Iconic Turns
Central and Eastern Europe

Regional Perspectives in Global Context

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Maciej Janowski
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Iconic Turns

Nation and Religion in Eastern European Cinema since 1989

Edited by
Liliya Berezhnaya & Christian Schmitt

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CONTENTS

Contributors ..................................................................................................... vii
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................... xi
A Note on Transliteration ................................................................................ xiii

Introduction ..................................................................................................... 1
  Liliya Berezhnaya and Christian Schmitt

Religion and Politics in Soviet and Eastern European Cinema:
  A Historical Survey .................................................................................... 33
  Hans-Joachim Schlegel

PART ONE
INSTITUTIONAL POWERS

Blessed Films: The Russian Orthodox Church and Patriotic
  Culture in the 2000s .................................................................................. 65
  Stephen M. Norris

Russian Film Premieres in 2010/11: Sacralizing National History
  and Nationalizing Religion ..................................................................... 81
  Natascha Drubek

Longing for the Empire: State and Orthodox Church in
  Russian Religious Films ........................................................................... 99
  Liliya Berezhnaya

A Cinematic Churchman: Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky in
  Oles Yanchuk’s Vladyka Andrey ............................................................ 121
  John-Paul Himka
PART TWO

SACRED AND PROFANE IMAGES

Rethinking History: Heroes, Saints, and Martyrs in Contemporary Russian Cinema ................................................................. 139
   Eva Binder

   Jan Čulík

Beyond the Surface, Beneath the Skin: Immanence and Transcendence in Györgi Pálfi’s Films ................................................ 183
   Christian Schmitt

PART THREE

CONFLICT, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY

Narrating the Shoah in Poland: Post-1989 Movies about Polish-Jewish Relations in Times of German Extermination Politics ................................................................. 201
   Maren Röger

Memory, National Identity, and the Cross: Polish Documentary Films about the Smolensk Plane Crash ................................. 217
   Mirosław Przylipiak

Religion Visible and Invisible: The Case of Post-Yugoslav Anti-War Films .................................................................................. 237
   Maria Falina

Index .................................................................................................................................................................................. 251
CONTRIBUTORS

LILIYA BEREZHNAIA is a research fellow at the University of Münster in the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics.” She earned her MA degree from Moscow State University, and her MA and PhD in history from the Central European University, Budapest College. Her research interests are focused on comparative borderland studies, imperial and national discourses in Eastern Europe history, symbolic geography and the construction of “the other,” Ukrainian religious and cultural history, and eschatological notions in Christian traditions. Her most recent book, *Death and the Afterlife in Early Modern Ukrainian Culture*, is currently in production at Harrasowitz Verlag. Her Catalog of the Ukrainian Last Judgment Images, co-written with John-Paul Himka, has been accepted for publication by the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute.

EVA BINDER is Assistant Professor in the Department of Slavonic Studies at the University of Innsbruck. She studied English and Russian Philology in Innsbruck and Moscow and has worked at the University of Innsbruck since 1999. Her current field of research is 20th-century Russian culture, with a focus on film, media and cultural studies. Recent publications include: *Migrationsliteraturen in Europa* (*Migrant Literatures in Europe*), edited by Eva Binder and Birgit Mertz-Baumgartner (2012); “Sokurov’s Film Portraits.” (In *The Cinema of Alexander Sokurov*, 2011); “‘Leningrads Heldentat’: Die filmische Verarbeitung der Blockade” (“‘The Feat of Leningrad: The Siege of Leningrad in Cinema,” *Osteuropa* 8–9, 2011).

JAN ČULÍK is Senior Lecturer in Czech Studies at the University of Glasgow. He studied at Charles University, Prague. His publications include a study of independent Czech literature published in the West under Communism, *Knihy za ohradou: Česká literatura vexilových nakladatelstvích 1971–1989* (1991), and a monograph on post-Communist Czech cinema, *Jací jsme: Česká společnost vhraném filmu devadesátých a nultých let* (2007). He has written, edited and/or translated a number of entries on 20th and 21st century Czech writers for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*. An updated version of his monograph on Czech cinema has been published by Sussex Academic Press in 2012.
Natascha Drubek is a Heisenberg Fellow at the University of Regensburg where she teaches Media Studies and Slavic Studies. She completed her MA and PhD in Slavic Studies & Eastern European History at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (Munich) where she also completed her post-doctoral qualifications, published in 2012 (Russisches Licht. Von der Ikone zum vorrevolutionären Kino). She was awarded a Marie Curie Fellowship at the Film School FAMU in Prague with the project “Hypertextual Film Presentation” (www.hyperkino.net). She is co-editor of Das Zeit-Bild im osteuropäischen Film nach 1945 (2010), editor of the “Film & Screen Media” section of www.ARTMargins.com (University of California), and co-editor of the series “osteuropa medial.” Currently, she is researching anti-religious films of the first two Soviet decades.

Maria Falina is a post-doctoral fellow and lecturer at Central European University, Budapest. She earned her MA degree from Moscow State University, and her second MA and PhD in Comparative History from the Central European University with a dissertation on Pyrrhic Victory: East Orthodox Christianity, Politics, and Serbian Nationalism in the Interwar Period (2011). She is a member of the research project “Negotiating Modernity: History of Modern Political Thought in East-Central Europe” (Center for Advanced Study, Sofia). Her fields of research include the history of political thought in Eastern Europe, religious studies and nationalism. She has published on clerical fascism and the nationalization of religion in the Balkans. Her current research project focuses on the comparative history of religious communities in 20th century Yugoslavia.

John-Paul Himka is professor in the Department of History and Classics and director of the Research Program on Religion and Culture, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, at the University of Alberta. He earned his PhD at the University of Michigan. His publications include Religion and Nationality in Western Ukraine: The Greek Catholic Church and the Ruthenian National Movement in Galicia, 1867–1900 (1999) and Last Judgment Iconography in the Carpathians (2009). Together with Andriy Zayarnyuk, he co-edited Letters from Heaven: Popular Religion in Russia and Ukraine (2006). He is currently working on two major research projects: on Ukrainian nationalists and the Holocaust, and on Ukrainian sacral culture in Canada.
Stephen M. Norris is Associate Professor of History at Miami University (Ohio, USA). He earned his PhD at the University of Virginia in 2002. His research interests are in Russian cultural history, visual culture, and cinema. His co-edited volume (with Willard Sunderland), *Russia’s People of Empire: Life Stories from Eurasia, 1500 to the Present*, appeared with Indiana University Press in 2012. His book, *Blockbuster History in the New Russia: Movies, Memory, Patriotism*, also appeared with Indiana University Press in 2012.


Maren Röger is a research fellow at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw. She earned her PhD in history from the University of Gießen. Before that, she studied history, media and cultural studies in Lüneburg and Wrocław. Her research is focused on European history of the 20th century (with a focus on World War II), gender history, media history and history of memory. Her recent book, *Flucht, Vertreibung und Umsiedlung. Mediale Erinnerungen und Debatten in Deutschland und Polen seit 1989* (2011) deals with German and Polish memories regarding the expulsion of the Germans.

Hans-Joachim Schlegel is a film historian and film critic, who specializes in Russian, Eastern and Central European cinema and has numerous publications to his name. He is a long time collaborator with the Berlin, Venice and Montréal, Oberhausen, Nyon and Leipzig International Film Festivals. He lectures at universities and film academies in Germany and abroad and has edited and translated works by Eisenstein and Tarkovsky. He is a member of the consultative councils of the *Eisenstein Centre for Film and Cultural Research* in Moscow, “Kinovedcheskiye zapiski” of
the European Film Academy, FIPRESCI, and Interfilm. In 2007 he was awarded the “Pushkin Medal” by order of the President of the Russian Federation.

Christian Schmitt is a research fellow at the University of Münster in the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics.” He studied German, Dutch, and History in Münster, Leiden, and Amsterdam and earned his PhD with a dissertation on cinematic pathos, *Kinopathos: Große Gefühle im Gegenwartsfilm* (2009). His current research project focuses on notions of community in Adalbert Stifter’s writings. Recent publications include articles on Stifter’s communities, Romantic poetry’s relation to archaeology, and national discourses in German *heimatfilms* of the 1950s.
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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Transliterating the Cyrillic alphabet into Latin letters means making a choice. We chose the BGN/PCGN romanization system, developed by the United States Board on Geographic Names and by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use. For purpose of simplification, we have converted ё to yo, -iy and -yy endings to -y, and omitted apostrophes for ь and ь.
“Farewell, comrades!” he shouted to them. “Remember me, and come back next spring to feast and carouse! So you thought, you’d caught us, you damn Poles? Do you think there is a single thing in this world that will frighten a Cossack? Just wait, the time will come when you will understand the meaning of the Russian Orthodox faith! Word has already spread through every nation: A Russian Czar will spring forth from the Russian earth, and there will be no power in this world that shall not yield to him!”

Thus the last words of the dying Taras Bulba, the fictional Cossack hero of Nikolai Gogol’s historical short story of the same name. Bulba’s words have been repeated in cinema too, most recently in a film by Russian director Vladimir Bortko (Taras Bulba, 2009), which caused a strong and agitated media echo, especially in Russia. Bortko’s film inscribed a patriotic message into its scenes that even exceeded Gogol’s revised version of the story (1842). The film sets a nationalist course right away by opening with another sappy Bulba-speech that links “comradeship” with the “Russian soul.” Like in Gogol, the border between “us” and “them” is also maintained with help of references to religion—a religion that the Poles, standing in for a rational and corrupt West, do not share. The last scene of the movie adds even more religious overtones; while the Cossacks are riding to attack, they proclaim the slogan, “For Faith! For Russia!” The film’s images have already added to this by depicting Bulba’s death in patterns that are well-known in Hollywood too, most notably the iconography of martyrs burned at the stake for their faith. The result is obvious: Bortko’s hero serves as a figure of identification for contemporary Russia that makes (partly fictional) historical events accessible for present desires and political agendas. In the mythical “golden age” summoned up by the movie, the

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1 Gogol, Taras Bulba, 140.
2 See Ian Appleby’s and Stephen Norris’ reviews in Kinokultura.
3 Gogol’s revised edition from 1842 (the one quoted here) has been characterized as the “transformation of a Ukrainian tale into a Russian novel.” This would include the transfer of the Cossack as a “Ukrainian symbol into a Russian image.” Yoon, “Transformation of a Ukrainian Cossack,” 430; 440.
link between religion and nationality is still intact. By linking nationality to concepts like “soul,” “soil,” and (Orthodox) “faith,” Russianness takes shape as an entity with historical, geographical and natural roots that is—and, thus the message, should be—inseparable from religion.

Films like *Taras Bulba*—as well as many other recent films from Eastern Europe—raise a question that deserves our analytical scrutiny and seems to call for the joint forces of historians, literary and film critics: How are nation and religion interrelated in today’s Eastern Europe and how is this interrelation “imagined” in cinema? After the historical turn of 1989, this question seems to be of particular importance for new communities that have emerged in a space that was until then held together by Communist ideology. In many Eastern European countries there has been plenty of evidence for a return to nationalism, while the predicted return of religion(s) was even envisaged on a larger scale, as a global phenomenon. But how are both connected? And what role does the cinema play in connecting nation and religion as categories of communal coherence? We suggest that in the wake of the historical turn of 1989, an “iconic turn” has taken place in Eastern Europe—in the form of a renewed cinematic commitment to make sense of the world in religious and/or national terms. In other words, cinema is one of the social sites where nation and religion meet, where the relation of nation and religion is negotiated.

This volume is devoted to these negotiations, even though its scope is necessarily limited. We can neither cover the whole geographical range nor address all possible themes. In geographical regard, the scope of *Iconic Turns* is limited to selected countries that were governed by pro-Soviet regimes before 1989. In regard to the themes, it is our aim to sketch a preliminary outline of some key aspects that will inspire further research. According to this goal, the volume is structured in three parts. Each part contains four case studies that explore the interaction of nation, religion, and cinema with the help of concrete examples. Nevertheless, we felt that some introductory remarks are necessary since the issue in question is so complex. These remarks will also provide the necessary theoretical framework for our book’s structure. There are four issues that need some clarification: (1) the geographical and historical scope of our volume; (2) how to conceive of the interplay of nation and religion in theoretical terms; (3) cinema’s role in relating nation and religion; (4) and films’ contribution to shaping historical memory.
INTRODUCTION

1. 1989—and the Notion of Eastern Europe

We have defined the year 1989 in this book as the base chronological line, as a conventional caesura and a breaking point in history that decided the future of the whole region. For most in the West, 1989 means the fall of the Berlin wall, but this is a very narrow, and strictly speaking, a very German point of view. As stated by Karl Schlögel, “[t]he fall of the wall on 9 November was only a confirmation. It served to sanction what had already been decided earlier and elsewhere.” 4 1989 embodies the whole transformation period, which started with the Charta 77, Gorbachev’s Perestroika, and the foundation of Polish Solidarność in 1980 and finished with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Irrespective of whether positively or negatively connotated, 1989 turned to be a pan-European lieu de mémoire, aptly called a “year of truth.” 5 The “parade of revolutions” in Eastern Europe led to the construction of new states and was accompanied by the (re-)creation of nationalist ideology. Conflicts—most notably the civil war in Yugoslavia—were fueled not only with national, but also with religious antagonisms. The events in the Balkans have often been interpreted as a paradigmatic example for the “Eastern type of nationalism” as opposed to the “Western” one. The former was interpreted as an ethnic, the latter as a civic type. Hans Kohn, who coined this typology during WWII, also added a moral notion to this distinction when he described ethnic nationalism as inherently backwards, while civic (“political”) nationalism is allegedly progressive. 6

The desire to return “back to Europe” after 1989 included revisions of geopolitical terminology and attempts to reconsider the end of the Cold War as a chance to restructure historical regions. From now on, following the earlier traditions (particularly that of the Polish émigré historian Oskar Halecki), one spoke in the region not only about Eastern Europe, but also about Central, or East Central divisions. Jenő Szűcs’ ground-breaking study justified the three-region-differentiation historically. 7 East Central (as opposed to Western and Eastern) Europe was conceived as a peculiar “transitory” territory between the closed German and Russian language realms. Four countries could claim belonging to this region: Poland,

6 Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism.
7 Szűcs, “Three Regions.”
Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Following Szűcs’ ideas, historians described the structural markers of this “mezzo-region,” which included specific forms of Christianization and colonization, libertarian constitutions, self-rule of the nobility and Gutswirtschaft, the Jewish impact in the region, and the expansion of the Romanov, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires, as well as specific forms of national movements in the 19th and 20th centuries. It is remarkable though that all attempts to reconsider European geography after the fall of Communism were symbolically and politically charged. A historically-based notion of East Central Europe apparently was not sufficient. Instead, narratives of “victimization” and “resistance” as the basis of an East Central European myth abound; that did not however necessarily counter the earlier label of the “East.”

