

THE BFI COMPANION TO

EASTERN EUROPEAN AND RUSSIAN CINEMA



EDITED BY RICHARD TAYLOR · NANCY WOOD

JULIAN GRAFFY · DINA IORDANOVA

The BFI Companion to Eastern European and Russian Cinema

Edited by

Richard Taylor, Nancy Wood,
Julian Graffy and Dina Iordanova

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	iv
Contributors	v
General Introduction	vi
Introduction to Eastern European Cinema	1
Introduction to Russian Cinema	5
Entries	10
Bibliography	285

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DI

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This book aims to bring together under one volume the breadth and variety of East European and Russian cinema in a concise, accessible and informative form. Written entirely by specialists (see **Contributors**), it is meant equally for professionals – teachers, students – and for film enthusiasts. The desire to include a considerable amount of information in a manageable and affordable single volume dictated drastic choices. A general principle has been to increase coverage, including of recent material, with a large number of short entries. The entries contain key factual points about a person, institution or critical concept, as well as areas of interest and debate, in other words not just what a person or institution did and when, but why they are interesting, famous or controversial.

The *Companion* does not claim to be exhaustive or ‘impartial’; all entries express, to some extent, the opinion of their writers (who are identified by their initials – see under **Key to Contributors**). At the same time, it tries to be as inclusive and accurate as possible, given all the difficulties that such an enterprise presents. Extreme care has been taken to check all sources, in the hope of reducing errors to a minimum. All historical works have more or less hidden agendas and have to operate choices further to those dictated by constraints of space. Choices in the *Companion* have been made according to the following principles:

- the necessity to acknowledge the important figures and landmarks of East European and Russian Cinema, as sanctioned by reputable historians and by the expertise of the writers;
- the desire, at the same time, to redress the balance of established film history:
 - a) towards the cinema of ‘small’ countries,
 - b) towards popular traditions (the entertainment cinema, the despised, supposedly mediocre, genres, and the stars and directors of popular cinema often unknown outside their own countries),
 - c) towards ‘other voices’: women, gays and lesbians, post-colonial communities;
- as far as possible, the desire to provide a perspective from *within* the cinema itself.

There are four major types of entries:

1. Historical overviews of the cinemas of the former Czechoslovakia, the former Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania. Readers unfamiliar with these national cinemas are encouraged to read these first, before ‘browsing’ or looking up entries.

2. *Entries on personnel*: directors, actors, cinematographers, musicians, writers and others are classified under their surname or most common name. This is followed by their date and place of birth and, as the case may be, death, as well as their real name, if relevant. The first words of the entry briefly characterise the person. To save space, the country in which a person was born and/or died is indicated next to their birth/death place only if situated outside this person's country, e.g.:

WAJDA, Andrzej

Swalki 1926

Polish director . . .

but

VERTOV, Dziga

Denis A. Kaufman; Bialystok, Poland
[Russian Empire] 1896 – Moscow 1954

Soviet director and theorist . . .

As a rule, biographical details such as marriage and children are indicated only if considered relevant to the work or achievements of the person.

3. *Critical entries* on well-established genres or movements such as **Czech New Wave** or **Bulgarian 'poetic realism'**.

4. *Entries on institutions*, ranging from film schools (**FAMU**) and festivals to production companies, archives and other institutions.

Cross-referencing

- Within entries: an asterisk at the end of a name denotes a separate entry – for instance, 'shaped in the films directed by * . . .'.
- At the end of entries (or within the text) attention may be drawn to other related entries [**> CZECH NEW WAVE**].

Bibliography

- At the end of entries, a single short bibliographical reference may be indicated (under **Bib**) in an abbreviated form, to direct the reader to further reading.
- At the end of the *Companion*, a general bibliography contains full references to books on East European and Russian cinema. Preference has been given to works in English, though authoritative works in other languages are included.

INTRODUCTION TO EASTERN EUROPEAN CINEMA

It would be misleading to conceive of the cinemas of Eastern Europe in monolithic terms. The fact that they appear together in a volume like this is more indicative of the geo-political order they inhabited for more than four decades of this century, than of any innately common characteristics. And even here, there are exceptions: most notably in the case of former Yugoslavia where, since Tito's break with Stalin in 1948, the country claimed the status of a non-aligned socialist state pursuing its own political, economic and cultural agenda.

If the cinemas of Eastern Europe tended to be perceived by western audiences as emanating from a common stable of themes, aesthetics and genres, this is no doubt in part due to the post-Yalta political constraints which they shared and which, however differently applied by their respective regimes, nonetheless had as their common denominator the ultimate subordination of cinema to the authority of state institutions and dictates. Cinema was not a mere reflection of the primacy of politics over art and popular culture – the Czech New Wave of the 1960s, to take just one example, would not have been possible if this were so – but film industries and cultures did develop in intimate tandem with this implacable power relation.

