreel documentary. Elaborating how these two filmmakers sought to imprint time, in Tarkovskii's words, or record the modest course of life, in Konchalovskii's, will clarify their position in the Soviet discourse on documentary-ness. Instead of approaching Konchalovskii through the better-studied Tarkovskii, I want to emphasize that formulations of both filmmakers derived from a desire for "documentary-ness". Tarkovskii was several years ahead of Konchalovskii when they met in Mikhail Romm's VGiK directorial class. They went on to collaborate on the screenplays for Tarkovskii's final student project, *Steamroller and Violin* (*Katok i skripka*, 1961), first feature, *Ivan's Childhood* (*Ivanogo detstvo*, 1962) as well as on *Andrei Rublev* (1969/1971). Along with these co-authored screenplays, considerable parallels connect their work as film directors. In 1962, Konchalovskii's VGiK diploma film, *The Boy and the Dove* (*Mal'chik s golubom*, 1961) won the top prize in the debutants' competition at the Children and Youth Film Festival in Venice, the same year and place where Tarkovskii won the Golden Lion for *Ivan's Childhood* at the Venice Film Festival. In late 1965, controversy befell both *Andrei Rublev* and *The First Teacher*. Scenes involving cruelty to animals were at the center of both cases. These films also shared the actor Bolot Beishenaliev, who starred as the eponymous hero in *The First Teacher* and played the Mongol-Tatar khan who leads the raid on Vladimir in *Andrei Rublev*. Lastly, questions of historical authenticity were raised regarding both films. Following these links,

scholars like Andrei Shemiakin have framed their oeuvres as being in a critical, meta-textual dialogue.<sup>29</sup>

According to Konchalovskii, it was his discussions with Tarkovskii regarding principles of filmmaking that motivated the observational-documentary conception of *Asia Kliachina*.<sup>30</sup> In the mid-1960s these two filmmakers were drawn to the possibility of documenting every moment of a person's life, publicly articulating this ideal film project within months of each other. What Konchalovskii and Tarkovskii would emphasize in arranging this material into a film differentiates their approach to filmmaking. After Konchalovskii asserted his ideal conception of his second film in the January 1967 issue of *Isskustvo kino*, a very similar scenario was incorporated into Tarkovskii's broader argument about cinema's particular ability to depict time in his famous essay "Imprinted Time", which went into print in April 1967 as part of the annual collection of essays *Voprosy kinoiskusstva (Problems of Film Art)*. Tarkovskii described his ideal film project in terms of a director taking "millions of meters of film, on which systematically, second by second, day by day and year by year, a man's life, for instance, from birth to death, is followed and recorded, and out of all that come two and a half thousand meters, or an hour and a half of screen time."<sup>31</sup> Following this fantastic image, Tarkovskii stresses that cinema's distinctiveness as an art lies in determining how to connect the segments of sequential fact, "knowing, seeing and hearing precisely what lies between them and what kind of chain holds them together."<sup>32</sup> In this regard

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<sup>29</sup> Andrei Shemiakin, "Konchalovskii and Tarkovskii: vmeste i vroz", in *Kinematograf ottepeli: kniga vtoraiia*, Ed. V. Troianovskii (Moskva: Materik, 2002), p. 228-300.

<sup>30</sup> Konchalovskii, *Vozvyshaiushchii obman*, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Tarkovskii, Andrei, "Zapechatlennoe vremia", *Voprosy kinoiskusstva*, Vol. 10, 1967, p. 84.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

the sequential arrangement of images for Tarkovskii needed to emphasize temporal pressure through “a kind of discontinuous sequence of events”.<sup>33</sup>

The composition of Konchalovskii’s films, on the other hand, gives special importance to a double occupancy of space, as both real location and constructed space. Through this doubling, *The First Teacher* and *Asia Kliachina* produce and, at the same time, investigate the conditions experienced by the occupants of these spaces. Discussing *The First Teacher*, Konchalovskii stated, “I think the most enticing challenge for a director is to create a special world in which characters behave not only in accordance to the logic of life, but in accordance to the logic of the specific world created by a specific artist.”<sup>34</sup> He asserted the need to construct the world of *Asia Kliachina* as one of the obstacles, which prevented him from actualizing his initial, ideal conception for making the film wholly in the observational mode. The presence of material reality in the imaginary setting and of the locations is exemplified by the choice of location for the setting of *Asia Kliachina*. The village of Bezdnoe was an interesting choice for a film aspiring to capture a look of minimal apparent interference with the pro-filmic material. The local coverage of the film’s production, which proudly cites the selection of the village of Bezdnoe as the film’s setting and production location also reveals the history of film production in that location. In the previous decades various productions had been filmed in Bezdnoe and the surrounding area, including *Champion of the World* (*Chempion mira*, Vladimir Gonchukov, Gorky Film Studio, 1954), *Vania* (Anatolii Dudorov & Arkadii Shul’man, Sverdlovsk Film Studio, 1958), *Foma Gordeev* (Mark Donskoi, Gorky Film Studio, 1958), *Secretary of the Regional Committee* (*Sekretar’ obkoma*, Vladimir

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<sup>33</sup> Bird, Robert, *Andrei Tarkovsy: Elements of Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), p. 198.

<sup>34</sup> Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii, “Nekotorye soobrazheniia po postanovke ‘Pervogo uchitelia’”, p. 38.