The crucial problem was whether the rest of the post-Soviet bloc also had a right to address itself as “East Central Europe.” Evidently, the Baltic countries, Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine shared some of the above-mentioned structural features. Again, suggestions came from historians and politicians alike. A first such suggestion resisted the expansion of this term’s applicability and resulted in the Visegrád Group Treaty in 1991, which founded a political bond between Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The group remained intact when all four states became members of the EU and the notion of “Europe” expanded eastward. The second possibility—never put into political practice, though—was the renewal of the old Jagiellonian idea, of the common future of Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania based on their historical experience as parts of the early modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Alexey Miller was right when he said that both options were aimed at friendship, which was also a “friendship against Russia.” Moreover, both options consequently meant gradually shifting the European border further eastwards. This shift would imply the dissolution of the notion of Eastern Europe per se; it would be replaced just with Asia or Russia as its substitute. A third option was to re-create the notion of Central Europe, but the “fathers of East Central Europe” avoided this term for the associations of Mitteleuropa with the era of National Socialism and German political-economic domination. Later, in the 1990s, under pressure for political changes in the region and the omnipresent Habsburg nostalgia, intellectuals from Poland

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9 See Miller, “Die Erfindung”; Ther, Von Ostmitteleuropa nach Zentraleuropa.
10 Miller, “Die Erfindung,” 159.
and Hungary suggested the use of Central Europe as a term to define a region of trans-cultural and trans-ethnic communication. This made it possible to include German-speaking territories, most notably Austria itself, within this region and terminology. The pitfall of this generalization, however, was the creation of new mental borders (with the danger of becoming real ones), e.g. fragmenting Ukraine and Romania into multiple parts. Notably, this proposal set the borderline according to Samuel Huntington’s famous map of the “Clash of Civilizations”—i.e. exactly along the drift line between Eastern and Western Christianity, with Central Europe now belonging squarely to the West. Bringing religion into picture made the application of the terms “Central Europe” and “Eastern Europe” even more doubtful, provoking new waves of historical debates.

Why then do we, considering the vagueness and political burdens of all these geographical terms, still opt for the term “Eastern Europe” in this book? While it should have become clear that the term can serve to reflect on shared historical experiences, there are also two more rather pragmatic points. For English-speaking audiences it remains common to apply the term to territories between Russia in the East, Poland in the West, the Baltic countries in the North, and the Balkans in the South. Even more importantly, juggling with geopolitical terminology does not seem particularly helpful for film studies. Both “Eastern Europe” and “Central Europe” are common terms in film criticism, as the names of two film festivals hosted in Germany suggest: the GoEast Festival of Central and Eastern European Films (Wiesbaden) and the Cottbus Festival of the East European Film. The Cottbus Festival provides a useful definition of “East European film.” A film is referred to as Eastern European “if the producer or one of the co-producers is based in one of the successor states of the former ‘socialist’ European countries (including the former Soviet Union as well as ex-Yugoslavia)” and if it is made “in one of the languages of this region.” This definition can serve as a good starting point for the purposes of our book.

11 Most prominently Csáky, “Zentraleuropa.”
13 Defined like this, the notion excludes, however, Eastern Germany and Austria, as well as Greece.
14 “Cottbus Film Festival: Reglement and Entry Form.” GoEast also includes films from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan in its competition.
2. Nation and Religion: Complementary Relations

The complex relationship between religion and nation certainly deserves a book on its own, and has been vividly discussed in the last several years.\(^{15}\) Especially questions of relations between national and religious identities, nationalism and modernization, as well as secularization as a precondition for modern national states and democracy have been scrutinized by historians and sociologists alike. The “classical set” of sociological theses, rooted in 19th century Western social theories, presumes a sharp distinction between nationalist and religious agendas. Nationalism has been perceived—partly by its proponents—as a “secular” and “modern” force, as opposed to “religion,” which apparently remained influential only in the under-developed, “unmodern” parts of the world.\(^{16}\) Recent scholarship has not only challenged this view by demonstrating the compatibility of modern industrial development and religious worldviews, but also confronted the key argument of the Weberian model: the privatization of religion in modern societies. The thesis of a “religion that went public”\(^{17}\) continues to be a hotly debated topic and highlights the active exchange between the sacred and the secular, between tradition and modernity, between religion and nationalism.

By taking the religious point of view more seriously, some social scientists introduced the idea of a “mutual conditioning” between religion and nation as social systems of interpretation. While the “sacralization of the nation” refers to the transfer of functions and means of representation from religious systems to the concept of the nation, the “nationalization of religion” implies a complementary process that inscribes nationality into religious frameworks.\(^{18}\) For instance, the sacralization of the nation becomes visible when a nation is credited with a “fate” that is often irrational and can only be explained in mystical terms. The fight for the symbols and myths of the nation also belongs to this field.\(^{19}\) While discussing the ways religion (Christianity, in particular) has shaped the “origins” of nations, Adrian Hastings has paid attention to how threats to national

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\(^{16}\) Lehmann, *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung, Rechristianisierung*.

\(^{17}\) Casanova, *Public Religions*.


\(^{19}\) See Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*; Flacke, *Mythen der Nationen*.
identity are mythologized and sharpen the sense of “us” and “them.” Hastings draws attention to other crucial factors that bind religion and nation, like the claim for a “contested frontier” (real and imagined) that produces a feeling of threat. According to Hastings, it is the borderland situation, which determines the specificity of the religious-national bond: “The political conflict is likely to have superimposed upon it a sense of religious conflict, so that national identity becomes fused with religious identity.”

These reflections, in turn, brought another topic to the focus of sociological attention—the complementary process of the nationalization of religion. This means first and foremost the adaptation process of a religious person, who absorbs the value systems of the nation in argumentation and behavior and does so more easily than a non-religious person: “If the nation is something to die for, religion offers ways to understand sacrifice and to remember and celebrate those who have died for the nation.”

To what extent are the terms “secularization,” “nationalization of religion” and “sacralization of the nation” applicable to the case of Eastern Europe after the downfall of Communism? Recent historiography has provided some affirming answers to this question, while at the same time emphasizing occasional asymmetries. These stem from historical peculiarities of modernization, processes of nation-building, and secularization in this part of Europe. Essential is the fact that these processes occurred here later than in other European countries further west. In most cases, they started to emerge in the mid 19th century, and the first nation-states were formed only after WWI. In some cases, these young states became the victims of totalitarian dominance and the nation-state tradition was thus interrupted in its earlier phases. What consequences did this “delayed development” have upon the relations between nation and religion? Apparently, three major peculiarities can be traced in this

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21 Another important factor in the affirmation of nationhood for Hastings is the local clergy. While entering into debate with Eric Hobsbawm, he points out that in the modern period it was the lower clergy rather than the politicians that “fostered a sense of shared local, provincial, or national identity.” Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*, 190–92.
23 Lehmann and van der Veer, *Nation and Religion*, 8. Hartmut Lehmann and Peter van der Veer went even further with this logic by posing the question of whether nationalism could be seen “not as a substitute for religion […] but as a religion authentic and proper? If so, racial elements within nationalism […] would be part of the quest for national salvation.” Lehmann and van der Veer, *Nation and Religion*, 9.
respect in modern East European history: (a) imperial versus nation-state practices of using religion as a legitimizing resource; (b) the forced secularization in the 20th century Soviet Union; and (c) the “return of religion” after the fall of Communism.

(a) In contemporary Eastern Europe, the legacies of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional empires have determined the specific nature of the nationalization of religion and the sacralization of nations. Both imperial and national-state structures used religious argumentation as a legitimizing resource. Often, conflicts arose between the three agents (imperial, nationalist, and church powers) resulting in further political and confessional fragmentation in the region. In the case of empires, the contradictions between the 19th century nationally-oriented religious movements from the borderlands and those of the center were the “gunpowder” that destroyed the principles of imperial governance. In this way, Polish Catholicism became a symbol of national aspirations against the Russian Orthodox center, whereas the analogical situation led to the formation of a national secular culture in Bohemia. Many of the above-mentioned “contested religious frontiers” covered the 19th and 20th century geopolitical map of Eastern Europe. The feeling of a threat from the ethnical and confessional “other” in the borderlands and in the imperial centers led to a gradual fusion of religious and national identities in their respective regions. The local clergy was the main agent in spreading nationalist ideology among peasants in many regions of Poland or Ukraine, as well as in Hungary and Transylvania.

This shows that religious-national relations cannot be limited to the symbolic field of discourses and borrowed topos; it is also necessary to track the interactions between ecclesiastical and state institutions, between religious communities and political organs. Bruce B. Berglund and Brian Porter-Szűcs point out a variety of factors in this regard and affirm that the history of Christianity in 20th century Eastern Europe “cannot be summarized in the story of the Polish pope and his instrumental role in the collapse of communism,” but that it must “also include accounts of the Romanian Orthodox Church cooperating with a regime that jailed hundreds of clergy, and Croatian Catholic priests baptizing Orthodox Serbs

25 Ibid., 12. See also Jan Čulík’s essay in this volume.
26 See the contributions of Hans-Christian Maner, Ricarda Vulpius, John-Paul Himka, Klaus Buchenau, and Juliane Brandt in Schulze-Wessel, Die Nationalisierung der Religion und die Sakralisierung der Nation. See also Vulpius, Nationalisierung der Religion.
just before they were massacred, and Reformed intellectuals promoting school curricula in the 1930s that branded Jews as aliens hostile to the Hungarian nation.”

(b) The imperial legacy is also the basis of the next peculiarity of the religious-national relations in Eastern Europe: the imposed secularization in the Soviet Union. Whereas in Western Europe the impact of religion on education and government faded gradually over the course of the 19th century, the Bolsheviks imposed secularism forcefully and brutally. Despite the obvious anticlericalism and disillusion in religious matters amongst Russian imperial elites at the turn of the 19th/20th century, this sort of secularization was still incomparable with the practical reality of Soviet politics. The Soviet government led a devastating campaign against all church institutions, education, and sacral objects. Yet, according to Catherine Wanner, these attempts did not prove to be successful in the end: “[W]hen coercive mechanisms in the USSR against religious practice were lifted […], religious communities rebounded with tremendous agility, suggesting that secularization in the sense of an eradication of religious belief did not have deep roots in Soviet society.” Wanner claims that this rebirth in the 1970s and 1980s also had to do with the declining belief in the Soviet ideology and with the disappointment in secular and rationalist worldviews. Besides, the official Soviet policy of commemoration—political rituals, folklore, and everyday social and cultural practices—was “imbued with the mystical aura of grace and power.” This presence kept religious sensibilities in the Soviet Union alive, too.

Regarding other parts of Eastern Europe, the matter of a forced secularization seems to be even more complicated. In most East European countries (including the USSR), religious growth is observable since the end of 1970s. But this is only one side of the coin. In some regions, like the Czech lands or Slovenia, the secularization of the public sphere had already started in the middle of the 19th century. The atheist policy of the Communist regimes in these lands apparently just followed the already established path. On the other hand, these regions' loss of trust in the Communist socio-political institutions in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in increasing respect for traditional churches. The strong reversion back to

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27 Berglund and Porter-Szűcs, Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe, XIV.
28 Wanner, Communities of the Converted, 7.
29 Ibid., 8. Tumarkin, Lenin Lives! More in detail, Steinberg and Wanner, “Introduction: Reclaiming the Sacred after Communism.” See also Hans-Joachim Schlegel’s contribution to this volume.
secular perceptions in the 1990s reflected the dominating historical tendency comparable to the Western European experience.  

(c) The above-mentioned absorption of sacred structures into the secularized Soviet everyday life is one possible explanation for the resurgence of religion that occurred in many parts of Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism. It manifests itself mostly in the attempts of the church and confessional leaders to revive the social role of religion. Direct or indirect political participation of religious activists from Poland, Russia, Romania, former Yugoslavia, or Ukraine has been growing by all accounts. One concrete instance of this is their work with local governments to restore confiscated structures and to build new churches. Another substantial element of Eastern European religious transitions is the appearance of new religious movements. Social scientists today still do not agree upon the reasons for the noticeable rise of religiosity in Eastern Europe after 1989. Some regard it within the scope of the general “return of religion” in a global perspective, be it a movement back to traditional church institutions, or different forms of the post- or outside-the-church religiosity (including the so-called “civil religion”). Also comparable to the Western European situation is what Grace Davie has called “believing without belonging.” In Eastern Europe as well as, for example, in Britain, a considerable number of people continue to believe in God without committing themselves to a particular church.

Following this logic, the idea that either the West or the East has become secularized is no longer sustainable. Rather than viewing this as an opposition between the sacred and the secular, Emile Durkheim’s functionalist perspective can shed new light on the relationship between the nation and religion, with religion as a means to create communal cohesion. Although religious consciousness in Eastern Europe has established itself historically and presently as a part of national and/or imperial identity, recent changes in social and political structures could begin to explain religion’s new revival. Social scientists have characterized “transitory societies” as plagued with social instabilities, economic crises, or a lack of reliable value systems. In this context, such societies seek compensation in faith

30 Tomka, Expanding Religion. 8–9.
31 Borowik, Jagodzinski, and Pollack, Religiöser Wandel.
33 See Davie, Religion in Britain since 1945.
and pursue a greater interest in the issues of state-church-cooperation. Still, the question of religious revival in Eastern Europe is under revision. Several sociologists doubt the validity and long life of any new trend. They point out that believers are mostly elderly people, live in villages or have a low level of education. Besides, a considerable group in many East European countries still declares themselves to be atheistic, and the percentage of regular church-goes is similar to that in Western Europe.35

Despite ongoing debates about modern East European religiosity and secularism, most sociologists agree that the rise of national ideas in the region after 1989 has strongly been determined by the religious dispositions of the populations. As stated by Miklós Tomka, “religion contributed to the strengthening of national sentiments in two ways: partly by direct cultural-symbolic means and references and partly indirectly, by encouraging social responsibility.”36 The “nationalization of religion” and the “sacralization of nations” in post-Communist Eastern Europe are terms that are suited for describing these processes. And the question of which role films from the region play in this mutual exchange “of cultural-symbolic means and references,” between nation and religion is, of course, the question at the core of our volume.