In the 1990s, this relation of power was dismantled as the civil societies of Eastern Europe in their turn cast off the yoke of Soviet domination (the Cold-war line dividing Europe into two was abolished and the East European countries re-emerged on their own from the shadow of the Soviet Empire. The changing international balance meant that they had to reposition themselves within the wider context of a new Europe). But this reconfiguration of geo-politics did not automatically abolish the prevailing mental division of Europe: while a 'return to Europe' became a major priority of East European countries, such ambitions encountered a Western Europe still entrenched in attitudes which confirmed an enduring separation of 'the West from the Rest'. Moreover, at the very moment when a rapprochement of Eastern Europe with Europe proper finally seemed to be gaining ground, nationalist-inspired wars in 'The Balkans' drove a new wedge into the project of European reconstruction. If, by the beginning of the new millennium, the concept of Eastern Europe as a dreary, unpredictable outpost of the Soviet Empire had become obsolete, new divisions were nonetheless in place which severed the dynamically-developing states of Central Europe from the volatile and retrogressive condition of their Balkan counterparts.

While Central Eastern Europe came nearer Europe 'proper,' the shift in the Balkans seemed to move in the opposite direction, and from a dreary unpredictable outpost of the old Soviet Empire they gravitated toward a gloomy orientalist fringe of the new Europe. The discourse on what used to be Eastern Europe during Cold-war times was more and more often replaced with the juxtaposition of Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian legacies. By the beginning of the new Millennium, the concept of Eastern Europe as an entity had grown obsolete. Developments in the economic, social, and political

spheres, furthered the dissolution of what used to be called Eastern Europe into Central East European and Balkan parts.

How might we summarise the transformation undergone by cinema during this stormy decade of transition? The end of the communist period brought state interference in film-making to an end, but it also initially meant massive cuts and the withdrawal of centralised government funding. The shift to a market economy affected every level of the film industry from its basic infrastructure to its mode of financing and administration. The pattern of changes in the media economy and film industries was similar throughout all East European countries: a sharp decrease in state funding, empty studios looking to attract foreign film crews, the disappearance of domestic films from the circuits, armies of idle film professionals, and the redefinition of concepts like 'copyrights', 'entertainment', and 'audience'. Freedom of expression and the end of state censorship had finally been achieved, but an emerging new constraint – let's call it 'market censorship' – now seemed to pose the greatest threat to indigenous film cultures. As the national entries show, with state budgets for culture cut to the bone, and the rapid privatisation of many cultural institutions previously supported by state subsidies, film studios* foremost among these, film production was to undergo a drastic transformation.

The funding crisis led to shrinking production, particularly in features and animation. Financing for film production changed profoundly, moving from the unit-based studio system to producer-driven undertakings. State subsidies, competitive in some countries or automatic in others, became a hotly contested territory, underlining the historical irony that the state interventionist measures (once so despised) were in some cases the only hope of safeguarding and reviving the failing film industries. The involvement of national television networks in film production became of crucial importance, alongside international co-production funding and the expanding sector of private financing. Film industries grew increasingly dependent on cross-border 'run-away' productions, which could take advantage of the cheaper facilities and locations but did not allow for serious artistic input, thereby fostering a new form of Western cultural colonialism. Most studios became partially or fully privatised, and today compete in attracting foreign film crews to shoot on location.

The concurrent crisis in distribution and exhibition led to a sharp drop in box-office indicators for all productions carrying an East European label. The abolition of centralised cultural management divorced domestic film production from exhibition and distribution, and earlier distribution networks, domestically and internationally, were ruined before new ones had come into being. In some places new multiplexes were built, while elsewhere, after privatisation, film theatres were turned into bingo halls. Most of the new private distributors who emerged subsequently chose to abide strictly by market rules and to opt for Hollywood box-office winners rather than play the losing card of domestic productions. As ticket prices rose sharply, the total number of admissions declined – a decline further exacerbated by changing patterns of cultural consumption which favoured video distribution (and much to the ire of Hollywood's market moguls, the rampant growth of video piracy). Although well received at festivals, at film markets East European films were considered hard sells and performed poorly.

Between 1991 and 1994, the drop in the number of movies produced was

significant. More recently, however, a greater number of features are being released. After the initial disarray, and as we reach the turn of the new century, the production cycle is in the process of stabilisation, legislation is being clarified, funding mechanisms are being created and the exhibition and distribution sectors have been much improved. In some countries, the output reached former levels fairly quickly (the Czech Republic, Hungary) while in others the crisis persists (Bulgaria). The break-up of Yugoslavia has spawned separate, non-interacting mini-industries in the successor states.

Recently, critical attention has turned to the category of 'popular' European cinema in order to shift the emphasis away from a more *auteur*-dominated approach to film culture. Because of the relative absence of an independent 'civil society' in the countries of the former Soviet Empire, where popular tastes and preferences could be freely registered and expressed in non-state spheres and institutions, the *auteur*-tradition not only preserved its dominance, but functioned as a site of individual moral resistance to an ideology which eulogised the putative collective interest and will. Moreover, it is again not coincidental that the best-known cinematic *auteurs* – Wajda*, Szabó*, Jancsó*, Meszaros*, Menzel*, Makavejev*, Kusturica*, Pintilie*, Vulchanov*, to name but a few – often took as their subjects individuals whose moral trajectory was inextricably linked to the historical and political dramas undergone by their nation.