Chebotarev, Mosfilm, 1963), *Once there was an Old Man and an Old Woman* (*Zhili-byli starik so starukhoi*, Grigorii Chukhrai, Mosfilm, 1964).<sup>35</sup>

The history of filmmaking in Bezvodnoe is telling of the growing Post-Stalinist move in Soviet cinema to utilize real world location for settings of films. *Asia Kliachina* belongs to this trend, but it also stakes a particular symbolic claim to the historical reality of the village through three lengthy shots featuring slow panning movements over the landscape. These 180° to 270° pans survey the village and its surrounding environs from a hill overlooking Bezvodnoe and the Volga river. The first functions as a transition from a communal meal in celebration of the harvest to a scene set inside the village restaurant. The second is inserted into a scene of recounting, while the final lengthy pan shot follows a short funeral scene. The latter two are nearly identical shots aside from the fact that the earlier one was filmed during the winter while the later one suggests spring. The sequencing of these shots dramatizes the physical space they display. While the first long pan evokes an idyllic connection of the people to the land, the wintery landscape of the second one provides a visual metaphor for the harsh conditions being recounting by a character describing his time in a labor camp and his journey home. Following this line of association, the final long pan returns to the tranquil connection of man to nature as it follows a close up the deceased, former prisoner's casket being covered by dirt. Along with their symbolic weight, the protracted length of these shots, lasting 43 and 58 seconds respectively, focuses attention on the landscape, asserting its materiality and continuity. As they slowly pan over Bezvodnoe, the river Volga, and the surrounding hillocks, these shots anchor the imaginary space of *Asia Kliachina* in the physical world. Together with the depictions of work and life on the

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<sup>35</sup> Bobin, O. "Uvideno v zhizni", *Leninskaia smena*, November 1, 1966, 4.

collective farm, these shots build up a spatial experience of Bezzvodnoe, defined through the doubling of material reality in imaginary space.

Konchalovskii's and Tarkovskii's divergent notions about how to ideally chronicle reality characterize a broader trend of *dokumental'nost'* becoming a prominent mode of filmmaking in Soviet cinema. According to Evgenii Margolit, select filmmakers in the 1960s "were discovering for themselves in documentary films a source of innovative artistic strategies, which would completely revive the language of cinematography in general."<sup>36</sup> The discourse regarding *dokumental'nost'* featured attempts to discern the formal, visual, and narrative strategies of the new documentary style, considerations of what separates documentary from fictional films, and analyses of attempts to combine the different modes of filmmaking. Thaw-era film critics distinguished between documentary and fiction films in terms of the perceiving subject and objects of perception, the former suggesting objectivity, evidence, dispassion, and fact, while the latter implies subjectivity, emotion, and individual voices.<sup>37</sup> According to this dichotomy, documentary filmmaking "attends to the analytical observation of reality", while fiction film "readily deals with openly subjective representations".<sup>38</sup> Negotiating this fundamental difference, definitions of *dokumental'nost'* delineated varying degrees of incorporating documentary strategies in the production of fiction films.

An initial form of borrowing consisted of adapting equipment initially developed for documentary filmmaking. The primary example of this borrowing was Sergei Urusevskii's use of the Konvas-Avtomat hand-held camera as well as Iurii Ekel'chik's use of the wide-angle 18mm

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<sup>36</sup> Evgenii Margolit, "Kinematograf otpepli: epokha vizual'nogo kino", in *Zhivye i mertvoe: zametki k istorii sovetskogo kino 1920-1960-kh godov* (Sankt-Peterburg: Masterskaia "Seans", 2012), p. 445.

<sup>37</sup> Woll, Josephine, *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000), p. 192.

<sup>38</sup> Varshavskii, Iakov, "Dokumental'noe i igrovoe", *Voprosy kino iskusstva*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1967), 157.

and 22 mm lenses on the production of *The First Echelon* (*Pervyi eshelon*, Mikhail Kalatozov, 1955). According to Roman Il'in, Urusevskii's and Ekel'chik's borrowings produced shots, which "resembled in their substance, materiality, and texture those [views] we know well from life, with a greater amount of specificity and detail".<sup>39</sup> Yet, the paradox in this usage was quite apparent. Iakov Varshavskii wrote: "Reportage, that is, documentary, that is, the most objective manner of filming, was aiding the expression of a subjective, authorial, and creative principle in fiction films".<sup>40</sup> Explicating the elements and functions of *dokumental'nost'* thus had to address how technological improvements were utilized to give meaning or significance to the reality represents in Soviet cinema.

A different type of appropriation, the incorporation of documentary sequences within fiction films, which included found-footage newsreel sequences and ones filmed with a hidden camera, produced another duality. Examples of this usage is found in Mikhail Kalik's *So Long, Boys* (*Do svidaniia, mal'chiki*, 1964) and Mikhail Shveitser's *Time, Forward!* (*Vremia, vpered!*, 1965). Aleksandr Macheret pointed out that such sequences enacted a tension between the representation of individual subjects and the move to generalize this individuality to represent moral or cultural values of a historical moment.<sup>41</sup> Mikhail Romm's *Ordinary Fascism* (*Obyknoennyi fashizm*, 1965), which was assembled from a vast trove of Nazi documentary footage as well as contemporary footage of Moscow children and students, represented an apogee of this appropriation. Although generally called a documentary film, *Ordinary Fascism* was described as

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<sup>39</sup> Il'in, Roman, "Nekotorye problem izobrazitel'nogo resheniia sovremennogo fil'ma", in *O kinoiskusstve: spetsifika, obraznost', masterstvo* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), 235.

<sup>40</sup> Varshavskii, "Dokumental'noe i igrovoe", 153.

<sup>41</sup> Macheret, Aleksandr, *Real'nost' mira na ekrane* (Moskva: Iskusstvo, 1968): 52.

“destroying the wall between feature and documentary film, and enriching the latter with artistic passion, brave new ideas, and emotional color.”<sup>42</sup>

The imitation of documentary visual strategies to film staged or rehearsed events did for Soviet feature films what *Ordinary Fascism* did for documentary cinema. Addressing this form of appropriation, critics and filmmakers delineated selections of formal elements, including “capricious and even illogical editing, very mobile and at first a seemingly senselessly wandering camera, careless pans and camera movement in general, and especially careless composition of the shot, far removed from any conventions of painting.”<sup>43</sup> Although some participants of the discourse on *dokumental’nost’*, like Sergei Iutkevich, did not delve past the surface realism of these elements, in the process promoting verisimilitude as the essential quality of the new ‘documentary style’, others like Mikhail Romm emphasized the ultimate benefit of these new methods. Romm wrote that the purpose of these borrowings was “an attempt to return to film its original *dokumental’nost’*, to restore the viewer’s belief that a shot is before all else a material fact recorded on film, an authentic event, not an imagined patch of a tailored whole.”<sup>44</sup> The goal of restoring this faith was to address the social conditions and individual experiences of people in the 1960s. In this regard, the reproduction of documentary aesthetics in fiction films mobilized visual poetics of documentary filmmaking into means for producing a particular reading or interpretation of reality.