3. Imagining Nation and Religion in Cinema

How can we conceive of cinema’s role in this mutual exchange? The constructivist shift of paradigms in the research on nationalism in general, and Benedict Anderson’s book Imagined Communities (1983) in particular, have offered important insights in this regard. By introducing “imagination” and “identity” into the historical discussion on nationhood, Anderson’s ideas of the nation as “cultural artifact”37 have also stimulated literary and film studies, enabling questions of how texts and films participate in promoting national unity: how they trigger “imaginations” and help form nationalized identities.38 While Anderson himself was more interested in (infra-)structural conditions that enabled nationalism to evolve in the

35 Tomka, Expanding Religion, 6; Pollack, “Renaissance des Religiösen?”
36 Tomka, Expanding Religion, 188.
37 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 4.
38 For an overview on film studies see Hjort and MacKenzie, Cinema and Nation, including many suggestions for further reading. See also Vitali and Willemen, Theorising National Cinema. Some mayor recent studies on Eastern Europe are Condee, The Imperial Trace; Beumers, Russia on Reels; and Iordanova, Cinema of Flames.
19th century, his successors have worked more closely with the “imaginations” featured so prominently in his book’s title. Anderson left several important questions unanswered: How exactly was nationality “imagined”? What, for instance, made someone think of himself as “German” and what made him conceive of other people as “Germans” too—people that he would probably never meet in real life? What exactly was it that defined nationality, what did—to introduce a more cinematic question—“German-ness” actually look like? And, last but not least, why did people believe these things at all, what made these abstract concepts so attractive that people identified themselves with them—to the extent that they would even consider dying for their nation?

Since its beginnings in the 19th century, the cinema has been closely connected to national issues, even though most nations had already been “born.” On a production level, nation-states offered (differing) conditions for their film industries—e.g. funding, infrastructure, or national awards. The emerging film criticism at that time helped link the two concepts “film” and “nation” into the single notion of “national film” by labeling certain aesthetics or genres (e.g. German expressionism, Italian neorealism). Film historians wrote the histories of these cinemas as stories with beginnings, heights, and declines. It seems precarious, however, to think of “national cinema” in terms of national preferences for certain topics or aesthetic choices. Instead, it seems more productive to us to think of cinema as a protagonist on its own and to conceive of films as cultural agents that shape our notions of what it means to be “Polish” or “Italian.” Films like David W. Griffith’s monumental epic Birth of a Nation (1915) could depict what national origins might have looked like. Films could tell stories and show images that made one’s nationality something sensual. In cinema, national imaginaries could take shape, filling abstract concepts like “Germany” or the “United States” with life and meaning—maybe even more so than other media. With the help of its specific medial potential, film participates in the construction of national (and other) identities.

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39 It was only in chapters added later that Anderson came closer to defining the mechanisms he had termed “imagination”—when he explored how national history (“narratives of the nation”) is written; or how maps can serve help create the image of a shared space.


41 To think of films in terms of cultural agency, one must opt for a certain theoretical perspective. The key word here is “representation.” Representation does not mean that a film simply reproduces preexistent notions of nationality, but that it helps create and distribute these in the first place. This is where other influential theories on identity
In short, for us, films are powerful cultural agents that interact with multiple discourses and shape concepts of nationality by telling stories and showing pictures about the nation.

How do films do this? A first way to think of this agency was conceptualized by sociologists like Bernhard Giesen and Shmuel Eisenstadt. In a cultural-semiotic approach, they suggested thinking of national identity in a semiotic framework, as something which is shaped according to cultural codes. These codes of belonging can manifest themselves in films as well as in other media. Not only do they decide who is part of a (e.g. national) community and who is not; they also relate this difference of belonging/not-belonging to other semantic structures—like bodily features, knowledge about the past, or insight into some greater truth. Furthermore, since Giesen and Eisenstadt also reflect on the important role played by privileged social groups in creating and promoting these codes (notably intellectuals), the films’ directors come into view as powerful protagonists. There is even more to explore when one thinks about the specific medial features of films that help shape these codes in specific ways. One of these features is the (moving) image. After the “linguistic turn,” the role of images became the object of academic scrutiny in the later decades of the 20th century, triggering visual studies as a new field of research. The so-called “iconic” or “pictorial turn” started in art history and spread out to other humanities. It recalled the important role of images in constructing social realities. Images carry a special power, a dynamic that is overlooked by strictly linguistic models. In the center of this dynamic, we find what has been called the “iconic” as a specific feature of images. In a semiotic perspective, this can be understood as a form of signification. Charles S. Peirce suggested thinking of the “icon” as a special type of sign that links significer and signified by means of similarity;

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(e.g. gender and post-colonial studies) can join the study of film and nationalism. See for example Butler and Spivak, Who Sings the Nation-State?; Goscilo and Lanoux, Gender and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Russian Culture; Bhabha, Nation and Narration; Hall, “Introduction.”


43 See Mirzoeff, The Visual Culture Reader; Mitchell, What do Pictures Want?; Boehm, Wie Bilder Sinn erzeugen; Belting, Bilderfragen; Burda and Maar, Iconic Turn.

44 Starting with W.J.T. Mitchell’s essay “The Pictorial Turn” (1992), historians have turned to “visual history” as a field of research. See Roeck, “Visual turn?” For the study of Eastern European history, Frank Kämpfer promoted the insights of the “iconic turn.” See e.g. Kämpfer, Propaganda. For the connections to sociology, see Emmison and Smith, Researching the Visual.
an icon resembles the thing it represents. Other theorists have sought to understand the “iconic” as a feature that pertains to the perception of images in the context of discursive utterances. Images are perceived with the eyes; they do not only tell, but they do also show something.

All of this was, of course, no big news for film studies. Film criticism had since its beginnings in the 20th century always reflected on the special impact that images have for a movie’s way of producing meaning—be it in a more static (mise en scène) or a more dynamic sense (montage). Instead of tracing these discussions into detail, which seems quite impossible, we would like to address a dimension of images that is of particular importance for thinking about nation, religion, and cinema: how images and processes of identification are related. This dimension has long been on the film-analytical agenda, and it was psychoanalytical theory that has provided some useful answers. One way to conceive of the relationship between images and identification is the concept of the “imaginary,” which was originally developed by Jacques Lacan and imported to film analysis by (amongst others) Christian Metz. Lacan’s well-known model for the imaginary as one of three dimensions of psychic activity is the so-called “mirror stage.” An infant looking into a mirror is confronted with an image that contradicts its own deficiencies (e.g. motor skills). By incorporating this image of an “Other”—Lacan sometimes calls it phantasme—the “I” comes into existence. The catch, of course, is that this “I” can never be really complete but will from now on strive to overcome the “discordance with its own reality” by relating itself to images. All forms of identification are structured like this. Whenever identity is at stake in the individual’s history, a dimension of (image-based) fantasy will necessarily be there, and all sorts of images can function as the “primordial” mirror image.

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45 See Peirce, “Sign.” Another author who has discussed iconic signs is Umberto Eco, for whom the matter is somewhat more complex. He reminds us that ultimately, these “similarities” (at least partially) rely on arbitrary cultural codes, too. See Eco, A Theory of Semiotics.

46 Evidentia, as a sensible quality that is not limited to language, thus accompanies and is part of an image’s semiotic power, its ways of signifying something. The interplay of discursive (i.e. ideological) framing and evidentia has been explored by Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image.”

47 For an overview, see the texts in Braudy and Marshall, Film Theory and Criticism. A recent and influential analytical approach that stresses the filmic image is promoted by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. See Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art; Bordwell and Thompson, Film History.

48 Metz, The Imaginary Signifier.


50 Ibid., 76.
Film theory has taken this scenario as a starting point for reflecting on the modes and processes of identification in cinema. One way to do so is to consider the striking similarity of the mirror constellation and the cinematic screen. Like no other cultural institution, cinema as an *apparatus*—a constellation of media, techniques, and space—is suited for processes of identification. Films invite (maybe even enforce) identification since they offer us images, images that are always already part of identity. More concretely, this enables questions like: How can a camera perspective force a viewer to adopt a certain point of view? Why does a viewer identify with a suffering martyr? These means are closely linked to ideology, since they manage to “suture” films as a social product with their audience, with the viewers’ wishes and desires. This is where the political dimension of identity returns; a dimension that film analysis can and must shed a light on. Recent theories of the “social imaginary” have tried to combine psychoanalytical and discourse-theoretical approaches to social coherence by pointing out that “nationality” (like any other seemingly stable identity) can serve as a term that brings endless processes of identification to a halt and solidifies discourses of belonging. It is in this sense that cinema has been called the “imaginary institution par excellence.” In cinema, social imaginaries take shape by becoming (moving) pictures. Like books, films can offer stories that invite identification by enabling a viewer to perceive his or her nationality as something perfectly solid and stable, for example something having “roots.” In addition to that, films can however offer visual signifiers that serve the same purpose and are more suited for the interplay with the imaginary dimension of identity.

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51 For an overview see Elsaesser and Hagener, *Filmtheorie zur Einführung*.
52 See Baudry, “Ideological Effects.”
53 With his concept of an “imaginary signifier,” Christian Metz has elaborated on the interplay of identifying with the camera (that is, believing a film’s illusion) and referring back to one’s body in the cinema.
54 See Silverman, *The Subject of Semiotics*, 194ff. The concept of “suture” had been developed by the Lacan disciple Jacques-Alain Miller and became a prominent concept in film studies.
55 Hahn, “Das Subjekt des Spektakels,” 188. (my translation, CS)
56 Recent theories of the “social imaginary” that seek to combine psychoanalytical and discourse-theoretical approaches to social coherence have termed these signifiers (that Benedict Anderson had encountered, too) “empty signifiers.” See Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*; Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?”; and Laclau, *The Making of Political Identities*. For a discussion of how these “empty signifiers” can be employed in films and literature, see the essays in Grabbe, Köhler, and Wagner-Egelhaaf, *Das Imaginäre der Nation.*
There is, of course, also another side to this coin. If cinema is a place where identity takes shape as the Self, it is also the site where its Others are defined and appear on the screen. In terms of semiotics, how communities encode their “Others” can be traced back to movies as cultural products that create narratives and faces for these Others. Psychoanalytically, the Other is of course always already included in the formation of any “I.” In this latter case, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has argued for a necessary connection between national identity and racism. On the one hand, concepts of national identity (the formation of the communal “I”) entail a promise of unity, homogeneity, and harmony. On the other hand, this promise is always endangered by an Other who consequently must be fought off in order to “reach the goal” of attaining a stable sense of self. The energy of this violence ultimately stems from within. The result is racism and notions of Others that are defined by strange and perverted desires (“The Chinese eat strange food” or “All Serbs are cruel”)—the images of which can be found in cinema.

So far, only the relation of cinema and nation has been discussed—mainly in terms of (national) identity. But how can religion be part of this? Referring back to the concepts of “sacralization of the nation” and “nationalization of religion,” it seems productive to us to conceive of cinema as a site of transfer, where both processes become palpable. In this view, films are cultural mediators that are always already situated somewhere between national and religious claims, forging links between the two social spheres and their semiotic material. Again, it is possible to think of this in a couple of ways. When considering production, churches (like states) can be powerful social agents that have played an important role in film history by funding and promoting films, or enacting criticism and censorship. In this way, film production is situated somewhere in between state and church; both can collaborate or even compete with each other. Another factor of production is the films’ directors, whose national and/

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57 Identification thus must be thought of as a dialectical process. It includes the incorporation of a perfect Other (the complete image) in order to forget about one’s own “Otherness,” while on the other hand, internal “Otherness” is projected onto external persons.

58 Žižek explains this by referring to the Yugoslav conflicts. See Žižek, “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself!”

59 See Žižek, “Enjoy Your Nation As Yourself!”

60 See e.g. Norris and Torlone, Insiders and Outsiders in Russian Cinema; Hutchings, Russia and Its Other(s) on Film.

61 For a historical overview see the contributions in Lyden, Religion and Film. For examples from Eastern European film history see the contribution from Hans-Joachim Schlegel in this volume. For a case study see Natascha Drubek’s article in this volume.
or religious predispositions might have an influence on their movies or on the public discourses that these movies are embedded into.

There is even more to explore when it comes to the films themselves. Their form and content not only testify to the links forged between national and religious identities—as we have set out above—but they also help forge these links where they previously did not exist. On a semiotic level, this can be conceived as a mixing of codes; by combining religious codes of belonging with national ones, films can for example help sacralize a national identity. The most obvious way to do this would be to forge a semantic connection between a certain nationality and a confession—as is the case in Bortko’s *Taras Bulba* that links “Russian” and “Orthodox.” Connections like these will inevitably also point out “Others” that cannot be a part of the nationality in question (in this example, the “damned Poles”). The mixing might also occur on the level of narration; A nation’s history might be told by referring to religious intertexts—thereby introducing another sort of stability by referring to the experience of transcendence. This is what happens when images of national history in film contain elements such as an apocalypse, paradisiacal beginnings, or a time of national suffering (*passio*). Similarly, a national hero depicted as a savior or a martyr can contribute to the sacralization of this nation. What is at stake here is a semiotic transfer: the transfer of narratives, images, and codes between the discourses of nationalism and religion that mutually stabilize the communal identities that both offer.

Another kind of (structural) transfer comes into view when one thinks of the role that images play in religious theory and practice. The medial power of the iconic has certainly been influential in theology. While some denominations have used this power for religious purposes, others have tried to limit the use of icons, the most obvious example being the Muslim and Protestant *aniconisms*. In film studies, this issue was raised regarding the question of what the label “religious film” should refer to. Some have argued that the label should not be limited to films that depict religious practices (church services, priests, religious holidays) but could be useful in dealing with films that try to establish a new medium for representing a

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62 A recent study on apocalyptic narratives in Hollywood cinema, discussed in relation to multiple forms of identity, is Copier’s *Preposterous Revelations*. The contributions in Lyden, *Religion and Film*, discuss narrative elements (in relation to religion only), including “Redemption,” the “Apocalyptic,” “Heroes and Superheroes,” and “Sacrifice.”

63 See Eva Binder’s contribution in this volume.

64 See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*.
“religious,” transcendental sphere. This view opens up the possibility to compare how film represents transcendence with religious ways to do so. For instance, as Paul Schrader has pointed out in his influential *Transcendental Style in Film*, French director Robert Bresson’s films were influenced by the Orthodox theology of the icon. Eastern European directors have been particularly influential in this respect, notably Andrey Tarkovsky. If one thinks of religion and film this way, the transfer between religious and national codes in film can be analyzed on a structural level, enabling questions like: How do religious modes of representation (e.g. “transcendental style”) help to promote profane goals (e.g. nationality)?