How has this specific type of *auteurism* fared with the transition? For a while in the 1990s, East European film-makers seemed to be losing their domestic audience. The years when people would go to the cinemas simply to see national film productions seemed to be beyond retrieval. *Auteurs* had trouble identifying to whom they were addressing their works: if they tried to appeal to the volatile mass taste they faced the overwhelming competition of imported mass culture. If they decided to address a more sophisticated audience they were doomed to failure by an underdeveloped market economy of distributors and exhibitors who were not interested in targeting scattered pockets of potential viewers.

Toward the end of the 1990s, however, some national productions came near the top of domestic box office charts. The most successful directors, like the young Czech Svěrák* or the young Macedonian Manchevski*, are those who energetically manage to raise funds, most often from a combination of domestic and foreign sources, and who realise that securing international distribution for a film is of equal importance to obtaining production financing. For political or economic reasons, many have chosen the international path. The number of East European film-makers working in the diaspora – Poland's Agnieszka Holland* and Ryszard Bugajski*, Serbian Goran Paskaljević* and Srdjan Dragojević*, Croatian Lordan Zafranović*, Bosnian Emir Kusturica* – is growing.

Common trends and experiences characterised the great range of nationally-inflected forms of cinematic expression under state socialism. Each national cinema had its storehouse of Socialist Realist* epics dating from the late 1940s and early 1950s; most of the countries could point to films which reflected the 'thaw' of the late 1950s in their bolder investigation of social issues; Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland all experienced virtually simultaneously a 'new wave of film-making in the 1960s, inspired by reformist political initiatives at home on the one hand, and the whiff of formal experi-

mentation emanating from elsewhere in Europe on the other. Meanwhile, mindful of these developments but reflecting the country's distinctive liberalisation process, Yugoslavia's socially-conscious film directors launched a 'Black Wave'* which challenged political, moral and aesthetic orthodoxies.

Looking at post-communist cinema, we would refrain from hurriedly declaring that a new, profoundly different profile of Eastern European cinema is emerging. The trend is, rather, one of continuity in topics and style. The state-financed historical super-productions are now replaced by privately financed 'heritage' super-productions. The partisan action-adventures and the socialist comedies of communist times are now replaced by Mafia action-adventures and post-socialist comedies that flagrantly target the box-office. Films focusing on the ethical concerns of everyday life, the so-called cinema of moral anxiety, have been replaced by films focusing on the drab everyday life and moral despair of post-communism. In spite of commercialisation, all East European countries continue making the same type of art films they were making before, and continue releasing films dealing with traditional thematic spheres such as history and heritage*, Stalinism*, the Holocaust*, and the experience of war. One can also pinpoint a common preoccupation with the moral life of the nation when democratic changes bring in their wake the vices and virtues of advanced capitalist economies. There is a proliferation of films focusing on the issues of ethnic minorities and the politics of ethnicity, reflected in the great interest shown in the Gypsy* genre, or the films made in response to the Yugoslav break-up* – a theme that has achieved international resonance. The traditions of lyric cinema, surrealism, magical realism, and experimental avant-garde animation are kept alive. The cinematic image of the deconstruction of the Berlin Wall was widely used by film-makers as the central metaphor of a new era. And not only at home, but also internationally, many films enjoyed a significant critical acclaim (*Kolya*, *Underground*, *Before the Rain*). In fact, if one looks at the number of festival prizes awarded to films from Eastern Europe, it will not be difficult to show that the 1990s was one of the most successful decades for East European film-making.

These successes clearly counter-balance the widely-held belief that East European cinema is undergoing a major crisis. If there is a crisis, it is one that is characteristic of European cinema in general, affecting its Western and Eastern counterparts alike, a crisis of identity in an era that marks the end of national cinemas. The volatility in East European cinema coincided with a clearly articulated period of insecurity in European cultural policies, driven by stalled trade negotiations and a growing anti-American sentiment. The establishment of pan-European funding bodies came partly as a reaction to the overwhelming triumph of commercialism in cinema. The share of international subsidies for film-making in poverty-stricken East European studios quickly increased as the concept of 'national cinema' gave way to a 'new European' one. This increasing dynamism is seen in collaborative artistic projects which cross traditional boundaries and bring together previously isolated spheres. In this respect, East European film-making has undoubtedly become an intrinsic part of European cinema, and of its culture more broadly, contributing in its own distinctive way to the eradication of lingering Cold-war divisions and tending to those war wounds more recently inflicted.