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<sup>42</sup> Baskakov, V. “Khoroshaia rabota”, in *Ekran 1967-1968* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968), 74.

<sup>43</sup> This abbreviated list comes from Mikhail Romm’s article, “Dokumentalizm khudozhestvennogo fil’ma”, *Sovetskii fil’m*, 20 May, 1965, p. 1. Similar enumerations are also found in Iutkevich, Sergei, “O dokumental’nosti kino teledeniia” in *Kinematograf segodnia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1970), 59-78 and in Macheret, Aleksandr, *Real’nost’ mira na ekrane*, 5-82.

<sup>44</sup> Romm, Mikhail. “Dokumenalizm khudozhestvennogo fil’ma”, *Sovetskii fil’m*, 20 May, 1965, p. 1-2

### **III. *The Story of Asia Kliachina, Who Loved but Did Not Marry***

In the tradition of Russian folk tales, the full title of *Asia Kliachina* maps out the film's plot. The titular character Asia (Iia Savina) finds herself pursued by Chirkunov (Gennadii Egorychev), a man she does not love, while hoping that Stepan (Aleksandr Surin), the father of her unborn child who doesn't show her affection, will come about and care for her and their baby. At the beginning of the film Chirkunov arrives at the collective farm where Asia works as the cook hoping to convince her to marry him. Although she refuses his courting, Chirkunov continues to make advances throughout the film. In the end, after giving birth, Asia defiantly rejects both men. This melodramatic love triangle is set on a kolkhoz farm during the time of the harvest and the film ends as the collective departs to their village for the winter. While this main romantic plotline loosely structures the film, *Asia Kliachina* is peopled by a cast of male and female characters, who don't simply fill out the background or provide color, but assume almost as much narrative and visual importance as the central, romantically involved characters. Nearly every role in the film, except for Asia, Stepan and that of Mariia, played by Liubov' Sokolova, were played by non-professional actors from the Gor'kii region where the film was shot.

From its inception to the ultimate prohibition of *Asia Kliachina*, the film's referential veracity was analyzed and discussed in terms of roughness and severity. The basis of Konchalovskii's second film is a script titled "The Year of the Quiet Sun" (God spokojnogo solntsa), which Yuri Klepikov originally wrote as his thesis for the Higher Courses for Script Writers (Vysshie stsenarnye kursy). At the school, Klepikov's script was sternly rebuked. The institute's director, Mikhail Borisovich Makliarskii, denigrated the work, calling the script shit [*govno*] and demanding that Klepikov write another script, one "without all this dirt" [*bez vsei*

etoi griazi].<sup>45</sup> Following the counsel of their mutual friend—film critic Manana Andronikova—Klepikov sought out Konchalovskii and gave him the “The Year of the Quiet Sun” script. The director expressed interest in the project, but it would have to wait for him to complete *The First Teacher*.

As Konchalovskii worked on his debut feature film, Klepikov’s script entered the state system of Soviet cinema. Goskino’s Script-Editorial Board and the leadership of Mosfilm’s Third Production Unit reviewed it on February 5, 1965, where several participants criticized the script’s style, Mikhail Skripitsyn asserting that the language of the script contained coarseness [*sherokhovatost’*] and roughness [*grubost’*].<sup>46</sup> Despite such complaints, the heads of the Third Production Unit, M. Romm, V. Ageev, and N. Glagoleva, approved Klepikov’s text and the development of a director’s script was sanctioned at the very end of 1965, which coincided with Konchalovskii’s return to Moscow from Kyrgyzstan. After the director’s script was approved in February 1966, the film’s length was set at the standard 2700 meters and the crew was given four months to prepare for production. During this time Konchalovskii and his assistants sought out nonprofessional actors, auditioning over 2000 people. The village of Bezdnoe, in Russia’s central Gor’kii region, was chosen as the location for the production. Filming began in June 1966, with 114 calendar days being allotted for on-location shooting. The production ended up spending 133 days filming in Bezdnoe partly due to problems in set preparation, for which the film’s original production manager M. Khavkin was replaced.<sup>47</sup> Another reason for the longer shooting period was the decision to film in Bezdnoe all of the interior shots originally planned

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<sup>45</sup> Klepikov, “Ne bylo by ‘schat’ia’...”, in Fomin, Valerii, *Polka*, Vol. 3, p 182.

<sup>46</sup> RGALI 2944.810, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> “Otchet: O komandirovke v g. Gor’kii v s’emochnuiu grupu ‘God spokojnogo solntsa’ (‘Istoriia Asikhromonozhki’) rezhisser A. Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii”. RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 24.

for the sound stage at Mosfilm. Following the completion of principal shooting, the film was edited in 41 days and submitted to Mosfilm on December 21, 1966 at the length of 2784 meters.

*Asia Kliachina* represented a conscious move on Konchalovskii's part beyond the more severe visual strategy of his debut film. Instead of the emphatic symmetry and gory shots of animal slaughter that punctured *The First Teacher*, the visual style of *Asia Kliachina* relied on the non-professional actors' performance of self before the camera and how these performances were enacted and framed as documentary. New sync-sound cameras allowed for the use of both professional and non-professional actors, making it possible to anchor the film's realism to specific bodies and voices. Early on the film garnered praises for having the look of a documentary film from filmmakers and industry bureaucrats. In its resolution regarding *Asia Kliachina*, the artistic council of Mosfilm's Third Production Unit asserted that the film produces a convincing authenticity. "The work of the cinematographer is so precise and clear that it produces the impression that everything was filmed with a hidden camera: each frame is perceived as a piece of reality imprinted by a documentarian."<sup>48</sup> However, rebukes of the film framed its representation of kolkhoz workers as anything but truthful. The film was disparaged for containing naturalistic, aesthetically unacceptable, and insulting images of kolkhoz farmers and villagers.<sup>49</sup> Making prominent real physical deformities and giving voice to Gulag survivors, *Asia Kliachina* raised the aesthetic and ideological stakes of what *dokumental'nost'* could reveal about individual experience and material conditions. The audiovisual strategies mobilized for the production of this film addressed viewers with images and sounds, which denoted the physical