The fluid transfer between religious and national modes of signification offers film viewers two important options for how to identify with the film and how to participate in the construction of an interdependent, multifaceted identity. A movie like Andrzej Wajda’s *Katyń* not only delineates Polish identity, but it does so by connecting this to models of masculinity on the one hand and Catholic ideas about martyrdom on the other. In this way, reflections on how the movie promotes and discusses that national identity make sense only if we take other forms of identity (gender and religious) into account. What is more, this makes it possible to recognize how and with which cinematic means the film narrates and imagines the identity’s notorious “Others.”

There remains, of course, an open question: to what extent Eastern European films from differing backgrounds perform a similar cross-over of religious and national codes and structures of representation. It seems necessary then to pose the question of how nation and religion interact in cinema in a more open way, i.e. as a question that does not only include the transfer of religious codes to national ones (and vice versa), but also allows for various rejections and/or reversals of these codes—for example by explicitly declining religious imagery. The articles in this volume will show, however, that even the more ambivalent ways of relating nation and religion cannot completely get rid of the European religious heritage altogether. The profane is, or so it seems to us, necessarily linked to the sacred.

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65 See the contributions in Lyden, *Religion and Film*.
67 This transfer can, of course, also be accompanied by a critical re-evaluation like in Aleksandr Sokurov’s *Russian Ark*, where the term transcendental style applies, but the relationship between Russia and religion is critically discussed. See Liliya Berezhnaya’s article in this volume.
68 See Jan Čulík’s and Christian Schmitt’s articles on Czech and Hungarian films respectively in this volume.
Another dimension that needs to be addressed when thinking about the relation of nation, religion, and Eastern European cinema, leads back to Vladimir Bortko’s *Taras Bulba*. As a historical film, the movie is clearly participating in shaping a temporal dimension of communal identity, i.e. memory. Conjuring up a “golden age” of communal cohesion as represented by the Cossack comradeship, the movie claims the past for present use. It is this dimension, of course, that is at the core of any historical research. This is also a dimension of potential conflict, since it is never self-evident what a community’s memory should include and what it should exclude. Creating a memory as a valid source of identity is always related to delineating and excluding “Others” and choosing whose stories are not part of what is officially told, recorded, and remembered. What is at stake here, too, are traumatic experiences that any memory has to confront in one way or another: either by forgetting them or by dissolving them into “soothing” narrations. In short, this perspective not only sheds light on how movies partake in the creation of a single, shared communal memory, but also opens up political readings that point towards possible pluralism and the integration of minorities.

This is particularly important in the case of Eastern Europe, which has never consisted of homogeneous units, but has been a mosaic of different peripheries and core regions because of its varying historical relationships to the Russian, Habsburg, and Ottoman Empires. As a result, there is a plethora of memories and histories to be considered. In this respect, the year 1989 was not only a starting point for a political remapping of Eastern Europe, but also for the re-conceptualization of national histories. The revisions not only affected history textbooks and university curricula but also the whole “topography of memory” in the region. The year 1991 saw the demolishing of the Felix Dzerzhynsky monument in Moscow as well as the erection of the Stepan Bandera monument in Ukrainian Kolomyya.69 Besides monuments, new street names, festivals, jubilees, national holidays, and museums were signs of a remarkable effort to reconsider history. What bound the region together was the demand for a new assessment of modernity, particularly of the 20th century. In nearly all countries, the revisionism was concentrated upon this key period,

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69 Felix Dzerzhynsky was the head of the Bolshevik state security department *Cheka*. Stepan Bandera was the leader of the West Ukrainian nationalist movement during WWII. On Ukrainian memory politics in film, see John-Paul Himka’s article in this volume.
starting with WWI. This is not surprising if one considers the events that took place in this period; events that were often violent and included shifts of political borders, mass deportations, and the repressive politics of totalitarian regimes. These all contributed to what we can think of as an unprecedented traumatization. American historian Timothy Snyder came up with the neologism *Bloodlands* to describe the region with respect to the shared history that memory has to deal with. For him, the territories between Poland and western Russia, through Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states, are all marked by “mass violence of a sort never before seen in history,” when from 1933 to 1945 “the Nazi and Soviet Regimes murdered some fourteen million people […]. Most were women, children, and the aged; none were bearing weapons.” Snyder’s analysis not only includes the victims of the Holocaust but also the Soviet famines, purges, and ethnic cleansings, and the atrocities of Nazi and Soviet occupiers against the non-Jewish population (like the Katyn murder of Polish officers, the blockade of Leningrad, or the rape of German women by the Soviet army). Furthermore, the mid 20th century civil wars (like the violence of the Ukrainian Organization of Nationalists or the Belarus partisans) are part of his book. Snyder’s endeavor to present 20th century Eastern Europe as a space (and a symbol) of suffering, political catastrophes, and inhuman politics seems to correspond with the general tendencies in contemporary memory studies.

While historians have pointed out shared experiences, memory discourses in the political space by contrast are often about the differences in their memories. From this perspective, the Eastern European memorial landscape is far from homogeneous. Attempts to cover up “blind spots” in national history may result in the sporadic appearance of new “prohibited topics,” or in conflicting memory cultures. Such a competition over historical narratives not only occurs between different national historiographical schools, but also within different historical traditions in the public discourses of a single country. The examples are numerous: from the recent Jewish-Polish discussion about Catholic crosses erected in Auschwitz to political scandals around the monument of the fallen Soviet soldier demolished in Tallinn. But how can we cope with these

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72 See Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*. 
differences in theoretical terms? Historian Stefan Troebst’s classification seems to be particularly instructive here. He suggests using an examination of how each country handles their totalitarian past as a criterion of differentiating among various cultures of memory in Eastern Europe. In a first group, represented by the Baltic States, societies have established a general consensus about the foreign and aggressive character of the Communist regime imposed from the outside. The second category includes countries where such a consensus has not been achieved. These countries—like Hungary and Ukraine—are still informed by political and historical debates about the meaning of their totalitarian past. A third group is defined by ambivalence and apathy in rethinking the Communist and/or fascist regimes as elements of one’s own past. Old structures have stayed powerful in Bulgaria and Romania, thus hampering open debates about the Soviet era. Finally, a forth category is formed by countries with a continuing authoritarian tradition and without particularly articulated distance to the Communist past (Russia, Belarus).

How does this taxonomy of memory politics relate to the nation and religion—or, to be more precise, to the complementary processes of the “nationalization of religions” and the “sacralization of nations,” as set out above? One prominent way to think about this explores the transfer of religious and national semantics in respect to communal discourses of remembering. Religious concepts can serve as a source of describing the national past. This is what Barbara Misztal calls the “sacralization of memory,” while pointing out that such processes are of particular importance in transitory periods. This applies to all groups classified by Troebst, but particularly to two categories: those, in which a consensus about a totalitarian past has not yet been achieved, and those, in which societal discourse has attributed a clearly positive or negative quality to this past. Hence, the first, second, and fourth groups fall into this definition, although in some cases, like Russia, Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Poland, or the Baltic countries, attempts to sacralize the memory of the 20th century are particularly selective depending upon the ideological preferences of the actors in debate.

Films are clearly an important factor in the creation of a communal memory. It is here where transfers between religious and national semantics take place; where national heroes are found in history and declared

73 See Troebst, “Introduction.”
74 Misztal, The Sacralization of Memory, 75.
martyrs; where traumas are covered up with help of “soothing” narratives; or where, more generally, “a kind of iconic status” is attributed to the past.75

On the other hand, films might lend a voice to those whose memories are not (yet) part of official discourses, paving the way to ethnic and religious pluralism.76 In this way, films can also serve as visual motors of interethnic and inter-confessional conflicts as well as of their resolution, depending on what is represented and how it is represented.77 But what should films look like to open up the possibility of pluralism? Is it even possible to create imagined communities on “burnt grounds”—in contexts that are ruled by frightening experiences, national traumas and haunting memories? And to what extent is it useful then to link religion and nation? These are the questions that are to be addressed in our book.

5. About the Contributions

The following articles are split into three sections that mirror the introductory remarks made so far. Being far from self-evident, we argued for the analytical benefits of conceiving of Eastern Europe post-1989 as a homogeneous space that deserves a comparative approach when it comes to film analysis. Our book starts with a historical survey that explores this space by shedding light on the interactions of religion and politics in Eastern European cinema throughout the eventful 20th century. In his article, Religion and Politics in Soviet and Eastern European Cinema: A Historical Survey, Hans-Joachim Schlegel addresses a couple of ways to conceive of these interactions. Starting with early Soviet films, he explores the political thrust of anti-clerical motifs as well as the uncanny commonalities between religious modes of representation and the cult of Stalin—including its cinematic forms. Religious motifs also inspired the aesthetics of avant-garde filmmakers like Sergey Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, while structural similarities between church and state allowed for a rather subtle form of criticizing Communist regimes under the guise of religious critique. Schlegel also traces the legacy of Andrey Tarkovsky’s spiritual movies that continue to inspire directors in the East and West;

75 Ibid., 69.
76 In the case of former Yugoslavia, Dina Iordanova has spoken of a “Cinema of Flames” to address the tricky problems of Christian-Muslim dialogue. See Iordanova, Cinema of Flames.
77 See Maria Falina’s article in this volume.
he addresses rather critically recent films that exploit religion, linking it to new nationalist agendas. While Schlegel’s article emphasizes developments in Soviet and Russian film, he also explores parallels in other Eastern European cinemas, thereby legitimating and preparing the comparative perspective of our volume as a whole.

I. Institutional Powers. The first section focuses on the complementary relationship of religion and nation—a relationship involving both processes of the “nationalization of religion,” and the “sacralization of the nation.” This presumes institutional interactions between church and state, but pertains also to a symbolic dimension since both processes take place wherever nation and religion are linked in a society’s discourses and practices. The articles in this section keep both dimensions in mind as they take a look at Russian and Ukrainian cinema of the last decade. In particular, tendencies towards a sacralization of national history are worked out. In Russian films, references to the Romanovs, the pre-Petrine period, Byzantium, and to WWII contribute to this on a symbolic level. The major agents are the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate and “religiously-fuelled” film-makers. The Ukrainian case seems to be more complicated. Here, the split between the churches and the conflict of historical memories (often described as East-West polarization) seem to have left traces in film production. Attempts to create national heroes—as all-Ukrainian saints—are obviously part of strategies to unite Ukraine, at least in the cinema.

The section opens with three articles addressing the Russian Orthodox Church’s role in the construction of national historical narrative(s). Stephen M. Norris’ text, Blessed Films: The Russian Orthodox Church and Patriotic Culture in the 2000s, is devoted to the impact of the Moscow Patriarchate’s marketing department on the promotion of movies with religious topics. Norris analyzes films that received an official blessing from the patriarch, like the documentary Zhitiye prepodobnogo Sergiya Radonezhskogo (2005). His article examines these films and their blessings in order to explain how the Orthodox Church has been involved in the patriotic culture of the Putin years. Norris argues that these blessings give the Russian Orthodox Church in our modern digital age the possibility to articulate its role in shaping history and Russian nationhood.

The Russian Orthodox Church’s attempts to influence Russian media are also the subject of Natascha Drubek’s study, Russian Film Premieres in 2010/11: Sacralizing National History and Nationalizing Religion. Focusing on three recent films, Nikita Mikhalkov’s Utomlennyye solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye (2010), Utomlennyye solntsem 2: Tsitadel (2011), and Vladimir
Khotinenko's *Pop* (2009), Drubek traces striking similarities between the ideological messages suggested by these films and the sermon of Patriarch Kirill on the occasion of Victory Day in May 2010. The article takes a close look at the background of the premieres of *Pop* and *Predstoyaniye* and their reception in 2010. Drubek claims that all three films accentuate the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in the WWII. The defeat of Nazi-Germany is thus celebrated as an Orthodox victory both in the official texts of the patriarchate and recent Russian films.

In her article *Longing for the Empire: State and Orthodox Church in Russian Religious Films*, Liliya Berezhnaya considers cinematic depictions of the imperial past as a part of the so-called “imperial turn” in Russian culture and the intellectual sphere in general. At the end of the 1990s, this turn coincided with a renewed filmic interest in religious topics, which came from both film-makers and from the Orthodox Church itself. Berezhnaya investigates the impact of the “imperial and religious turns” on these movies and examines the connections of religious motifs upon the formation of the Russian imperial narrative. In focus of her analysis are recent documentaries, like *Zemnoye i nebesnoye* (2004) or *Romanovy. Ventsenosnaya semya* (2000), *Gibel imperii. Vizantiysky urok* (2008) as well as a feature film *Russky kovcheg* (2002), in which the sacralization of empire is most notable. Berezhnaya argues that the Russian imperial past is often presented as an ideal sacral “site of memory” to serve as a model for contemporary church-state relations.

Finally, John-Paul Himka’s article *A Cinematic Churchman: Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky in Oles Yanchuk’s “Vladyka Andrey”* explores a biopic about the famous Ukrainian churchman, Greek Catholic Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky (1865–1944). Situating the film within Yanchuk’s oeuvre, Himka reads the movie as an attempt to invent a saintly figure that fits the aspirations of all social and religious groups in contemporary Ukraine. The idea behind the film was to “nationalize” the memory of a church leader in order to create a sacralized historical narrative about the Ukrainian interwar past. However, according to Himka’s critical reading, the film director erected a rather hollow monument to one of the most compelling characters of modern Ukraine, imprisoning Sheptytsky within his nationalist agenda.

II. Sacred and Profane Images. The articles assembled in the second section take a closer look at films’ role in shaping communal imaginaries with the help of images and narrations. What is under particular scrutiny here,
are films’ medial features—their ways of narrating and representing—and their impact on social reality. Since cinema’s role as a mediator between nation and religion can best be grasped in our view in terms of a semiotic transfer, the articles in this section take a closer look at how the transfer between religious and national codes, between sacred and profane images works in different contexts. By presenting three possibilities, the articles testify to the diversity of Eastern European films when it comes to mediating between nation and religion. While some examples from Russian cinema force close connections between nationality and confession, religious codes are used in more ambivalent ways elsewhere: be it as a means to designate a position to national Others (Czech cinema), or as emptied-out forms that are part of a self-reflective play of representation (Hungary). These examples seem to testify to another trend: a secularization of religious forms in contemporary cinema.

In her article *Rethinking History: Heroes, Saints, and Martyrs in Contemporary Russian Cinema*, Eva Binder discusses motifs that are transferred from the archives of religious imagery to nationalist contexts. Binder examines images of heroes, saints, and martyrs in Russian films of the 2000s, a decade of a renewed Russian nationalism that has shown a noticeable interest in history. This history is construed with help of patriotic narratives about the Russian nation that are recurrently tied to Orthodoxy. In a close reading of the films *Admiral* (2008) and *Tsar* (2009), Binder is able to show how signifiers of Russian Orthodox faith are presented as essential generators of national identity. In other words, “Russian” is made to equal “Orthodox” once more.