Nancy Wood and Dina Iordanova

INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIAN CINEMA

Russian Cinema in the 1990s

At the time the late 1980s seemed to herald a period of renewal for Soviet cinema, just as they did for all of Soviet society. With the weakening of both ideological and economic constraints the number of films produced, which had hovered around 150 per year for decades, suddenly underwent an enormous increase, reaching 300 in 1990, and the ambition and daring of the subjects of these films was breathtaking to Soviet audiences used to rigorous Party control of the industry. But just as the fabled *perestroika* turned out to be a false dawn, an end rather than a beginning, so the dangers this heady growth presented to the cinema were apparent to those who chose to look closely. Changes to the laws by which the cinema was governed meant that new independent producers could now function outside the state system, but many of those who moved into cinema production for financial motives would soon find surer ways to turn a profit. The state industry itself was moved to a system of economic self-financing, but a loosening of the distribution and exhibition system led to a huge inrush of (often third-rate) American films, which proved extremely popular with audiences who had hitherto been deprived of them. Buyers from regional and republican distribution chains at the new 'alternative' film markets increasingly declined to purchase the majority of new Soviet films. Instead, cults grew around popular American stars, such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, and, for more refined tastes, around directors such as Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway and Pedro Almodovar. So called 'video salons' grew up all over the country, often showing pirated copies of films that would not get official distribution, and there was a huge growth in video piracy. Uncensored copies of new Hollywood films could now be bought in Moscow before their British release. Private cable television channels opened up relying overwhelmingly on building up audiences by showing feature films. Most crucially of all, rampant inflation and other social crises – crises faithfully recorded in the new documentary and feature films of the time – undermined cinema-going as a mass, regular habit, a habit that had survived to a far greater extent in the Soviet Union than in the rest of Europe. Between 1986 and 1991 total attendances fell from 4,000,000,000 to 2,500,000,000, and it was estimated that there were 14,000,000 unsold seats every day. This led to increasing cinema closures, to cinemas being leased out or sold off for more lucrative uses – cinema foyers becoming video and compact disc stores, or showrooms

for expensive foreign cars. Thus the fact that the Sixth Congress of the Union of Filmmakers of the USSR*, held in June 1990, presided over the reorganisation of the Union into a so-called 'Federation of Sovereign National and Territorial Organisations of Film Makers', each of them further split into guilds for the various cinematic professions, could only be seen as symbolic of larger fissures.

One year later, a far more symbolic event occurred: in August 1991 a group of political hard-liners effected a coup against Gorbachev, and for three days Moscow was in turmoil. The defeat of this coup meant the end of the system that Gorbachev had been attempting to 'rebuild' through his fabled *perestroika*. By the end of the year the Soviet Union had dissolved itself and Gorbachev was out of power.

The country was entering a new world in which everything, even its name, had changed. In these altered conditions Soviet film-makers had to learn fast – particularly about the role of the producer, a function previously carried out by state functionaries, and about marketing. Because of poor distribution and almost non-existent marketing, scarcely any of the vast numbers of Russian films being made were bringing their investors a return on their money. The number of films made each year began a vertiginous decline. From 300 in 1990 it fell to 213 in 1991, 172 in 1992, 152 in 1993, and, as economic crises recurred with sickening predictability, to sixty-eight in 1994, forty-six in 1995 and twenty-eight in 1996. In the last years of the century it would not rise far above this level.

Much was written about the 'normalisation' of post-Soviet society, and this had a profound effect upon cinema audiences. Now that they had access to an unrestricted range of cinematic product, not to mention a vastly increased range of leisure activities, the previously stable audience atomised into a number of small groups with contradictory tastes, and it would take a number of years for film-makers to identify those tastes and to produce again the genuine popular hits that were such a feature of the Brezhnev years.

Attempts were made to internationalise the Russian film industry. A number of films were made on Russian subjects with American and British money. But the artistic compromises that this involved – making films largely in English, using Western stars, and simplifying plots to make them accessible to Western audiences ill versed in Soviet history (by this very token making them laughably simplistic for Russian audiences) meant that these films satisfied neither East nor West and the experiment soon foundered. Russian directors had greater success with European, particularly French, co-productions, where there was a greater tradition of allowing directors the licence to follow their own vision, but even here some degree of compromise was inevitable, and relations between French production companies and Russian directors were rarely harmonious. One way in which the internationalisation of the industry was, indeed, successful was in the increasing tendency of Russian actors, directors and other film workers to work, and sometimes to base themselves, abroad. Thus the expenditure of the

Russian cinema industry, on equipment and people, was increasingly in hard currency, while the income generated continued to be in the increasingly unstable rouble, a recipe for further financial disaster. For a while Russian studios tried to lease their studio space and get their technicians work on Western films made in Russia, such as Sally Potter's *Orlando* (1992), but increasing inflation put paid to this and recently Russian film-makers have found it financially viable to film abroad – much of Nikita Mikhalkov's* recent film *The Barber of Siberia*, for example, was shot at the Barrandov Studios* outside Prague.

As the decade went on, the Western interest that had been acute in the late 1980s, both in the rediscovered masterpieces that had for so long been shelved [*Glasnost* and the Cinema*], and in the new cinema of social engagement, declined. Russian films were no longer winning prizes at Western festivals, and were often not even being invited to participate in them. In Russia many of the stalwarts of the late Soviet period were finding it difficult to adapt to new conditions.

A new generation was coming to the fore, formed in the Gorbachev period and more able to adapt to conditions of independence and artistic and financial risk-taking. But the indifference shown to their films by Russian distributors and Western festival programmers alike meant that their films were failing to reach audiences. In response to this, the 1990s have witnessed a large growth both in the number and in the importance of Russian film festivals and prizes. Most important among the festivals is the so-called *Kinotavr*, officially the Open Russian, and latterly the Open International Film Festival, first held in the town of Podolsk in 1990 and held each June since 1991 in Sochi on the Black Sea. In recent years it has been able to show virtually every new feature film produced in Russia in the prior twelve months, and many of those produced in the former Soviet republics, as well as becoming a well-reported social event. The leading Russian film prizes are the Nikes, distributed each year since 1988 by the Russian Film Academy and now broadcast live on the main television channel, in a ceremony which very obviously attempts to emulate the Oscars. That these festivals and prizes are in general more attuned to the endeavours of the post-Soviet generation of film-makers is amply illustrated by events at the Yalta *Kinoforum* of 1994 when Ivan Dykhovichny*, Vladimir Khotinenko*, Alexander Khvan*, Sergei Selyanov* and Valeri Todorovsky*, all of whom have come to cinematic prominence as directors, but also, significantly, as producers, in the 1990s, were nominated as 'Directors of the Twenty-First Century'.