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<sup>48</sup> "...rabota operatora nastol'ko tochna i chista, chto proizvodit vpechatlenie, budto vse sniato skrytoi kameroi: kazhdyi kadr vosprinimaetsia kak kusok zhivoi, zapechatlennoi dokumentalistom, deistvitel'nosti." RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> From Vladimir Baskakov's letter to V. N. Surin, General Director of Mosfilm, dated August 18, 1967. At the time Baskakov was a Deputy Chair of Goskino. RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 45.

conditions and personal experiences of contemporary kolkhoz farmers. As opposed to *The First Teacher*, the audio-visual strategy of *Asia Kliachina* was not predicated on shocking the viewers into experiencing the severity of these conditions and experiences. Instead, Konchalovskii's second film addresses viewers through the representation of contemporary rural life based on the specificity of authentic bodies and voices. Roughness and severity were to be defined through real people and real locations, yet, at the same time, as much as Konchalovskii wanted to represent "the authentic life" of the rural village where the film was made, the film's brand of realism is beholden to conventions of cinematography, editing, and post-production sound synchronization.

From the time *Asia Kliachina* was first presented for official review until it was finally banned, official responses to the project underwent a drastic transformation from the initial positive response of Goskino's Script-Editorial Board. Initially, an official resolution [akt] issued by Goskino and affirmed by its assistant director Vladimir Baskakov on December 30, 1966, identified a "series editing deficiencies" [riad netochnostei montazha] in several scenes, including that of the harvest, funeral, and Asia giving birth. Once these were fixed, the document stipulated, the film could be released under the first category, meaning it could be distributed domestically and abroad. On February 14, 1967, deputy head of Mosfilm, R. Semenov, informed Baskakov, that the edits, which Goskino had recommended, had been implemented, requesting of him to instruct the Department for Production and Exhibition [Upravlenie kinofikatsii i kinoprokata] to accept the revised version of the film with the length of 2693 meters. This would be the closest that *Asia Kliachina* would come to being released.

Soon after the initial revisions were complete, Goskino requested additional edits to *Asia Kliachina*, likely in response to the negative reception of the film in the Gor'kii region following its

first public screenings there. In the middle of February 1967, several members of the crew, including Konchalovskii and the lead actress Iia Savvina, brought what they likely believed was the final version of the film to the Gor'kii region for screenings and discussions with locals. On the one hand, members of the local intelligentsia, such as teachers and local artists, positively received the film, praising its inclusion of local people and the local dialect. On the other hand, a vocal majority rebuked *Asia Kliachina*, decrying its representation of dirty villagers and the presence of so many invalids and people with physical disabilities. This segment of the public compared Konchalovskii's film unfavorably to Ivan Pyr'ev's *Cossacks of the Kuban* (*Kubanskiie kazaki*, 1949) where, they claimed, the life of villagers and kolkhoz farmers was represented wonderfully.<sup>50</sup> Further criticism was leveled at the Dom kino screening and discussion of *Asia Kliachina*. Actor Sergei Stoliarov decried the depiction of Soviet people in the film as weak and primitive, bemoaning that because of this film no one would believe that this nation won a great war.<sup>51</sup> Later that year, in a letter to Vladimir Surin dated August 18, Baskakov enumerated a new list of required changes to the film, aiming to rid *Asia Kliachina* of "shots that showed vividly dirty and slovenly people" [kadrov demonstriruiushchikh osobenno vypuklo griaznykh, neriashlivykh liudei].<sup>52</sup>

After a new version of the film was submitted on November 14, 1967, with edits that reflected Baskakov's recommendations, a change in the focus of the criticism becomes apparent. Initially, objections focused on the depiction of people and their bodies, from the inclusion of people with physical handicaps to objections about their cleanliness. As the criticism continued, its emphasis shifted to the film's general ideological stance. On a handwritten note dated

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<sup>50</sup> Zorkaia, Neia. "Ne stoit selo bez pravednitsy", *Iskusstvo kino*, No. 1, January 1989, p. 65.

<sup>51</sup> RGALI 2936.4.521, p. 7-10.

<sup>52</sup> RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 45.

December 7, 1967, A. Romanov, a member of the Soviet Council of Ministers, asserts that the new alterations have not altered the conception of the film. In early 1968, Konchalovskii proposed a new set of changes, which A. Romanov agreed to review once they were made. On June 24, 1968 Mosfil'm submitted a new version of the film, now 2425 meters long, markedly shorter than the original 2784-meters print submitted on December 21, 1966. The removal of more than 12% of the original version was not enough to ensure the film's release. A confidential letter, dated August 28 1968, from Assistant to the chairman of the State Security Committee, Semen Kuzmich Tsvigun, reported that the *kinematografisty*, (likely referring to the heads of Goskino) did not believe that the new changes beneficially changed the ideological conception of the film, whose release might be politically damaging.<sup>53</sup> On October 7, 1968 the film was officially shelved by the order of the Department of Culture of the Central Committee.<sup>54</sup>

Before the Russian film historian Valerii Fomin outlined how *Asia Kliachina* came to be banned in his book *Polka* (Volumes 1 and 3), Konchalovskii asserted that a personal grudge led to his film being shelved.<sup>55</sup> After making the initial cuts to the film in early 1967, Konchalovskii took the revised version to Gor'kii region a second time, screening it in the regional center of Kotovo. At this time members of the regional committee also viewed the film. The print was reportedly directly taken from the projector in the Kotovo regional center during one of the screening and brought to the building of the regional committee. Konchalovskii and his father were present at the screening for local officials. The head of the committee, Konstantin Fedorovich Katushev, was also in attendance and soon after, this regional official was promoted to the Central Committee due to his acquaintance with the Slovak official Aleksandr Dubcek, who at the time

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<sup>53</sup> RGANI Fond 5, opis 6, delo 66, p. 258.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Konchalovskii. *Vozvyshaiushchii obman*, p. 47-48.

was attempting to reform the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. According to Konchalovskii, when Katushev was made a secretary to the Party's central committee and was sent to restrict the Prague Spring he exercised his newfound power to keep *Asia Kliachina* from being released.