While in Russian cinema, these images testify to a “positive” transfer as a strategy of sacralizing national identity with help of religious imagery, a “negative” transfer can be noticed in Czech cinema. Jan Čulík’s article *The Godless Czechs? Cinema, Religion, and Czech National Identity* explores cinematic traces of a national identity that has usually been constructed in secular terms. In a historical tour through Czech cinema of the last decades, Čulík is able to demonstrate how religion itself has nevertheless been used in film to create communal cohesion. While religious motifs do not contribute to the creation of a national Czech mythology, they can still serve as a suitable representation of society’s imaginary “Other.” Communal cohesion is established by using religion as a metaphor for bigotry, inflexibility or oppression.

The tension between profane and sacred imagery is also at the center of Christian Schmitt’s article *Beyond the Surface, Beneath the Skin:
Immanence and Transcendence in Györgi Pálfi’s Films. Schmitt takes a closer look at two Hungarian films that evoke European cinema’s surrealist heritage, *Hukkle* (1999) and *Taxidermia* (2001). Both films make use of a form of representation known in film criticism as “transcendental style.” By way of close reading, the article traces how this form becomes part of a self-reflective play, thereby questioning religious ideas of transcendence altogether. In both movies, thus Schmitt’s thesis, a religious form is secularized to the extent that the film form itself becomes visible as an agent of “meaning making.” If there is anything holy to be found in obscure Hungarian villages and/or history, it is film form itself.

III. Conflict, Trauma, and Memory. The third section is devoted to topics that seem to call for particular attention in the Eastern European context: the dimension of conflict, memory, and trauma, which is intrinsically linked to questions of nation and religion. By pointing out historical victims or heroes with help of religious semantics, films from Eastern Europe contribute to the “sacralization of memory.” In this perspective, the interaction of nation and religion not only points to a temporal dimension of identity. It is also related to the possibilities of pluralism in a world that still makes use of national, religious and other identities for political purposes.

The section’s first article introduces Polish cinema with Maren Röger’s article *Narrating the Shoah in Poland: Post-1989 Movies about Polish-Jewish Relations in Times of German Extermination Politics*, in which she explores how the Holocaust was finally re-inscribed into Polish national memory after 1989. The article concentrates on how feature films by Andrzej Wajda, Roman Polański and Feliks Falk and a documentary by Jolanta Dylewska frame the Holocaust nationally and religiously. She argues that after the outbreak of the Jedwabne debates (about the persecution of Jews by Polish peasants under German occupation), these films concentrate on the contradictory aspects of Polish-Jewish relations. A true confrontation with religion is largely absent from these movies, and Röger emphasizes the “educational” function of showing Jewish holidays and religious rituals in a modern Poland.

In his paper *Memory, National Identity, and the Cross: Polish Documentary Films about the Smolensk Plane Crash*, Mirosław Przylipiak analyses the political and symbolic consequences of the 2010 Smolensk plane crash that killed 96 people including Polish president Lech Kaczyński, and the crash’s connection to the 1940 Katyn Massacre. Przylipiak examines how documentary films represented the catastrophe and unified national
symbols of "Polishness" with religious discourse. For him this event is a subsequent stage in an ongoing struggle to preserve national identity and its relationship to trauma. Przylipiak shows two conflicting tendencies in the public debates and films about the Smolensk catastrophe. One is to combine Polish national identity with Catholicism; the other is to link anti-clericalism with a dismissal of historical tragedies as signifiers of "Polishness." For Przylipiak, these are two opposing poles featuring relations between religion and nation in modern Poland.

Finally, we move to the cinema of former Yugoslavia. Maria Falina examines this particularly violent case of "burnt grounds" left by the wars of the 1990s. In her article, *Religion Visible and Invisible: The Case of Post-Yugoslav Anti-War Films*, she examines three movies that explicitly condemn violence and war: *Pred dozdot* (1994), *Lepa sela lepo gore* (1996), and *Turneja* (2008). While all three movies critically re-evaluate the nationalist politics of the 1990s as the directors’ individual reactions to the post-traumatic experiences of Balkan society, they differ in their assessment of the link between religious and national identity and a discourse of perpetual suffering. When misused by nationalists, religion functions as a potential for conflict, as dangerous gunpowder in multiconfessional communities. Movies like *Turneja* might offer a possible alternative, non-violent interpretation of the religion-nation bond.

These Yugoslav and Polish alternatives (as indicated in the Przylipiak article) show us a multifaceted picture of cinematic reactions to historical traumas in a region where national and religious identities are often tightly connected. Whether this tendency will further be supported by the film-makers, or whether the "return of religion" in Eastern European cinema will turn into a one-sided process, remains a question for further investigation.

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**Bibliography**


In 1942 the 29-year-old Hungarian film director István Szőts shot his *Emberek a havason* (*Men on the Mountain*), which later served as a strong impetus for the Italian Neorealism film school.¹ It tells a story of a poor peasant family from the Transylvanian mountains whose only shelter is religion. It also tells the story of how greedy speculators destroy the traditional peasant lifestyle. Szőts’s film was condemned by the Horthy Fascists as “Communist propaganda” and by the local Communists as “religious agitation.” Religious motifs in films were regarded by both totalitarian regimes as a basis for potential upheavals. The individual’s appeal to the Divine posed a danger that could not be controlled by secular authorities.

This article focuses on the major stations of cinema’s confrontation with religion and church. Particular attention is devoted to the Russian (Soviet) filmography due to the fact that its experience with this confrontation is the oldest one, it dates back to 1917. After 1945, regardless of various religious and cultural peculiarities, many countries of the so-called “Eastern bloc” had to go through the same challenges that Russia worked through in the decades preceding. What brings these filmographies together is the fact that Eastern European filmmakers continued to use (sometimes as a manifestation of their protest attitudes) religious motives in their works, despite the official atheistic state doctrine. In particular it applies the so-called Thaw period (mid-1950s to the early 1960s). The article explores these very confrontations, working only with those films which place religion at the center of the narration.

The February Revolution of 1917 in Russia brought with it cinematic liberty and the end of the clerical/state censorship. In early Soviet times, popular mainstream cinema made use of this new liberty by satirically depicting the downside of religion, e.g. bigoted clerics or diabolical nuns. More seriously, avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s and 1930s explored the role of religious concepts in a new world dominated by materialist

¹ Schlegel, “Il ministro del cinema di Stalin,” 288–89.
concepts. While directors and theorists like Sergey Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov tried to deconstruct religious views with their dialectic-materialist concepts, they also referred to religious concepts in a productive way to develop their own aesthetics. Stalinist politics were accompanied by harsh attacks on church institutions, but at the same time, cinematic mockery of Orthodoxy was a surprising taboo—explainable by the obvious structural similarities between church and state. Stalin’s cult of personality was heavily influenced by Orthodox rituals and iconography, and this left traces in the cinema, too. The structural similarities between state and church allowed for a special form of subversive criticism used by filmmakers after Stalin’s death. The 1960s saw a renaissance of religious values and traditions, culminating in the “spiritual” movies of Andrey Tarkovsky that have been influencing directors from all over the world until today. The development of such new spiritual forms has continued since 1989, but the films using it now have to compete against blockbuster productions of relentlessly commercialized film markets, which include new forms of exploiting religion and linking it to nationalist agendas. On the other hand, current cinema has also given way to productions that foreground a new plurality of the religious and fresh scrutiny for the meaning of spiritual phenomena in people’s everyday life.

Anti-Clericalism in Early Soviet Film

The film history of “real socialism” ended in 1989, when the vaults of censored material that until then were so strictly protected were opened.2 A similar opening marks the beginning of the very same history 72 years earlier. In August 1917, after the downfall of the Romanov Dynasty, Alexandr Kerensky’s provisional government dissolved the Most Holy Synod along with its lay head, the Chief Procurator, which had been introduced by Tsar Peter I. 1917 also saw the end of a narrow-minded state-church film censorship, which had for instance banned Yakov Protazanov’s film Ukhod velikogo startsa (Departure of a Grand Old Man; 1912; literally: The Death of the Grand Starec) because the excommunicated Leo Tolstoy is shown to be welcomed in heaven by Christ with open arms. The end of censorship—as a way of disciplining culture and spirit—was embraced

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2 In the USSR, this process began as early as (the perestroika year) 1986, on the 5th Congress of Filmmakers. See Pyaty syezd kinematografistov SSSR; and Schlegel, “Das zweite Tauwetter.”
by liberal urban intellectuals and a petty bourgeois audience alike. This audience was not only interested in films that had until then been forbidden, but also in more popular subject matter: anti-clerical comedies, satires and action movies, speculative Rasputin- and Gapon-films, and "satanic parlor dramas."³

Their demand was met with a plethora of trivial entertainment movies, produced by private studios—not at all pro-Bolshevik—which still had a dominant market position. Most of these movies have anti-clerical overtones. A notable example in cinematic regards is Protazanov’s *Satana likuyushchy* (*Satan Triumphant*; 1917), showing Russian superstar Ivan Mozhukhin as a puritanical Lutheran priest who becomes a debauchee and thief under the influence of the devil.⁴ It is remarkable that the movie is set in the Baltic provinces, as they had only been independent for a short while. Protazanov’s successful anti-clerical vaudeville film *Prazdnik svyatogo Yorgena* (*Holiday of St. Jorgen*; 1930, after a Danish novel by Harald Bergstedt) is set in a foreign country as well—as are many comparable films. Similarly, Mikhail Romm’s *Pyshka* (*Boule de suif*; 1934), based on Maupassant’s famous novel, unmasks the bigoted morals of Catholic nuns in the Franco-Prussian War (1870/71). What seems to have been a tactical respect for the national-religious feelings of the Russian audience at first by placing religious critique in foreign countries became the official norm after the mid-1930s in Stalin’s ideology of centralized Russian imperialism. There were, however, also some movies that made fun of Russian clericalism, for example the filmic satire *Skazka o pope Pankrate* (*Tale of Priest Pankrat*) by Nikolay Preobrazhensky and Aleksandr Arkatov, which premiered as early as 1918, on the first anniversary of the October Revolution. The movie was based on a manuscript by the leading anti-religious labor poet Demyan Bedny. In Aleksandr Panteleyev’s comedy *Chudotvorets* (*The Miracle-Maker*; 1922) a sentry fools Russian society, including the tsar’s family, by claiming that a diamond (in fact stolen by him) was given to him by the Mother of God. More cinematically notable, however, is

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³ Scandal-ridden Siberian itinerant preacher and mental healer Grigory Yefimovich Rasputin was introduced to the tsar’s family in 1907. He soon became a controversial figure of public life that not only stimulated Soviet films, but also films in the US, Germany, France, and Italy. The Russian Orthodox priest Georgy Apollonovich Gapon collaborated as an *agent provocateur* with the tsar’s secret police *okhrana*. In 1905, he organized a workers’ procession to present a petition to the tsar which ended tragically (“Bloody Sunday”).

⁴ For more information on this actor who emigrated to France in 1920, see Sannwald, “D’autre monde.”
Aleksandr Medvedkin’s satire Schastye (Happiness; 1935), which employs stylistic elements from traditional Russian prints (lobok).5

Another cinematic way of dealing with religion becomes evident starting in the mid-1920s, when educational films and documentaries were made about Russian sects or to document the transformation of churches to working clubs. More profound thematic examinations did not however stand a chance on the film market during the times of Lenin’s New Economic Policy, even though film industry had been nationalized by a Lenin decree (27 August 1919). The new market’s film economists still pinned their hopes on the same lucrative entertainment goods which made Leon Trotsky compare “Vodka, Church and Film” in the Pravda from 12 July 1923.6 In the eyes of the distributors, even popular science films—like Vsevolod Pudovkin’s Mekhanika golovnogo mozga (Mechanics of the Brain; 1926), which deals with Ivan Pavlov’s theories—did not stand a chance and were therefore evaluated as “secondary.”7

A way out of this dilemma can be found in a tactical maneuver employed by Grigory Roshal in his Salamandra (Salamander; 1928): The historical case of the Viennese biologist Paul Kammerer (in the movie: “Professor Zange”) is transformed into a genre movie, full of trivial clichés. Kammerer had been a controversial figure at his time and he was criticized for his hereditary experiments with toads that later turned out to be forgeries. The movie about his life is composed as a thriller, full of scheming Jesuits and fascistic aristocrats—it even includes a popular science film about the gene-modifying power of environmental influences. In the final scenes, People’s Commissar Anatoly Lunacharsky himself offers the hunted materialist scientist political asylum and work in the USSR, where “creative thinking is esteemed.” In Germany, this movie inspired public outrage for its “degradation of German intelligence (Geistesleben),”8 and it was ultimately forbidden. The comments of well-known Russian critic Khrisanf Khersonsky reveal his skepticism when he writes in Pravda from 30 December 1928:

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5 This movie had been forgotten for a long time, in spite of Eisenstein’s enthusiastic praise, and was only edited anew in post-Soviet times. See Eisenstein, “Styazhateli,” 231–32.
6 Trotsky, “Vodka, tserkov i kinematograf.”
7 Yerofeev, “Vtorostepennye filmy.”
8 Scheffer, “Der Salamander in Moskau.” This and all the following translations from German (source texts as well as secondary literature): Christian Schmitt and Eric Scheufler.
The plot of *Salamandra* is based on the fight for scientific truth, for humans, and for political aims that, in a bourgeois society, lead to the destruction of the existence of a materialist scientist and his scientific results. For Soviet film art, this is a new and relevant topic. But the result is utterly vague. The movie did not succeed in translating this intriguing philosophical topic into the language of convincing facts. [...] The movie combines a serious topic with not-so-well-chosen entertainment.  

**Secularizations of the Left Wing Avant-garde**

Consequently, Roshal’s *Salamandra* came under attack from all sides. In particular, the movie contradicted the more stringent dialectic-materialist film concepts that directors of the left wing avant-garde tried to develop at about the same time. The common goal of these concepts—developed not only by Soviet directors, but also by their Czech, Hungarian, Romanian, and Serbian counterparts—was to liberate film art from all sorts of restraints, including religious irrationalism, with help of anti-illusory means. Important impulses came from Western European Enlightenment, scientific Positivism, and aesthetic Modernism. The results of this mixture are seen in figures like the electrical robot woman in the (never realized) script of *Zhenshchina Edisona (The Edison-Woman; 1923)*, written by Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, members of the Petrograd avant-garde group *FEKS*. This electrical woman, developed by American inventor Thomas Alva Edison, fights the “counter-revolutionary” return of the old-Russian world of “popes, distillers, and bureaucrats.” She can be seen as an alternative draft of Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s electro-magnetic *Eve future* (1886), which was a hybrid of technical utopianism and occultism. In contrast to this, the Edison-woman neatly embodies the early Soviet devotion to technology. This includes the vision of a “psychophysical conversion of the present ‘human material’ according to technical parameters,” a “conversion of the human body into a constantly productive machine.”