Increasingly, the place to see the most important and adventurous new Russian films has been on television, with a number of channels finding space for ambitious and intelligent programming strands that would be the envy of young film-makers in Britain, or on video. Simultaneous cinematic and video release is now commonplace as the new production companies, notably NTV-Profit, and STV, which is headed by the directors Sergei Selyanov and Alexei Balabanov*, aim

to cope both with the non-functioning distribution system and with video piracy by setting up their own video distribution outlets.

Support also comes, once again, from the Russian state, particularly since the new law 'On State Support of Cinematography' of 1996, which in theory arranged annual state subventions of \$10–15,000,000 dollars to finance production. Thus the state, which at the beginning of the decade, with the privatisation of the studios, was almost entirely removed from production funding, is once more of fundamental importance. Whereas only nineteen of almost 400 films being made in the Soviet Union at the beginning of the decade attracted state funding, by 1995 out of fifty-one films being made in Russia fifteen were fully funded and a further twenty partially funded by Roskomkino, the Russian State Cinema Committee. But the country's continuing financial crisis means that only a small percentage of these funds are actually distributed on time, and rampant inflation substantially devalues funds disbursed late. Some funds are not paid at all. The draft 1999 budget allocated 264 million roubles to the film industry, but it was expected that only 30 per cent of this figure would actually be distributed.

The Union of Filmmakers of the Russian Federation* has also attempted, in recent years, to revitalise the industry. The film director Nikita Mikhalkov* was swept into the chairmanship of the union at its Third Congress in December 1997 on a programme of renewal, planning the building and refurbishment of a chain of fully equipped modern cinemas across the country and taxes both on videos and sales to television (television channels in the Russian Federation show over three hundred hours of films over the three days of the weekend) to finance production.

The old state studios have been split up or privatised. Increasingly they are run not by the old cinema bureaucrats but by directors who have developed an acute sense of popular taste by assessing the box-office fates of their own films. Both the big studios and the many independent production companies that have developed over the decade have attempted in recent years to produce a number of low-budget films that have at least a chance, through combined theatrical release, video sales and television rights, of recouping the money spent on them.

At the century's end the Russian cinema industry is in a position with which it has grown familiar – in a prolonged crisis in which, despite all the odds, it continues to survive and in some respects to prosper. It celebrated the centenary of cinema with intelligence and resourcefulness, with specially commissioned films, with television programmes, and with book and magazine publications, on a scale that was not matched in many cinematically wealthier countries. At last, in the work of such directors as Dmitri Astrakhan*, Alexander Rogozhkin* and Alla Surikova*, it is turning out popular comedies whose mixture of nostalgia and self-mockery has found major success with audiences. At the other end of the scale it is making serious attempts to analyse the disastrous wars the country has been recently in-

volved in, particularly in the Caucasus, in Sergei Bodrov's* *Prisoner of the Mountains*, Vadim Abdrashitov's* *Time of the Dancer* and Rogozhkin's *Checkpoint*. It is endeavouring to depict the lives and values of a new generation of alienated young people, most notably in Alexei Balabanov's* *Brother*. It looks back without prejudice at the recent past, in Sergei Ursuliak's* *Russian Ragtime* and Dmitri Meskhiev's* *The American Bet*. It is beginning to win prizes again at international festivals, notably for the work of Alexander Sokurov, whose *Mother and Son* was one of the most internationally praised films of 1997, but also for Petr Lutsik's *Outskirts*, for Todorovsky's *The Land of the Deaf*, for Balabanov's *Of Freaks and Men*. It has won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film, with Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun*, and been shortlisted both for Bodrov's *Prisoner of the Mountains* and for Pavel Chukhrai's* *The Thief*. It has also, in a way the Soviet industry was never entirely at home with, produced a new group of genuine stars, including Vladimir Mashkov*, Oleg Menshikov* and Sergei Makovetsky*, capable of carrying any film they play in, their reputations burnished by a number of popular TV programmes about cinema and a vibrant cinematic press [Russian and Soviet Film Press*] which makes up in enthusiasm for what it lacks in circulation figures compared with the Soviet years. It has begun the refurbishment of its cinemas, and major cities now boast some excellent cinemas with up-to-date equipment which has led to a new fashion for cinema-going (which though usually, so far, for big-budget American films is also beginning to include domestic product). It has even just produced, in Nikita Mikhalkov's *The Barber of Siberia*, one of the most expensive epics ever made outside the Hollywood system, complete with international stars, and launched it at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. This does not look like a cinema in terminal decline.