The initial positive reception of *Asia Kliachina* promoted the film's documentary qualities. In response to the version of the film submitted on December 21, 1966, the artistic council of the Third Production Unit praised its documentary style. "The documentary truth of the texture [faktura], objects, and natural lighting has been organized to convince and it does convince of the authenticity of what occurs [proiskhodiashchego]."56 The film's referential veracity was also commended in Goskino's Script-Editorial Board's resolution about *Asia Kliachina*. In the Board's initial resolution regarding the film, V. Sytin, a deputy chief editor on the board, and E. Osherova, one of the board's senior editors, praised the coordination of various elements in the film's claim to realism. "The psychological correctness of the director's work with the performers, the simplicity and expressivity of the camera style, the exactness and polyphony of the synchronous audio-track create this film's atmosphere of authenticity and poetic coloring."<sup>57</sup> Sytin and Osherova ground *Asia Kliachina*'s documentary veracity in specific elements of the film, namely the performance of the actors, the work of the director and cinematographer, and the use of synch-sound.

The film's visual strategy was based on to Konchalovskii's decisions regarding casting and sound style. Reading Yuri Klepikov's script, Konchalovskii was concerned that its characters

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<sup>56</sup> "Zakliuchenie po fil'mu 'Istoriia Asi Kliachinnoi, kotoraiia liubila da ne vyshla zamuzh'". RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 34.

<sup>57</sup> "Psikhologicheskaiia tochnost' raboty rezhissera s ispolniteliiami, prostota i vyrazitel'nost' oratorskoi manery, tochnost' i mnogo-zvuchnost' sinkhronnoi fonogrammy sozdaiut atmosferu dostovernosti, poeticheskii kolorit etoi kartin, rasskazyvaiushchei o zhizni sovremennoi derevni." "Zakliuchenie stsenarno-redaktsionnoi kollegi po fil'mu 'Istoriia Asi Kliachinnoi, kotoraiia liubila da ne vyshla zamuzh'". RGALI 2944.4.810, p. 37.

were defined with specific actors in mind who had previously acted in films about kolkhoz farms. Wanting to avoid stock kolkhoz characters, Konchalovskii settled on using a combination of non-professional and professional actors. Two and sometimes even three cameras were used during the production in order to alleviate pressure on his non-professional actors by displacing their focus from a single recording apparatus. Konchalovskii believed that all actors, professional or not, play to the camera, angling to face it where ever it is placed, looking to establish a direct relationship with the film apparatus instead of maintaining all relationships inside the scene with fellow actors. “Placing two cameras at crosses [*na prostrel*] leaves the actor not knowing whose footage will be in the film. He stops thinking about them. And when there are three cameras on the set (the more the merrier), the actor becomes even freer... The fourth wall Stanislavskii dreamed about emerges.”<sup>58</sup> Konchalovskii did not want his actors to perform for the cameras or the imagined viewers, but to preserve the separation and maintain the illusion of reality. Sometime he would prominently position a dummy camera, stationing a gaffer there to look through the viewfinder, in order to distract his actors and “neutralize the hypnosis of the main camera”<sup>59</sup>.

In contrast to *The First Teacher*, during the production of *Asia Kliachina* multiple cameras allowed for expanded coverage of scenes, which made it possible for Konchalovskii and his cameramen to film certain episodes whole as opposed to separate takes. For instance, the celebration scene at the end of the film combines footage from three different cameras working simultaneously. In this crowd scene, the workers of Asia’s kolkhoz and those from the

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<sup>58</sup> “Esli zhe postavit’ dve kamery na prostrel stseny, akter ne znaet, material kakoi iz nikh voidet v kartinu. On voobshche perestaet o nikh dumat’. A kogda na ploshchadke tri kamery (chem bol’she, tem luchshe), akter stanovitsia eshche svobodnee.” Konchalovskii, Andrei, *Parabola zamysla* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1977), p. 126.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

neighboring collective farm come together to celebrate the departure of their young men to the army. Over 200 locals were gathered to participate in this scene. Dressed as a kolkhoz worker and moving through the crowd of people, one cameraman filmed with a hand-held camera. A second camera was placed on an elevated crane overlooking the crowd, while a third one was hidden behind a truck with a tarpaulin.<sup>60</sup> Edited together into 35 shots, the scene includes wide-angle, hand-held shots with medium framing, such as that of a group of women tossing the diminutive kolkhoz foreman in the air. Along with this, eye-level, medium shots emphasize the bodies and faces of those dancing in the foreground, before the crowd that fills out the background. Lastly, over-the-head, high angle crane shots focus attention on the principal characters standing in the crowd watching the dancers and musicians. This varied coverage of the scene would have been near impossible with only one camera.

Filming *Asia Kliachina*, Konchalovskii mainly utilized two of the same model cameras—the new Soviet sync-sound camera “Era”, which made it possible to record the non-professional actors’ regional inflection of Russian simultaneously with their enactment of themselves. Emphasizing the film’s reliance on actual people, their *byt*, and its atmosphere, Mosfilm’s general director, Vladimir Surin, and the artistic director of the Third Production Unit, Mikhail Romm, petitioned Goskino’s deputy director, Vladimir Baskakov for the use of the two Era cameras. Konchalovskii lamented not having been able to produce the kind of audiovisual impression of reality the Era cameras promised during the production of *The First Teacher*, which had been dubbed in Russian using native Moscow-Russian voice-actors. His original conception had been for the film to be in Kyrgyz. “The images would sound much more truthful and authentic accompanied by the temperamental and staccato Kyrgyz speech with subtitles or, let’s say, the

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<sup>60</sup> Konchalovskii. *Vozvyshaiushchii obman*, 39.

translation of a voiceover narrator.”<sup>61</sup> After the production, however, he was left without rough-cut [chernovye fonogrammy] of the audio track since the actors spoke interchangeably in Russian and Kyrgyz. Fearing that some semantic inflections from the script would be lost on viewers if the film was dubbed in Kyrgyz, Konchalovskii decided on Russian. Afterward he regretted not at least having Kyrgyz speakers dub the film in Russian, so that their accents would have preserved some of the color, intonational richness and originality of the Turkic language. Discussing this issue in *Iskusstvo kino*, he calls the decision to dub the film in Russian a mistake, proclaiming that it was about time film crews were equipped with portable, noiseless sound recording equipment, which could record the authentic breath and intonation of actors in each step and movement.