Soviet director and film theorist Dziga Vertov expanded this into his concept of “life caught unawares” that includes a transformation of man

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9 Khersonsky, “Otvet Lunacharskogo.”
12 Gassner, “Der neue Mensch,” 160; 171.
with the help of the unerring camera lens. In an allusion to the cabalistic, all-seeing eye of God, Vertov—who grew up in Jewish-influenced Białystok—speaks of a “Cine Eye” (*kinoglaz*). This filmic eye, which is also directed at the “poetry of moving and self-moving machines,” was supposed to change man “from a bumbling citizen through the poetry of the machine into the perfect electric man”: “We’ll join man and machine together, we’ll raise new humans.” In an allusion to the biblical Genesis, Vertov sometimes also refers to this New Man as a “new Adam”—a wording that exceeds the trivial ballyhoo of the entertainment films discussed by far. The vision that is at hand here is that of a “Second Creation,” to be obtained with help of the altering power of film-technical and—compositional procedures.

A similar approach informed Sergei Eisenstein’s theory of film form that the Soviet director and theorist conceived of as a “dialectical approach.” Art, for Eisenstein, is “life-construction” (*zhiznestroyeniye*), a “changing factor of a changing reality.” He too positioned himself in a programmatic opposition to the fictions of contemporary trivial movies that sought to make their audience forget their everyday lives. Unlike Vertov however, whose “Cine Eye” was meant to catch reality at its purest (non-staged), Eisenstein envisages the “filmic fist” of impact (*vozdeystviye*). The basic law of this impact will serve as the basis for Eisenstein’s investigation of the arts and sciences from the most diverse cultures and epochs. His impulses come from manifold sources: Friedrich Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature*, which conceptualizes mechanics and technology as imitating nature by using its basic laws for a “secular Creation”; Leonardo da Vinci’s belief in the necessary unity of rationality and emotions, of concepts and images; and psychoanalysis as developed by Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung: creative cinematic “influence” comes into being for Eisenstein at the “seam” of the conscious and the unconscious. In the course of his search for the “structure of things” (*stroyeniye veshchey*)—the laws of construction from the physical and psychological world that could be transferred into film form—Eisenstein turned to religious ceremonies and rituals as well. What he detects there are *ecstatic* structures, forms for stepping out of a certain

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13 See Bochow, *Vom Gottmenschentum zum Neuen Menschen.*
15 Eisenstein, “Dramaturgie der Film-Form,” 20ff.
16 Engels worked on the *Dialektik der Natur* from 1873 to 1883 and from 1885 to 1886. It was first published in Moscow and Leningrad in 1925 in German and Russian; then in 1962 as volume 20 of the Eastern Berlin edition of Marx’ and Engels’ works.
state in order to enter some different, qualitatively new state. Not only did he detect this in the religious exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, but also in Mexican Passion plays, the cult of the Holy Grail, the mass ecstasies of Lisieux and Lourdes, the composition of El Greco’s and Piranesi’s paintings, or in relics and sacred architecture. Here, the religious becomes the object of semiotic analysis—which ultimately even serves to unveil structural analogies with the ecstatic dimension of the orgasm. This is not meant blasphemously; neither is there any blasphemy in Eisenstein’s psychoanalytic-semiotic interpretation of the vaginal oval that church frescoes use to surround the Christ Pantokrator. Instead, in Eisenstein’s view, this form becomes a symbol for the necessary unity of female and male in the act of creation.17 It is in this sense, too, that we have to understand the common denominator of sadomasochism that he detects in Mexican Passion rituals and in bull fights—an analogy that Eisenstein points out in a drawing that shows a bull and a torero hanging on a cross together in a position that symbolizes the mixture of love and death, eros and thanatos.

As a filmmaker, Eisenstein took ecstatic phenomena like these from their original context in order to transpose their rhythmical structures onto cinematic depictions of everyday situations, thereby forcing his audience into a mode of intensive, attentive perception. This is how he uses, for example, the cultic structure of the mystery of the Holy Grail in Staroye i novoye (Old and New; 1929) to present a butter machine as a “baptismal font of new life”; its mechanical rhythm becomes perceivable (unconsciously) as an orgiastic, miraculous event. The successful “miracle” of the mechanical butter machine stands in contrast to (and triumphs over) the fiasco of a religious supplicatory procession that precedes it.18 By joining the rational and emotional, the conscious and unconscious impact, Eisenstein also overcame the kind of rather abstract, intellectual composition of images that he had employed in the God-sequence of his Oktyabr (October; 1928) in order to deconstruct the “idea of God as such.” With the help of his structural-analytical view, Eisenstein finally also discovered the Bible as an archive of “eternal subject material,” of basic situations that are always valid. Thus, the story of Abraham, who is ready to sacrifice his son Isaac because of his fear of God, became the source of inspiration for his film Bezhin lug (The Bezhin Meadow; 1935/37)—a film that was

17 Eisenstein, Metod, t. 1: Grundproblem, 285.
later forbidden, maybe even destroyed because of its biblical stylizations. In spring 1935, film minister Boris Schumyatsky criticized Eisenstein for choosing the biblical story as its main point of reference instead of depicting the class struggle in a village in a socialist-realistic way.\(^{19}\) This movie also contains striking examples for a kind of pictorial secularization: In scenes depicting a \textit{riza}, i.e. the glittering cover protecting an icon, the cover no longer protects saints but peasants instead, the new lords and saints of history. In the same film, Eisenstein was inspired by the “reversed perspective” of the Orthodox icon.\(^{20}\) As the theologian, art historian and semiotician Pavel Florensky before him, he found the composition of Andrey Rublyov’s icon of the Trinity to be a formal incarnation of the idea of the trinity.\(^{21}\) In opposition to Florensky, however, for whom the icon was convincing proof for God’s existence (“There is Rublyov’s \textit{Trinity}, thus there is God.”),\(^{22}\) Eisenstein’s fascination is based on his conviction that he was right when he sought to make ideas and becoming-ideas visual in pictorial forms of composition. The Orthodox notion of the icon as an incarnation of divine \textit{logos} in lacquer and wood, as a window to the transcendental, is secularized by Eisenstein. It becomes the dialectical unity of image and idea, of the visible and the invisible, of conscious and unconscious perception. In the end his ideas even imply the resurrection of the unity of image and word, a unity that had been destroyed in late Antiquity.\(^{23}\)

\textit{Soviet Centralism and Local Traditions}

Very different, yet innovative filmic paths were developed by Aleksandr Dovzhenko in Kyiv whose films became later, in the 1960s, important sources for the rediscovery of the spiritual and religious by Andrey Tarkovsky and Sergey Paradzhanov, amongst others. By drawing from the archives of archaic Ukrainian legends and imagery, Dovzhenko was able to transform filmed reality into dreamlike visions that bear a resemblance to surrealist aesthetics.\(^{24}\) The elements of natural-philosophy or rather

\(^{19}\) See Seton, \textit{Sergey M. Eisenstein}, 361.
\(^{20}\) See Florensky, \textit{Die umgekehrte Perspektive}.
\(^{22}\) Florensky, \textit{Die Ikonostase}, 75.
\(^{24}\) See Trymbach, “Kontexte des Surrealen im ukrainischen Film”; Zubavina, “Surreales im ukrainischen Film.”
natural religion, which can be found in films like *Zemlya* (*Earth*; 1930), provoked severe reactions in the USSR and in Germany as well as by atheists and clerics alike. Anti-religious labor poet Demyan Bedny, for instance, condemned the “counterrevolutionary” spirit of this film in his lyrical feuilleton *Filosofy* (*Philosophers*) in *Izvestiya* from 4 April 1930. In Germany it was due to Prelate Wienken, a Catholic member of *Filmprüfstelle Berlin*, that the film could only be shown to “a selected group of people that could prove with their ID cards that they were members of the film industry, specialized press and daily press.” When Berlin newspapers protested against this, the journal *Filmrundschau*, published in Essen, counterattacked with indignant polemics:

> If the German people’s religious feelings could be harmed by this movie is something that Berlin critics are surely not appointed to decide. Their verdict gives a clear testimony that they do not differ a lot from those Russian film peasants. Unfortunately, they might set the tone in some respects, but their power stops when it comes to the “religious feelings” of the German people, i.e. the imprint on the German soul.  

In his film *Dzhalma* (1928), Dovzhenko’s Ukrainian colleague Arnold Kordyum linked the contemporary kolkhoz topic with Christian intolerance towards a Chechen Muslim: A mob of *kulaks* tries to lynch a Muslim woman, but not without forcing the village priest to baptize her first. At the last moment, poor peasants save her life. Many of the “Chechen movies” that were produced during the 1920s, mainly in Georgia and Ukraine, stress the social causes for the bloody, century-old Christian-Muslim conflicts to be overcome by the “international brotherhood” of the new society.  

At the same time, these movies notably strive to depict Christian and Muslim rites in an authentic way. This is very obvious in Siko Dolidze’s *Posledniye krestonostsy* (*Last Crusaders*; 1934) and in Nikolay Lebedev’s documentary *V strane Nakhcho / Chechnya* (*The Land of Nakhcho / Chechnya*) from 1930, which was made with help of a Chechen adviser. Yet, some years later, Mikhail Kalatozov was no longer allowed to shoot his film *Shamil*—based on his own short story that had been published in 1936 in *Iskusstvo kino*. The protagonist of the story, Dagestani Imam Shamil, who had until then been celebrated in Soviet school books as a freedom fighter against tsarist colonialism, had been declared an agent of anti-Russian, Anglo-Turkish

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26 See Schlegel, “Das Bild des Anderen.”
imperialism in 1935. Ivan Kvaleridze’s already-completed film *Prometey* (*Prometheus*; 1935, preserved as a fragment only) was prohibited as well—it shows Ukrainians, Russians, and Georgians joining Imam Shamil’s fight against the double eagle of Tsarist Russia, and speaking in their own languages. Such multilingualism had to give way to Russian at this time.27

*Orthodox Iconography and the Cult of Stalin*

When Lenin’s internationalism was replaced by Stalin’s doctrine of “Socialism in One Country” beginning in the late 1920s, this meant the return of a greater-Russian idea as basis of a centralized, totalitarian rule. While this did not bring an end to the persecutions of the Orthodox Church, church history was nevertheless surprisingly re-evaluated. A first course was set in 1936, when Stalin banned Demyan Bedny’s opera farce *Bogatyri* (*Knights-errant*) because it ridiculed the “historically progressive role of Russian Christianization.”28 Beginning with the second half of the 1930s, historical films were also obligated to stress only the positive role of the Russian Orthodox Church—that is at the same time when the old revolutionary guards were liquidated in show trials. This is obvious in films like Sergey Eisenstein’s *Aleksandr Nevsky* (1938), Vsevolod Pudovkin’s and Mikhail Doller’s *Minin i Pozharsky* (*Minin and Pozharsky*; 1939) or Igor Savchenko’s *Bogdan Khmelnitsky* (1941). In his introduction to the *Christian Encyclopedia of Film 1909–1999*, Russian film critic Vladimir Semerchuk stresses the fact that “what could be seen on the screen sometimes differed greatly from the official church policy of Soviet authorities.”29 He has also spoken of a “positive melody” to be heard in Soviet cinema of the 1920s, following the harsh “attacks on church and Christian religion.”30 While it is true that religion and clericalism were attacked on screen in Stalinist times, too, these—frequently intense—attacks were, as I have already briefly discussed, solely directed against Catholics and Protestants of hostile foreign origin. In Mikhail Chyaureli’s *Padeniye Berlina* (*The Fall of Berlin*; 1950), it is a papal ambassador, Cardinal Asegnio, who delivers

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27 In addition to the common Russian allusion-versions, sometimes versions were produced in other languages of the multi-ethnic USSR as well, including Yiddish.
29 Semerchuk, “Pod znakom politiki i ideologii,” 9.
30 Semerchuk, “Pod znakom politiki i ideologii,” 14.
papal blessings to Hitler and his “crusade against Bolshevism” in 1941. In
Mikhail Kalatozov’s *Zagovor obrechyennykh* (*Conspiracy of the Doomed*; 1950), American clerics and ambassadors try to free a fictive socialist
country from the Soviet alliance with the help of the Marshall Plan and
political assassinations. In 1953, Aleksandr Faintsimmer depicts Vatican
agents who try to stop the collectivization of Lithuanian agriculture with
terrorist acts (*Nad Nemanom rassvet; It’s Dawn over the Neman*), whereas
in his *Ovod* (*The Gadfly*; 1956), reactionary Catholic priests break the vow
of chastity and the confessional secret.

On the other hand, comparable filmic attacks on the Russian Orthodox
Church were inhibited by Stalin, who in 1943 even conceded the office
of the patriarch back to the church after it had been abolished by Peter
the Great. Presumably, Stalin as a runaway priest seminarian was still
fascinated by the authoritarian structure of this church and its national-
religious impact. In 1937/38 he allowed Sergei Eisenstein to make a movie
about one of its saints and a national hero alike: *Alexandr Nevsky.* The
Grand Prince Alexandr served also as a role model that Stalin recom-
mended as a “leader in the Holy War of the people” to those troops that
departed in December 1941 in order to defend Moscow. Stalin delivered
his speeches in a semi-liturgical style, standing on top of the Soviet sanctum
sanctorum: the mausoleum of Lenin, who had been embalmed like
a saint against his explicit wish. Cameramen reported later that they had
to re-stage Stalin’s speeches in the studio, according to strictly canonized
rules of image and sound. One of Stalin’s architectural visions was antici-
pated by Aleksandr Medvedkin’s *Novaya Moskva* (*The New Moscow*; 1938),
using animation techniques to erect a “Babylonian” Palace of the Soviets
(*Dvorec Sovetov*) with a Lenin statue reaching for the clouds, where once
Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior had stood. In propagandistic
documentaries, as later cited and criticized by Nikita Mikhalkov in his
*Utomlennye solntsem* (*Burnt by the Sun*; 1994), airplanes carry flags of Stal-
in portraits across the sky above the Lenin mausoleum. A highlight of this
iconographic “deification” of Stalin is to be found in the finale of Mikhail
Chyaureli’s *Padeniye Berlina*, already mentioned earlier: Here, Stalin is
depicted as a messianic Savior, leaving a plane that has advanced through

31 Although the production of this film had been paused during the Molotov-
Ribbentrop Pact, its hymn was broadcasted by Radio Moscow immediately after the news
of the treacherous German invasion. See Schlegel, “Alexander Nevskij.”
33 See Schlegel, “Bilderstürme.”
the sky above the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag in Berlin. He then receives the homage of the liberated peoples and Soviet soldiers whose battle call had tellingly changed from “For Faith, Tsar, and Fatherland” to “For the Homeland, for Stalin.” Even more than the church’s authoritarian structure, the power of religious rites and icons seem to have been fascinating for the dictator, a power that works at an unconscious level and that he was able to adapt for his cult of power and his own personal “deification.”