Julian Graffy



PLATE 1: Kusturica's *Bila jednom jedna zemlja/Underground* (1995)



PLATE 2: Askoldov's *Komissari/The Commissar* (1967)

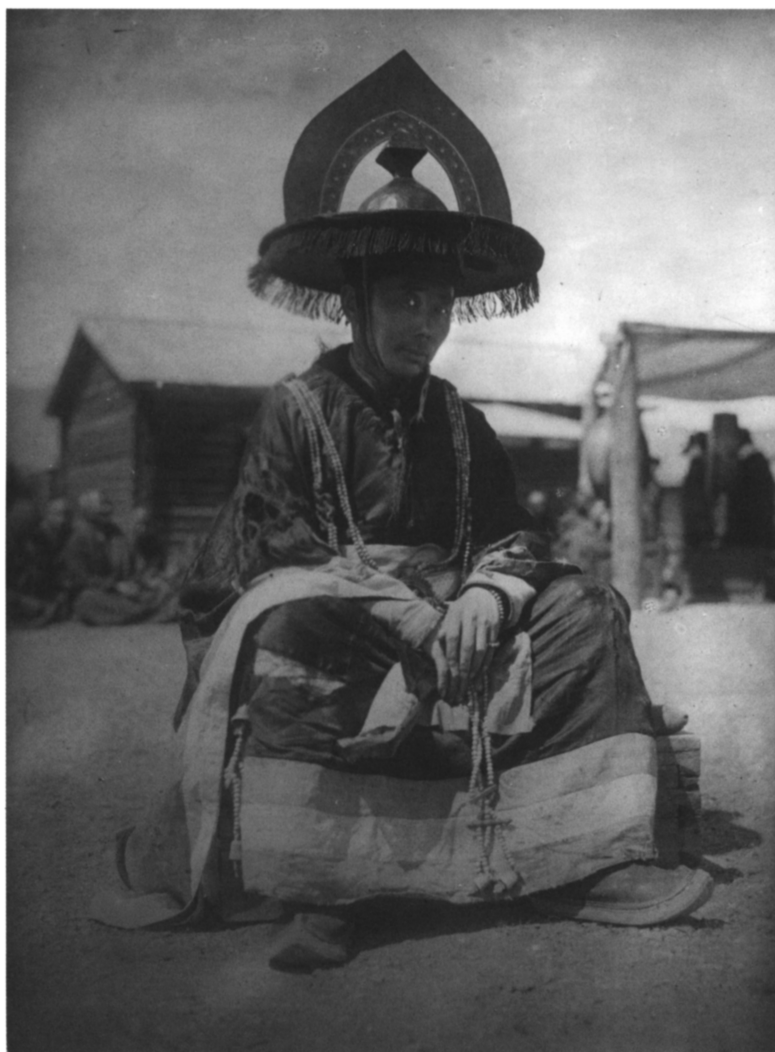


PLATE 3: Pudovkin's *Potomok Chingis-khana/Storm Over Asia* (1928)



PLATE 4: Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924)



PLATE 5: Makavejev's *W.R. – Misterije Organizma*/*W.R. – Mysteries of the Organism* (1971)



PLATE 6: Jancsó's *Szegénylegények/The Round-up* (1965)



PLATE 7: Forman's *Lásy jedné plavovlásky/A Blonde in Love* (1965)

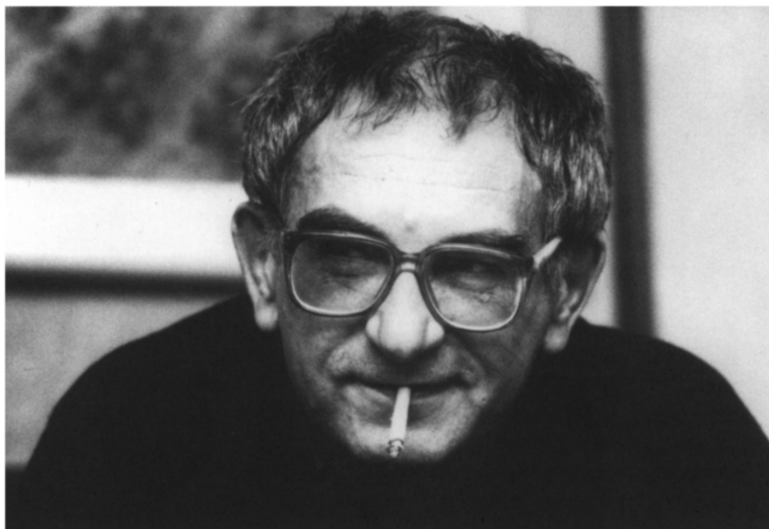


PLATE 8: Krzysztof Kieślowski



PLATE 9: Švankvankmajer's *Lekce Faust/Faust* (1994)



PLATE 10: Sergei Eisenstein



PLATE 11: Wajda's *Popiol i Diament*/*Ashes and Diamonds* (1958)