Access to the new sync-sound camera “Era”, model 1KOS, allowed Konchalovskii to make a film whose referential veracity could be defined by the presence of authentic bodies and voices. This was the first Soviet-made camera capable of recording sound optically onto the negative film strip, though the technology had emerged in Hollywood in the 1920s. Because of the low quality of the audio recording the camera was initially intended for newsreel and documentary filmmaking only.<sup>62</sup> As for feature filmmaking, it was suggested that Era’s optically recording audio be used as a rough cut and reference for the production of the master track.<sup>63</sup> Although parts of *Asia Kliachina* had to be re-recorded at the urging of Mosfilm’s technical committee, the film retained significant portions of the synchronously recorded audio track.

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<sup>61</sup> “...gorazdo pravdivee i dostovernee budut zvuchat' eti kadry, soprovozhdaemye kirgizskoi temperamentnoi i otrivistoi rech'iu s subtitrami, skazhem, ili s perevodom.” Konchalovskii, “Nekotorye soobrazheniia”, 42.

<sup>62</sup> Ershov, K. G., *Kinos’emochnaia tekhnika* (Leningrad: Mashinostroenie, 1988), p. 221.

<sup>63</sup> Gordiichuk, I. B., “Kinos’emochnyi apparat ‘Era’ (model’ 1KOC)”, *Tekhnika kino i televideniia*, No. 9, 1964, p. 28.

The use of optically recorded sync-sound is evident at points in the film when several characters recount their life experiences. Near the beginning of the film, Prokhor (Ivan Petrov), a driver on the farm, tells Chirkunov about how he was wounded in the war and about his time in a military hospital where he met his future wife. After two establishing shots locate them in a field, the rest of the sequence, which lasts approximately 7 minutes 7 seconds and contains 13 shots, shows the men sitting next to a combine harvester. The sonic boom of jet engines heard during the sequence signals that the image and audio were synchronously filmed and recorded. Prokhor's lines in this scene combine what Klepikov's had written with descriptions of how and where Ivan Petrov suffered the wound that mangled his hand. Konchalovskii worked with the non-professional actor Petrov for over a week to adjust what Klepikov had written to the oral and communicative habits of the non-professional actor. Along with his verbal performance, the traces of war on Petrov's body furthermore grounds his character in a physical, embodied sense of reality.



Figure 4.8: Prokhor from *Asia Kliachina*.



Figure 4-9: The kolkhoz foreman from *Asia Kliachina*.



Figure 4-10: Ded Fedor from *Asia Kliachina*.

In a scene set in the kolkhoz dining hall, which comes at the end of the fourth reel of the film, the diminutive and kyphotic kolkhoz foreman (Nazar Nazarov) and the elderly Ded Fedor (Fedor Rodionych) deliver similar personal accounts. Together with Prokhorov's earlier scene, these later personal accounts interrupt the dominant observational mode of *Asia Kliachina* and instead establish an interactive, dialogic relationship. After two crowd scenes establish a vibrant sense of life on the kolkhoz farm, showing the sorting of harvested wheat and the kolkhoz community sitting down to a meal together, the film cuts to the local dining hall, where the

foreman, Chirkunov, and Ded Fedor are seated around a table, eating and drinking. First the foreman relates to the other men how during the war he met a woman and how they came to love each other. Though not stated explicitly, the use of the past tense and the foreman's longing gaze at the portrait he holds in his hands suggests the woman died in the war. Afterward, Ded Fedor recounts how he made his way home after spending eight years in the Gulag. These unashamed confessions narrate individual accounts of personal hardship and bodily experiences of roughness and severity. Following the opening title card that established the non-professional qualification of all but three of actors in the film, these retellings of personal experience foreground the personal identities of the speakers, their particular bodies and faces. As mundane scenes of dialogue, these moments in the film circumvent mediation through reenactment. They mediate instead an intimate encounter with characters, whose identity is anchored in the bodies, faces, and emotions of the men that play Prokhorov, the foreman, and Ded Fedor. Filmed using the sync-sound camera "Era" camera, these scenes double as interviews, making public and drawing attention to the particular bodies of Ivan Petrov, Nazar Nazarov and Fedor Rodionych. These men are presented not as historical types or stereotypical representations of kolkhoz characters. Recounting their individual biographies before the camera they redeem specific individual roles in society.

#### **IV. Conventions and Limits of *Dokumental'nost'***

Given Konchalovskii's referential aspirations for *Asia Kliachina*, which promoted diminished control over pro-filmic material during on-set production, the deliberate quality of his documentary style becomes fully apparent when the initial conceptual plans for the film and the filming strategies utilized during the production are related to the final composition of the

film. Along with the use of non-professional actors and multiple sync-sound cameras, *Asia Kliachina* relied on conventions of editing, framing, and post-production sound recording to overcome technical and stylistic limits in its claim to *dokumental'nost'*. Framing, camera movement, and editing combine to dictate the viewer's access to information throughout the film. For example, near the beginning of the film, these elements delimit the knowledge of Asia's pregnancy until the introduction of this information produces a comedic effect.