Stalin’s Long-lasting Heritage

How difficult it might be to dismantle this quasi-religious cult, deeply embedded into the collective unconscious, was later shown by Valeri Ogorodnikov in his Bumazhnye glaza Prishvina (Prishvin’s Paper Eyes; 1990). Its consequences are still to be felt, as a recent anecdote suggests: In 2008 the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church was confronted with the case of Abbot Yevstafy (Zhakov). Yevstafy had erected an icon in the church of St. Olga Equal-to-the-Apostles in Strelna, near St. Petersburg. This icon showed Stalin together with the Blessed Matrona of Moscow—who had supposedly predicted the rescue of Moscow in autumn 1941. The abbot, who had meanwhile been suspended, summoned the patriarchs Sergy and Aleksy I, who were convinced that Stalin was, above all, a believer. It is the same spirit that causes Georgian street hawkers to sell Stalin paintings along with holy icons until today and that makes Russian cab drivers stick Stalin portraits to their windscreens like badges of St. Christopher. We might even find traces of Stalin’s political cult of personality in the political landscape of today’s Russia and its leaders, producing strange, yet morbid ideas like the Tserkov boga yedinogo—Putina, the “Church of the One God—Putin,” that was discussed in August 2011 at the St. Petersburg primaries of the parties Yedinaya Rossiya and Obshcherossiysky narodny front (ONF), or the “reincarnation of the apostle Paul” in the form of Putin, as believed by a sect in Nizhny Novgorod. Surely, these cases are curiosities that even Vladimir Putin had to distance himself from.

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34 See Maier, Totalitarismus und Politische Religionen.
35 See Schlegel, “Kreative und verhängnisvolle Bildzerstörungen.”
36 See “Stalin na ikone.”
37 “Pod krylom ONF sozdavut Tserkov boga yedinogo—Putina.”
38 Chaykovskaya, “Sect believes Putin is a modern day St. Paul.”
himself from. But this didn’t seem to be an obstacle for Vladislav Surkov, vice leader of the administration, who in July 2001 publicly called Putin a politician “sent to Russia by fate and God the Father.”

Not only has Vladimir Semerchuk suggested that after the attacks on church and Orthodox religion in the 1920, a “positive melody” could be heard in the cinema of the Stalinist 1930s. He has also claimed that with respect to the church, a period of “Khrushchev nihilism” gave way to a more tolerant “Brezhnev liberalism” in the 1960s and 1970s. It is true that some directors took up topics that were rather critical of religion in (amongst others) Russian history during the Khrushchev Thaw—the same time when the cinema of the 1920s was rehabilitated. In Doktor Vera (1967), director Damir Vyatich-Berezhnykh showed how Orthodox priests collaborated with German soldiers in the execution of partisans. Similarly, Sergey Paradzhanov’s Tsvetok na kamne (A Little Flower on a Stone), released in 1962, is a harsh polemic against a devious Adventist-preacher who tries to mislead some miners into dark business—it reminds one of the anticlerical agitki polemics of the 1920s. Paradzhanov’s later films will, quite to the contrary, be inspired by religious imagery and rites. What Semerchuk doesn’t keep in mind, however, is the fact that a whole new generation of directors grew up as “children of the Thaw” and their films could only be released in the Brezhnev era with utmost difficulties. If a spiritual departure became evident, this departure was made possible by impulses from the Thaw. Semerchuk’s assertion of a “Brezhnev liberalism” seems pretty cynical if one thinks of the adverse fate that films by Andrey Tarkovsky, Sergey Paradzhanov and many others met.

There are a couple of directors who have reacted to the danger of continuing the past in the present after 1989, notably non-Russian directors. Most of them had already rebelled against the dogmatic structures of socialist authority earlier with subversive films. In Poland—where KOR- (Komitet Obrony Robotników) and Solidarność-activist Adam Michnik had repeatedly warned of the Catholic clerics’ ambitions—director Piotr Szulkin depicted a woman kneeling in front of a Stalin portrait while praying the rosary in Femina (1990); and four years later, in Mięso (Meat, 1994), he showed a Catholic bishop dancing with a State Security agent. Czech director Karel Vachek, who had made the key documentary

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39 Ivanov, “Vladimiroj Putina poslali.”
40 Semerchuk, “Pod znakom politiki i ideologii,” 14.
41 See Michnik, “Die auferstandene Unabhängigkeit.”
of the Prague Spring, *Spřiznění volbou* (*Elective Affinities*; 1968), and had since been banned from his profession, drew pictorial parallels between KPCh mass events and the preparations for the pope’s visit in Prague in his *Nový Hyperion aneb Volnost, rovnost, bratrství* (*New Hyperion or Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood*; 1992). Czech surrealist Jan Švankmajer, who had also been banned from working for several years under Communism, depicted a resurrection of Stalin’s plaster bust in the 1990 short film *Konec stalinismu v Chechách* (*The Death of Stalinism in Bohemia*), immediately after the Velvet Revolution, in the national colors of (what was then still) Czechoslovakia. What we might read as an anticipation of the upcoming nationalist catastrophes in other former socialist states, was also a result of Švankmajer’s structural understanding of totalitarianism. In his view, Stalinism and Neo-Stalinism were only one manifestation of a multiform totalitarianism: “I never cherished the illusion that Stalinism’s downfall would give way to paradise on earth. Civilization’s problems are more serious. The ulcer of Stalinism could never have cracked open if civilization as a whole hadn’t been sick.”

Similar thoughts were expressed by well-established Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó, who had explored phenomena like these—manifesting themselves in multiple ways—since the beginning of his career in the 1960s. In 1990 he made a film with the ironic title *Isten hátrafelé megy* (*God walks backwards*; released in 1991) that depicts the post-Communist period as an absurd regress of history and moral values.

**Strategies of Criticism**

Stalin used his power strategically to place a taboo on cinematic attacks on the institutions of Russian Orthodoxy in part because he recognized parallels to his own power structures. It is not surprising then that the opportunity this analogy opened up was used by directors of almost every socialist country after Stalin’s death. This strategy was, however, not always understood in the West. In 1964, for instance, the West-German FSK (Voluntary Self-Regulation of the Movie Industry) refused to approve Jiří Trnka’s *Archandel Gabriel a paní Husa* (*Archangel Gabriel and Mrs. Goose*; 1964), an adaptation of a satirical story by Boccaccio, for public viewing. The Catholic Film Commission for Germany protested the same

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42 Quoted in Schlegel, “Jan Švankmajer,” 19.
film and declared its critique of false dogmatism to be nothing more than a "hatefully denigration of the confessional secret." A similar tactics of encoding political criticism informed Georgian director Tengiz Abuladze’s film *Molba* (*The Prayer*; 1967), a poetical and philosophical elegy with powerful images that explores the violence between Caucasian Muslims and Christians, a violence that is shown as the result of “eternal,” archaic dogmas. This movie was produced in a time when the “thaw” gave way to the “Ice Age” of Leonid Brezhnev, and it could be read as a warning that a fatal return to totalitarian dogmatism was to be expected. In his later film *Pokayaniye* (*Repentance*; 1984), a key film of the perestroika period, Abuladze was then able to make his point in an outspoken manner.

A commentary on totalitarian violence is also to be found in the popular genre of “inquisition movies,” including Jerzy Kawalerowicz’s *Matka Joanna od aniołów* (*Mother Joan of the Angels*; Poland 1961) and Otakar Vávra’s *Kladivo na charodějnice* (*Witches’ Hammer*; 1970). The director of the latter commented on this movie later in his memoirs:

> I was mostly interested in the method of these 17th century witch trials, the reason for these gigantic trials against people who were neither witches nor fanatics; and yet they were somehow made to confess to crimes that they had never committed, and to even beg for the hardest punishment possible. Mechanically, one was reminded of the political trials of the 1950s.44

In the ČSSR, which had just been occupied again when the movie came out, the film surely reminded everybody of the menacing return of trials like these, too.

Another horrific vision of omnipresent totalitarian violence was made by a surrealist from Prague, Jan Švankmajer. His film *Kyvadlo, jáma a naděje* (*The Pit, the Pendulum and Hope*; 1983) was based on motifs by Edgar Allan Poe’s story *The Pit and the Pendulum* and Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adams *La torture par l’esperance*. Official censors were able to deactivate the self-evident reference to the present—the time of a “normalized” ČSSR in a neo-Stalinist fashion—by adding end credits that named the numbers of victims of the Holy Inquisition, thereby clearly historicizing the subject. The director’s protest was in vain. An inquisitor is also to be found in Konrad Wolf’s East German film *Goya—oder Der arge Weg der
Erkenntnis (Goya or the Hard Way to Enlightenment; 1971), an adaptation of Lion Feuchtwanger’s novel of the same name. This inquisitor reminds one of the Grand Inquisitor in Fedor Dostoyevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov, who was so dogmatic as to bring the returned Christ before trial for heresy. For Wolf, who still believed in the socialist vision, Goya’s resistance against the Great Inquisitor signifies an appeal for “individual courage or moral courage,” for “cordiality and honesty” in the concrete existing socialist society: “A human being should react to the often difficult, complicated antagonisms, even in our society.”

The Renaissance of Transcendental Spirituality

Quite different and less concrete connections to religion are to be found in the oeuvre of a Russian director who continues to influence filmmakers in the East and West until today: Andrey Tarkovsky. His work can be characterized as a search for genuine filmic forms that would enable the experience of the transcendental. Similar to Eisenstein, a work of art is for Tarkovsky an “organic alliance of idea and form.” In opposition to his predecessor, however, Tarkovsky conceived of an analytical understanding of art as a betrayal of the “spiritual truth” of artistic creation. For him, an image is a “hieroglyph of absolute truth,” a “revelation” that he distinguishes from a “symbol” as vehemently as the Orthodox Church distinguishes their icon from the Western churches’ symbolical pictures of saints since the Byzantine-Roman schism of 1054. “There are no symbols to be found in any of my movies.” Following the Byzantine-Platonist tradition—with parallels to John of Damascus and Meister Eckhart (for whom reality is the icon)—, Tarkovsky insists on the existence of “windows” to a transcendental world that can be found in our reality and in images and sounds from within. The title of his book Zapechatlyonnoye vremya (Sculpting in Time; literally: Sealed Time) is ambivalent, for it refers

46 Quoted according to: Aurich, Der Sonnensucher Konrad Wolf, 340.
47 Tarkowskij, Die versiegelte Zeit, 44.
48 Ibid., 61; 64.
49 See Florensky, Die Ikonostase, 78: “If icons are really ‘representations,’ then it is absurd and sinful to ‘honor’ these pedagogical aids in a way that appertains only to God.”
50 Tarkowskij, Die versiegelte Zeit, 280.
to two things that are closely linked: time as it is literally sealed in a film strip, and time as it has been sealed by the angel of the apocalypse.

On the other hand, Tarkovsky stresses the role of his own, individual creativity to such an extent that his concept must necessarily contradict the Orthodox notion of the ikonnik—the monk as re-creator of the revealed archetype-image (proobraz) who is limited by strongly canonized rules. The commonly repeated idea that Tarkovsky is an “Orthodox director” normally excludes this as much as it excludes his criticism of church as a “hollow façade” and a “caricature of social institutions,” along with his outspoken affinity to anthroposophy and Taoism:

The East has always been closer to eternal truth than the West, but Western civilization has devoured the East with its claims for life. It suffices to compare Eastern and Western music. The West cries out, “Here, this is me! Look at me! Listen, how I can suffer and love! How unhappy and happy I can be! Me! Me!! Me!!!” The East, on the other hand, doesn’t say a single word about himself! He totally loses himself in God, in nature, in time, only to find himself again in all of this. He is able to find everything in himself. Taoist music—China, six hundred years before Christ was born.52

A main reason why Tarkovsky’s spiritual film art has been such a productive alternative to the spiritual void of materialism—the prescribed ideology of the free market—can also be found in the fact that it unites basic Orthodox impulses with an open, border-crossing creativity. This is why his films have not only inspired directors in Buddhist- or Muslim-oriented cultures, but also a convinced agnostic like Béla Tarr. In movies like Kárhozat (Damnation; 1988), Sátántangó (Satan’s Tango; 1994), and most recently A Torinói ló (The Turin Horse; 2011), the Hungarian director has shown meditative, spiritual images of Nothingness, of the existential forsakenness of man—the homme nu; images that are perhaps only countered by the religious hopes stirred by false prophets.53

Andrey Tarkovsky was not the only director who helped open up the ideological petrifaction of socialist films with the help of spiritual accents. In Polish director Krzysztof Zanussi’s short film Śmierć provincjała (The Death of a Provincial; 1965), students experience the spiritual aura of a monastery for the first time. Slovak director Dušan Hanák kept records of the people’s provincial piety in his 1967 film Omša (The Mass; 1967). In his documentary Obrazy starého sveta (Pictures of the Old World; 1972), which

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52 Tarkowskij, Die versiegelte Zeit, 328.
53 See Schlegel, “Der nackte Mensch.”
was banned until 1989, piety forms a valid alternative to social(ist) reality. Martin Slivka reflected on overlaps between Orthodox and Western imagery in *Ikony (Icons; 1966)*, taking East-Slovak icons as an example. His documentary on Bulgarian-Orthodox funeral rites, *Odchádza človek (A Man Leaves Us; 1968)*, in both its ethnographical and philosophical dimensions, remained banned until 1990 because of official Bulgarian protests against allegedly “anti-religious propaganda” and the “pessimistic and dismal” depiction of village life.54 At the same time, Christo Christov and Todor Dinov made a movie called *Ikonostasat (The Icon Stand; 1969)* that tells the story of Bulgarian icon painter Rafe Klinche, who rebelled against the clerical and social dogmas of his time in a very similar way as Tarkovsky’s *Rublyov (Andrey Rublyov; 1966)*. In the aftermath of Prague Spring, Štefan Kamenický commemorated the repressions against Slovak convents in the 1950s in his *Intolerancia (Intolerance, 1969)*.