A

ABDRASHITOV, Vadim Yu. Kharkov, Ukraine [USSR]
1945

Russian director. In 1974 Abdrashitov graduated from VGIK*, where he had studied in the workshop of Mikhail Romm* and Lev Kulidzhanov*. In constant collaboration with the scriptwriter Alexander Mindadze, he made a series of films analysing the official institutions and the moral ambiguities of the late Soviet era. In *Slovo dlya zashchity/Submission for the Defence* (1977), *Povorot/The Turning Point* (1978), *Okhota na lis/Fox Hunting* (1980), and *Ostanovilsya poezd/A Train Stopped* (1982) personal crisis forces the hitherto conformist protagonist into moral reassessment. In the allegorical *Parad planet/Parade of the Planets* (1984) a group of army reservists enters a mysterious 'other' world. *Plyumbum, ili opasnaya igra/Plumbum, or A Dangerous Game* (1986) is another parable of the dangers of blind conformism, this time in a teenage boy. In *Sluga/The Servant* (1988), a conductor picks up a hitchhiker and, as their roles are reversed, layers of Soviet corruption are revealed. After two less successful films, *Armavir* (1991), in which the sinking of a Soviet liner forces the passengers to reassess their lives, and *P'sa dlia passazhira/Piece for Passenger* (1994), Abdrashitov and Mindadze returned triumphantly to form with *Vremya tantsora/Time of the Dancer* (1997), their contribution to a recent cycle of films meditating on the Chechen and other Caucasian wars. Three friends settle on land won in a war in which two of them fought but despite the idyllic southern setting, a mounting sense of omen assails them and their families, and the film ends in anguish and tragedy, offering a bleak diagnosis of the possibilities available in contemporary Russia. The film was nominated for five Nikes, the Russian Oscars, winning two, and won the Grand Prix at the leading Russian film festival, the Sochi *Kinotavr*, in 1998. JG

ABULADZE, Tengiz E. Kutaisi, Georgia [USSR] 1924 –
Tbilisi, Georgia 1994

Georgian director. Abuladze studied at the Rustaveli Theatrical Institute in Tbilisi (1943–6) and then at VGIK*, in the workshop of Sergei Yutkevich*. In 1947, under the influence of *Ivan Grozny/Ivan the Terrible*, he and a fellow student, Revaz Chkheidze, wrote to Eisenstein* asking for work: he told them to complete their studies first. Abuladze graduated in 1953 and returned to Tbilisi, where he joined the Gruziafilm studios. His first films were documentaries, co-directed in 1954 with Chkheidze. In 1955 they co-directed *Lurdzha Magdany/Magdana's Donkey*, which won the Best Short Film award at

Cannes in 1956. Abuladze's later films include *Chuzhie deti/Other People's Children* (1958), set in contemporary Tbilisi; *Ya, babushka, Iliko i Illarion/I, Grandmother, Iliko and Illarion* (1963), a tragi-comedy set in a mountain village; and *Ozherel'e dlya moyei lyubimoi/A Necklace for my Beloved* (1973). But his reputation rests on a trilogy of philosophical films concerned with questions of good and evil, life and death. *Vedreba/The Prayer* (Russian title *Mol'ba*) (1968), based on the poems of Vazha Pshavela, is an epic tale of love, hatred and revenge, shot in black-and-white in the harsh Georgian landscape. *Natris Khe/The Wishing Tree* ((Russian title *Drevo zhelaniya*) (1977) is set in a Georgian village before the Revolution and concerns the dreams and aspirations of a beautiful young girl and a man's search for the legendary tree that can make dreams come true. The third film of the trilogy, *Monanieba/Repentance* (Russian title *Pokayanie*) (1984) is one of the most important films of the *perestroika* period. It tells the story of the death of an old man of power, Varlam Aravidze, and the refusal of a woman, Ketevan Barateli, to let his corpse rest in peace. At the woman's trial the evil past is revealed and confusion is sown among Aravidze's surviving family, especially his son Abel (played by the same actor Avtandil Makharadze) and his grandson. Varlam Aravidze is given the physical features of Hitler, Mussolini, Beria and Stalin to turn him into a composite dictator, and Abuladze uses anachronism (blending medieval knights and Rubik cubes) to point to the universality of his parable, but the film is also decked with the realities of the Soviet 1930s. *Repentance* was written for Georgian television in 1981–2, and shot in late 1983 and early 1984. It was finally released in Tbilisi in October 1986, after support from Eduard Shevardnadze, then the Soviet Foreign Minister, later President of Georgia. It was also the first film to benefit from the intervention of the Conflict Commission established by the Union of Filmmakers* after their Fifth Congress in May 1986. It was released in Moscow in January 1987, and then shown widely throughout the Soviet Union and the rest of the world. *Repentance* is over-long and its stylistic confusion links it to the contradictory moods of the mid-1980s but it is a brilliantly acted and sometimes deeply moving evocation of the seductions of power. JG

AGIT-FILMS

Soviet short films, also known as 'agitki'. Produced during the Civil War of 1917–21, these films were simple in form and straightforward in content and dealt with topical matters of politics, production, health and hygiene. They were primarily intended for exhibition through the network of agit-trains touring the frontlines and areas recently recaptured from the White forces.