Throughout the sequence in which Chirkunov makes Asia aware of his affection for her, composition and shot scale do not permit the viewer to get a full view of Asia. While medium-close ups and close-ups formally truncate her body, long shots include obstructions that hide Asia's stomach. Along with this, slight tilts, push-ins, and overall positioning of Asia in the mise en scene withholds information from the viewer for the sake of narrative impact, using formal tricks to avoid flattening out the form. The revelation is maximally exploited. First in shot no. 16, the camera pans at medium scale to follow Asia as she walks by Chirkunov, who, while looking down and peeling onions, states that he wants to marry her even though she is lame, and that he loves her as she is. In this shot Asia winds up facing the camera, still at medium scale, and gives a knowing smile, essentially an acknowledgment of the visual game the film is playing. The film cuts on this line referring to her condition to a long shot, shot no. 17, of Asia and Chirkunov facing each other as he realizes her state and she bursts out laughing. In this manner, specifically with Asia's knowing, direct glance into the camera, this film exemplifies Evgenii Margolit's claim that *dokumental'nost'* in Soviet fiction films of the 1960s "abandoned the masking of artifice and confronted such earlier tendencies with overt, unmasked conventions, which were not intend be

passed off as reality.”<sup>64</sup> Instead, conventions of representation and narrative constituted a part of reality, described by Margolit as its “experimental space”.<sup>65</sup>

Conventions of film sound were also mobilized to guide the viewer’s perception of *Asia Kliachina*. In terms of the authentic voices Konchalovskii wanted to preserve in the film, the low quality of the Era audio recordings proved to be problematic for the comprehensibility of the film’s audio track. This was particularly important in relation to the confessional episodes. Technicians at Mosfilm noted that the audio quality especially for parts Ded Fedor’s monologue was particularly poor and contained many unintelligible lines, which needed to be re-recorded.<sup>66</sup> Sound was thus added to parts of the film after the fact, disturbing the authentic reality claim of synchronous sound and image filming. Even though this particular convention is not laid bare, pace Margolit’s claim, the addition of post-production sound ensured that Rodionychev’s experience would be comprehensible.

Along with post-production sound recording, the editing of these scenes into a shot-counter shot formula, through the movement of the camera within the frame or through the montage of shots, reveals the reproduction of classical conventions. Prokhor’s narration of his war experience is composed of shots that frame him as one speaker and Chirkunov as his interlocutor. In the first medium shot of the sequence, the camera pans and centers on whichever character is speaking. For the most part this is Prokhor, but when Chirkunov asks a question the camera moves to center on him, leaving the war veteran out of frame. After the sonic boom of

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<sup>64</sup> “Otritsaia uslovnost' zakrytuiu, novaia estetika protivopostavliaet ei otkrytuiu, zamaskirovannuiu uslovnost', kotoraiia i ne namerevaetsia vydavat' sebia za okruzhaiushchuiu real'nost'”. Margolit, “Kinematograf ottepeli: epokha vizual'nogo kino”, p. 446.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> It still remains an open question whether Fedor Rodionychev was brought to Moscow to re-record the lines in question or whether voice-double was used. “Zakliuchenie o tekhnicheskom kachestve fil'ma”, RGALI 2944.4.811, p. 41.

the jet engines is heard, which likely caused Konchalovskii to cut for the sake of audibility, the film shifts to cutting between Prokhorov speaking and Chirkunov listening. This pattern of editing, within the frame and in the combining of shots, holds to the conventions of shot-counter shot technique. The later scenes of recounting featuring the kyphotic kolkhoz foreman and Ded Fedor are equally edited according to shot-counter shot technique. Moreover, the Ded Fedor segment was culled from over two thousand meters of film Konchalovskii shot in conversation with Fedor Rodionych, which clearly implies the selection of material according to its emotional appeal.

## **V. Conclusion**

Bearing in mind the presence and function of these filmmaking conventions and formal tricks, the documentary style of *Asia Kliachina* appears as something more than a relative claim to greater realism, whose logic would be based on the denigration of old forms through the assertion of new artistic codes that claim a more accurate rendition of reality. Writing about the production of *Asia Kliachina* in *Sovetskii ekran* (No. 19, 1966), the magazine's special correspondent M. Zinov'ev addressed the film's documentary style and its relation to material reality. As he notes how the film's production artist Mikhail Romadin managed to make the collective's field camp look very natural, Zinov'ev takes up the paradox of the great difficulty required to represent something so seemingly simple as ordinary life. Rejecting the notion that *Asia Kliachina* is meant to produce complete verisimilitude, M. Zinov'ev defined Konchalovskii's project not as a naturalist one, which would seek to efface the authorial hand, but as one mediating social conditions and individual experiences through the intervention of the artist. "It's not possible to get away from the frame of the screen, from the conventional brevity of time, in general from all of the things

that constitute the difference between the world on the screen and the real world. Even if you could efface this difference, nobody needs that, the point is different, [the point] is the concentration of truth.”<sup>67</sup> Zinov’ev’s notion of *Asia Kliachina* as a “concentration of truth” indicates how this film addresses viewers through the representation of contemporary rural life based on the doubling of authentic bodies and voices. Roughness and severity were defined through real people and real locations, but these non-professional actors also enacted a self-construction, which asserted their experience as part of Soviet reality. Making prominent real physical deformities and giving voice to Gulag survivors, *Asia Kliachina* raised the aesthetic and ideological stakes of what *dokumental’nost’* could reveal about individual experience and material conditions. In its reliance on conventions of cinematography, editing, and post-production sound synchronization, this film demonstrates how that *dokumental’nost’* was constructed through deliberate selection of stylistic devices.

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<sup>67</sup> “Kak by tam ni bylo, a nikuda ne uiti ot uslovnosti ramki ekrana, ot uslovnoi szhatosti vremeni i voobshche vsego togo, chto sostavliaet raznitsu mezhdou mirom ekrannym i mirom real’nym. Da esli by dazhe bylo vozmozhno steret’ takuiu raznitsu, nikomu eto ne nuzhno ibo sut’ v drugom — kontsentratsii pravdy.” Zinov’ev, M. “Obyknovennaia istoriia”, p. 6

## CONCLUSION

Over the course of four years of research and writing, this dissertation project developed from an initial fascination with the art and craft of Soviet cinematography into a study of what defined and stimulated Soviet film experience and visual poetics of the 1950s and 1960s. This development transpired predominantly as I worked in Russian state and studio archives, studying the discussions of films from this period. Reading archival documents, I kept coming across not just different interpretations of film styles, but persistent associations between what films looked like and what responses they were expected to elicit from viewers. There were almost always competing formulations of this link between style and reception. Participants of studio discussions or post-screening deliberations organized by the Union of Soviet Filmmakers argued contentiously about the messages and images films should convey. Having previously studied the history of Russian and Soviet cinema, these debates were expected and I wanted to examine their dynamics in relation to the films under discussion. What struck me about these exchanges was the assurance with which participants asserted their claims regarding how Soviet viewers were going to respond to particular films. At first believing that examining these assured claims was going to require a project devoted to reception, which examined viewers' responses and reflections, I realized that the true object of analysis at the center of this project was the imagined film experience, to which everyone—filmmakers, managers, film critics, and Party bureaucrats—continually made reference to in written and spoken statements.

The conceptualization of the viewer's encounter with the film screen related to all aspects of Soviet cinema in the immediate post-Stalinist decades. Even if claims about film experience did not entirely determine the individual viewer's reception of a given film, ideas about

viewership pertained to the production of films, their exhibition, and reception. All of these aspects of Soviet cinema were in play since filmmakers developed visual strategies to produce effects and elicit responses from viewers. Artistic councils and script editorial boards would rarely approve scripts or finished film without demanding changes based on claims about viewer reception and propriety. Film reviewers also frequently judged films according to their cinematic appeals to viewers. With industry managers also claiming to know how Soviet viewers would perceive films, conceptions of spectatorship and film experience during the course of the Thaw vary drastically, from the early justification of searches for new expressive means to the stark definition of Soviet cinema's purpose as "the political enlightenment and aesthetic education of the people."<sup>1</sup> Since film experience was not only imagined discursively, but also greatly informed the work of filmmakers, to delineate the conceptualization of film experience during the Thaw required analyzing the visual strategies of films and correlating their cinematic appeals with the specific terms that were mobilized to describe and evaluate the stylistic choices of filmmakers.

Belonging to Soviet film history, the select films examined in this project as well as their contemporary evaluation during and after production prompt further questions regarding such topics as the history of film style within national and international traditions, the development of film as a technologically dependent form of art, as well as the production of films within a state-administered and state-financed industry. In this regard, Alov and Naumov's cinematographic techniques in *Wind* could be considered with regards to patterns of stylistic continuity and change in Soviet cinema specifically and as part of international film history more generally.<sup>2</sup> Kalatozov and Urusevskii's use of the Konvas-Avtomat handheld camera requires us to seriously question

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<sup>1</sup> The latter definition of the purpose of Soviet cinema was delivered by Aleksei Romanov, the chair of Goskino. See Aleksei Romanov, *Nravstvennyi ideal v sovetskom kinoiskusstve* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), p. 113.

<sup>2</sup> This suggestion is in keeping with David Bordwell's approach to the history of film style. See David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997).

how the use of technological devices in production of films is determined by cultural, practical, and representational contexts.<sup>3</sup> If we question what about a film can be considered sincere, Marlen Khutsiev's *Ilich's Gate* can be enlisted to think through how realism in cinema appeals to and relies upon sensory, emotional and cognitive responses.<sup>4</sup> Likewise within the territory of "documentary" realism in cinema, Konchalovskii's *Asia Kliachina* can help us distinguish how filmmaking produces new, fictive bodies, rather than simply recording or conveying the "real body" of the subjects. Through such doubling, non-professional actors playing themselves can participate in a process of affirmative self-construction, whereby they qualify what they reenact as the past, something left behind and apart from a redeemed, conscious presence.<sup>5</sup>

Discourse surrounding the production and reception of these films mobilized terms like participation, sincerity and documentary-ness to articulate affective and discursive frameworks, which defined films as sites where the relationship between individual and society could be redefined. In this regard, Alov and Naumov revised how viewers experienced the historical-revolutionary past by revitalizing the cinematic appeal of Soviet films with an expressive visual strategy. Kalatozov and Urusevskii utilized new camera technology to produce an intense experience of participation and intimacy that paralleled the logic behind the new cultural emphasis on the value of individual human life. The claimed absence of narrative and visual conventions in Khutsiev's *Ilich's Gate* and the assertions of sincerity in the film and as part of the

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<sup>3</sup> The appeal for this approach to film technology is articulated by Jim Lastra in *Sound Technology and the American Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> I'm here referring to Torben Grodal's reading of the processes and elements that cause viewers of audiovisual representation to have the sensation of realism. See Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture and Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), specifically the chapter "The Experience of Audiovisual Realism", pp. 250-270.

<sup>5</sup> This approach to realism is inspired by Ivone Margulies' reading of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Attempted Suicide*, his contribution to the omnibus film *Love in the City* (1953). See Ivone Margulies, "Exemplary Bodies: Reenactment in *Love in the City*, *Sons*, and *Close Up*" in *Rites of Realism*, Ivone Margulies, Ed. (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 217-244.

discourse surrounding it were associated to the true representation of one's beliefs and thoughts. These appeals to sincerity parallel the more general promotion of lyrical qualities in Soviet art and literature during the Thaw, which related self-reflection upon one's own emotions to authenticity and truthfulness. Lastly, Andrei Konchalovskii's pursuit of documentary aesthetics in *The Story of Asia Kliachina* suggests that the film's viewers would encounter and empathize with the representation of harsh life on a kolkhoz farm, whose minimal mediation would preserve the severity of the non-actor's lived experiences.

These frameworks emerged from a remade visual culture of Soviet Communism, which still “presupposed a realignment of aesthetic media as privileged materials sites of the negotiation—or the conflict—between society and its constituent members.”<sup>6</sup> As products of public discourse and modes of presentation from a specific historical period, concepts like participation, sincerity, and documentary-ness indicate how ideas about film experience developed in concert with contemporary concerns in Soviet society. In the wake of Stalin's reign and cult of personality, faith in the historical progress of the Soviet project was at a nadir. The humanist hue of these key terms indicates the character of Soviet cinema's response to Khrushchev's critique: cinema would redeem itself by communicating changes in aesthetic, ethical, and cultural values of the post-Stalinist Soviet society.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Bird et al., *Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary: Children's Books and Graphic Art*, exhibition catalogue (Chicago: The University of Chicago Library, 2011), p. 39.

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fond 1701 Pervyi uchitel'

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fond 2468 Tsentral'naia studiia detskikh i iunosheskikh fil'mov im. M. Gor'kogo  
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