Agit-films were a temporary solution to an emergency problem: they were a short cut to resolving communication difficulties between rulers and ruled and provided valuable experience in film-making

– especially in montage* as a method of using scant resources economically – for a new generation of directors such as Lev Kuleshov* and Dziga Vertov*, who worked together on the ‘October Revolution’ agit-train. RT

ALBANIA

Until World War II, isolated and largely illiterate Albania possessed about twenty cinemas in the main towns, showing exclusively imported material. The only cinematic evidence of prewar Albania is in a few foreign newsreels and travelogues. The communist regime of Enver Hoxha (1944–85) nationalised the cinema in 1947, and immediately began using it for propaganda by making two newsreels with Soviet assistance. Moscow was largely responsible for the building of the Shqipëria e re/New Albania film studio in Tirana, and was virtually the only source of equipment and technical skills. Its construction, begun in 1952, allowed a steady production of newsreels, and documentaries such as *Rruga e lavdishme/The Glorious Road* (1952). Soviet director Sergei Yutkevich’s* *Skanderbeg* (1954), about Albania’s medieval national hero, was partly put together in the Albanian studio, and presented for political reasons as a Soviet-Albanian co-production. It helped confirm film as a mass medium, and by the mid-1950s there was an annual audience of five million for the hundred or so cinemas (from a population of c. three million), including mobile units for rural areas.

Until 1958, features were almost entirely from the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The first Albanian feature, *Tana* (1958), directed by Kristaq Dhamo and starring Tinka Kurti, relied on the modest documentary tradition in its handling of the collectivisation of the countryside. Hysen Hakani’s *Debatik/Communist Youth* (1961), on the resistance of children during the Italian occupation of 1938–43, set a pattern for storylines based on this period and subject. The break with Moscow in 1960, and growing political and cultural isolationism, made it necessary to increase domestic production. This was hampered by the loss of most foreign assistance, though there were enough Moscow-trained technicians and directors to begin to develop an autonomous film industry and provide some training at the Tirana Higher Institute of Arts. Only one film a year was made until the late 1960s, but then production rose steadily to about twelve features annually in the early 1980s.

Hoxha’s insistence on sticking to a Stalinist line of ideological struggle, and his refusal to follow Soviet revisionism, turned Albania into a bastion of Socialist Realist* film production. Every film was obliged to perform some political task, though in the special context of Albanian history. With slow television development, film had a key role, along with schools and various state institutions, in promulgating not merely the propaganda of class struggle but a ‘socialist morality’. In particular this meant the central role of the ‘positive hero’ – the ‘new man’ edu-

cated by the Party. This pattern is firmly established in Dhimitër Anagnosti and Viktor Gjika's *Komisari i dritës/Commissar of the Light* (1966), in which a man returns to his home village after the liberation in 1944 to fight against the local priest and landowner, and a counter-revolutionary brigade, but whose greatest achievement is to set up the first school in the village and to inspire pupils. Anagnosti's other main films include *Cuca e maleve/The Mountain Girl* (1974), a ballet showing the strong influence of Chinese 'heroic' opera; *Lulëkuqet mbi mure/Red Poppies on Walls* (1976), starring Kadri Rashi and dynamically describing a children's rebellion against a fascist schoolmaster; the satirical comedy *Perralle nga e kaluara/A Tale from the Past* (1988); and *Kthimi i ushtisë së vdekur/Return of the Dead Army* (1989).

Ibrahim Mucaj and Kristaq Mitro portray collective heroism in *Dimeri i fundit/The Last Winter* (1976), where a group of village women put up resistance to occupation during World War II. Viktor Gjika achieves a subtler political approach with strong performances in *Rrugë të bardha/White Roads* (1974), where the 'new man' is a sympathetic contemporary figure struggling for love and against snow-drifts. Gjika's sensitivity for images, music and dramatic development can also be seen in *Gjeneral gramafoni/The General Gramophone* (1977), which shows the struggle to preserve Albanian folk music during the Italian occupation. *Yje mbi Drin/Stars above the Drin* (1977, dir. I. Zhabjaku) shows the final phase of almost complete ideological isolationism, the enemies now the Chinese 'revisionists' conspiring to destroy a hydro-electric plant. Kujtim Çashku and Piro Milkani's *Ballë për ballë/Face to Face* (1979), starring Sulejman Pitarka, has a conspiracy theme set around the departure of the Russians in 1960. With a significant annual production, a wider range of subjects could now be covered. In the record year of 1984, seven of the fourteen features dealt with contemporary subjects, while most of the rest were set in or around World War II. Productions included comedies, children's films and films based on ancient history and folklore. But as an Albanian delegate said at a Balkan film festival, whatever the subject matter every effort had to be made to omit 'sentimentality, physiological and moral anomalies, pornography, sadism, psychological and Freudian dimensions, naturalism and individualism'.

Cinema screens increased to 450 in 1975, and attendances reportedly reached twenty million, with a carefully chosen selection of heavily censored and selectively subtitled French, Italian and other European films. In 1978 a modernisation of the film studio began, but lack of access to the latest technology made it a limited project. The first colour feature, made with East German assistance, appeared in 1974. By the 1980s, most films were in colour and processing quality improved, though remaining relatively poor. Production of short documentaries increased to about thirty annually by the mid-1980s, mostly devoted to propaganda, scientific and educational subjects, and the activities of Hoxha. Occasional full-length documentaries, like *Kujtime te vegjëlisë/Memories of Childhood* (1985), were usually homages to Hoxha.