More and more, there were also religious motifs to be found in the official genre of anti-fascist films: In Štefan Uher’s Slovak movie *Organ (The Organ; 1965)*, a Polish deserter counters the dogmatism of Slovak clerical fascism—hostile to the spirit as well as to humanity—with the spiritual force of Bach’s organ music. This also indirectly comments on the socialist present as well. In Nikita Mikhalkov’s early short movie *Spokoyny den v kontse voyny (Quiet Day at War’s End; 1970)*, a young soldier in the Red Army dies when he tries to save icons from the ruins of a church. Already in their titles, Larisa Shepitko’s *Voskhodheniye (The Ascent; 1977)* and Elem Klimov’s *Idi i smotri (Come and See; 1985)* relate the martyrdom of Byelorussian partisans to the passion of Christ. This was definitely not only metaphorical as their adaption of Valentin Rasputin’s novel *Proshchaniye (Farewell; 1984)* shows, which as a side note was finished by her partner Elem Klimov after Shepitko’s unexpected death. In the film, Russian peasant women bear icons to defend their village from its imminent flooding and its transformation into an artificial lake at the hands of Soviet officials. It is important to note though that both the movie and the novel it was based on mirror the attitude of the so-called *pochvenniki*—a group that gained political importance since the beginning of the 1980s. Their national-religious interests were part of an anti-urban and emphatically great-Russian ideology.55

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54 Lužica, *Ostáva človek*, 125.
55 Stemming from Dostoyevsky’s journalistic writings, the word *pochvenniki* mainly refers to writers of the Russian village prose movement (e.g. Valentin Rasputin, Vasily
In 1978, the year that marked Leo Tolstoy’s 150th birthday, Igor Talankin presented a remake of Tolstoy’s short story *Otets Sergy* (*Father Sergius*), which had been adapted to a film as early as 1918 by Yakov Protazanov. The film tells the story of a lieutenant and favorite of the tsar, who becomes a hermit monk (*starec*) and ends up in Siberia, actively living out his Christian charity as a village school teacher and a male nurse. It was skeptically received in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and was only approved for screenings in “company cinemas.” The distribution office’s application for approval to screen the film quotes Lenin: “The fight against the official church was accompanied by the sermon of a new, ‘clarified’ religion, that is, a new, purified, improved poison for the subdued masses.”\(^{56}\) It is not surprising then that in the GDR, the ruling party and the state controlled the topic of “religion and church” in television and film in a very strict manner.\(^{57}\) Since the early 1980s, however—especially since the big Luther year in 1982—a tactical opening gradually became noticeable. At the forefront of the *Wende*, Lothar Warneke was able to produce *Einer trage des Anderen Last* (*Bear Ye One Another’s Burden*; 1988), set in a lung sanatorium, where a militant atheist commissar of the *Volkspolizei* (People’s Police) clashes with a committed Christian vicar. In the end, both find a path towards mutual understanding without giving up their positions. In 1973, the authorities of the *Hauptverwaltung Film* refused the project for ideological reasons:

The ideological antagonism between church, religion, and our weltanschauung is inevitable. The scenario doesn’t do justice to this. There is no discussion of materialism and idealism; instead a political *modus vivendi* is preached. Our common interests are of a temporary nature, but the antagonisms are absolute and non-reversible.\(^{58}\)

At the premiere of the film on January 28, 1988, Kurt Hager, member of the SED politburo, was sitting demonstratively next to former bishop Albrecht Schönherr.

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Belov, Anatoly Ivanov, Viktor Astafyev). Since the 1960s, these writers have represented slavophile, national-religious, anti-urban and increasingly also xenophobic and anti-Semitic positions. See Hielscher, “Das Gespenst der ‘Russophobie’.”

\(^{56}\) “Zulassungsantrag des PROGRESS Film-Verleih.”

\(^{57}\) See Simons, “Das DDR-Fernsehen und die Luther-Ehrung.”

\(^{58}\) “Notate zur Diskussion des Szenariums . . . und einer trage des anderen Last.”
Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, religious objects continue to be present in mainstream, privatized Russian cinema. But in these movies, modeled according to Hollywood examples, these icons or statues of saints function as nothing more than profane objects of speculation; objects causing action and stirring wars between enemy mafia clans. Another proof that the former, officially prescribed materialism has not led to a renewed creative cinematic spirituality is evidenced in TV programs or films like Boris Kustov’s *Novye svedeniya o kontse sveta* (*Latest News of the End of the World*; 1992). In this way, religious elements seem to have become the object of business-minded spiritualists. The result can also be seen in esoteric fantasy blockbusters like Timur Bekmambetov’s *Nochnoi dozor* (*Night Watch*; 2004) and the sequel *Dnevnoy dozor* (*Day Watch*; 2006). What had been the result of the creative and bold resistance of some directors in times of censorship was consequently more and more replaced by the adamant laws of a profit-oriented market.

Resistance came especially from Aleksandr Sokurov. Sokurov never declared himself to be Tarkovsky’s student, but his films definitely bear this influence. None of his films were shown during Soviet times; still it was Sokurov, who got support from the Paris-residing Tarkovsky. Sokurov’s short film *Zhertva vechernyaya* (*The Evening Sacrifice*; 1984) seemed to foreshadow the end of the Soviet Union in his own way, by employing documentary style images and sounds—cross-fading, for example, Soviet and Orthodox rituals, Old-Russian lullabies and imported pop songs. With *Sovetskaya elegiya* (*Soviet Elegy*; 1989), Sokurov reacted to the historical turn with contemplative shots of weathered crosses on graves, serialized portraits of Soviet politicians and a tired, melancholic Boris Yeltsin. In *Vostochnaya elegiya* (*Eastern Elegy*; 1996), set on a small, misty Japanese island, Sokurov started to explore the mystic borderlands between the visible and the invisible, the immanent and the transcendental. He remained utterly faithful to his principle of a meditative spirituality in later movies, too.

Although Sokurov allows himself critical remarks about religion, his films are full of sacral imaginary. He was praised in November 1998 by

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60 Cf. Schlegel, “Auf der Suche.”
the Pope John Paul II for the film *Mat i syn* (*Mother and Son*; 1997) as a “contribution to spiritual culture.”\(^{61}\) The same pope was the focal point of a film that Polish director Krzysztof Zanussi had made a year before (*Brat naszego Boga; Our God’s Brother*; 1997). This pope’s interest in the medium of film was also proven in 2001, when the Vatican hosted the premiere of a monumental *Quo Vadis* remake. This film had been made by none other than Jerzy Kawalerowicz, whose *Matka Joanna od aniołów* (*Mother Joan of the Angels*; 1961) had been very heavily attacked by the Catholic Church. But it was not only the church; it was also governmental institutions that sought to make use of cinema for their national goals in recent times. Politicians could be seen on screen making the sign of the cross—politicians who had formerly made careers in the Communist Party or as secret service agents. Films like Ilgar Safat’s *Sofrinskaya Bogoroditsa* (*The Holy Virgin of Sofra*; 2005), which is about an army chaplain in the Chechen War, were commissioned by such people, too.

Immediately after 1989, film studios with a national-religious agenda were founded like the Russian studio *Otechestvo* (*Fatherland*) in St. Petersburg. It produced movies like Viktor Ryzhko’s *Istina i kostyor* (*Truth and Stake*; 1990), which explained the destruction of churches in Soviet times by referring to Christ-hating, Jewish Bolsheviks. In Poland, Tadeusz Rydzyk, Priest of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and media entrepreneur, provoked the public with the anti-Semitic broadc castings of his Radio Maria.\(^{62}\) In Russia, writer Olga Sedakova—whose religious poems could only be printed as individually reproduced *samizdat* copies during Soviet times—claimed that an “institutionalization of religion” was accompanied by a “privatization of values.”\(^{63}\) When conservative Russian Duma delegates called for a film funding policy that would no longer tolerate filmic *chermukha* (pessimism, or literally, painting it black) but would only support productions that sustained “patriotic and family values”—an obvious attempt to make church and religion instruments of an authoritarian and intolerant education. After Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin had called for a “dress code” of public morals,\(^{64}\) Nikita Mikhalkov joined the ranks of those who demanded film censorship to help save traditional Russian values.

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\(^{61}\) See Sokurov, “Stille Stimme.”

\(^{62}\) See Żurek, “Für Kirche und Volk.”


\(^{64}\) See “Vsevolod Chaplin.”
However differently these developments may have manifested themselves in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, they seem to reveal a common motivation for why more of the younger generations are increasingly looking for spirituality somewhere else beyond established religious institutions. In Jerzy Stuhr’s *Pogoda na jutro* (*Tomorrow’s Weather*; 2003) a Solidarność-activist—who took refuge in a monastery at the time of martial law—joins a Hare Krishna group, out of resignation from the moral relativism in the post-Communist era. In Ivan Golovnev’s *Perekryostok* (*Crossroads*; 2006), adolescents from all parts of the formerly multinational Soviet Union look for multi-religious, spiritual experiences in the West Siberian village of Okunevo. Czech director Petr Zelenka records the fascination with Ethiopian Rastafarianism in *One love* (also the original title, 2005). Hungarian directors Katalin Petényi and Barna Kabay depict the efforts of Benedictine abbot Várszegyi to achieve an inter-religious dialogue held with believers from all confessions, including agnostics, in *A közvetítő* (*The Mediator*; 2005); while Bulgarian director Stephan Kondarev explores how social misery in a small Bulgarian border village leads to new solidarity between traditionally disunited Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim peasants in his *Hlyab nad ogradite* (*Bread Over the Fence*; 2002).

Sometimes, directors whose movies have stimulated reflections on religious (or more specifically Christian) values have deliberately tried to elude any institutional appropriation. This is very clearly the case with Krzysztof Kieślowski, the Polish director of the *Dekalog*-cycle (1989/90), who has repeatedly rejected classifications of this kind: “For God’s sake, I don’t have anything to do with church.” When Kieślowski’s fellow countryman Marek Koterski made a movie about the “passion” of alcoholics and other drug addicts called *Wszyscy jesteśmy Chrystusami* (*We’re All Christs*; 2006), this was neither blasphemy nor cynicism. Similarly, Polish director Łukasz Karwowski’s film *Południe-Północ* (*South by North*; 2007) is more about a humanism beyond dogmatic rules: It depicts a monk who leaves his monastery in order to hitchhike together with a prostitute to the sea’s open horizon.

Andrey Zvyagintsev’s debut *Vozvrashcheniye* (*The Return*; 2003), which won the Golden Lion in Venice, was an attempt by young Russian filmmakers to free themselves from the imported images and contents of the mainstream genre-cinema. Zvyagintsev presents a new trend that

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65 Kieślowski, “Ich drehe keine Filme mehr.”

66 See Sobolewski, “Das Leben als Passion.”
explores its own film language to deal with real problems and themes of the new generation. His film plays on the background of the north-Russian see landscape and re-evaluates the “eternal” subject matter of the Bible. Zvyagintsev ties the biblical story of Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac (which had already inspired Eisenstein’s movie Bezhin lug) to a contemporary conflict between a father and his two sons. These sons discover a photograph of their long-absent father in a book with exactly this biblical scene, while he is depicted later as resting in a position that recalls Mantegna’s painting The Lamentation over the Dead Christ (1490). When he was awarded the Catholic Signis Prize, Zvyagintsev stressed the fact that associations like these were very much intentional; and that religious questions, questions about the meaning of life, were important for him.

The break to the new spiritual-oriented auteur cinema, which started well at the beginning of the new century, had in fact little chance because of the limited state willingness to finance these initiatives in favor of the mainstream production. In this context, Pavel Lungin’s success with Ostrov (The Island, 2006) transfers religious questions from Dostoyevsky’s novel Crime and Punishment into a popular cinematic story, which makes it seem even more impressive. Besides the spiritual thematic emphasis, Ostrov is saturated with the authentic aura of Russian monasteries. The movie stimulated an exceptionally broad and intensive social debate in Russia, which can be seen as proof of the longing to engage with religious and ethical questions; but also as proof for a cinematic culture that tied in with Russian traditions and subjects again.

More often however, recent film productions that explore spirituality and religion lack serious artistic ambitions, the most obvious example being Slava Ross’ Sibir. Monamur (Siberia, Monamour; 2011)—a movie that depicts the world of a faithful grandfather and his grandson that is to be destroyed by criminals, wild dogs, icon thieves and other mainstream clichés. While Vladimir Khotinenko’s Musulmanin (A Muslim; 1995) tells the conflict-laden story of a converted Russian soldier who returns to his Orthodox village as a Muslim, his more recent movie Pop (The Priest; 2009) turns to the subject of an Orthodox priest in the 1940s for whom the service for his community is more important than the threat of excommunication or accusations of collaborating with the occupying German forces. The movie was produced by the currently very active studio Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya, which is actively involved in the production of the Russian church history films.

The latest example is the monumental film Orda (The Horde, 2012) by Andrey Proshkin. Shot in an “action” and “exotic” rather than “historical”
style of the genre, the film presents Saraj-Berke, the capital of the Golden Horde, as Hell. The metropolitan of Moscow, Aleksy has to endure sufferings and pains there. The film passes over in silence the fact of the khans’ religious tolerance, codified by the laws of the “Great Yasa” and even protecting the Russian Orthodox Church at that time.67

The conflict between state and church power—which Eisenstein had already dealt with in his Ivan Grozny (Ivan the Terrible) movies (part 1: 1941–44; part 2: 1943–46)—is at the center of Pavel Lungin’s film Tsar (2009), a historical movie that could more aptly be characterized as a period piece due to its loyalty to props, costumes, and a mimetic realism. In opposition to the (filmic and theoretical) work of Tarkovsky, the Orthodox notion of the image as a window to the logos, to the transcendental archetype (praobraz), does not seem to have left any creative trace in these contemporary films.68

Translated from German by Christian Schmitt & Eric Scheufler

Filmography

A közvetítő (The Mediator; Hungary/Germany 2005, dir.: Katalin Petényi/Barna Kabay)
A Torinói ló (The Turin Horse; Hungary/France/Germany/Switzerland/USA 2011, dir.: Béla Tarr/Agnes Hranitzky)
Aleksandr Nevsky (USSR 1938, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Andrey Rublyov (USSR 1966, dir.: Andrey Tarkovsky)
Archangel Gabriel a pani Husa (Archangel Gabriel And Ms Goose; CSSR 1964, dir.: Jiří Trnka)
Bezhin lug (The Bezhin Meadow; USSR 1935/37, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Boğdan Khmelnytsky (USSR 1941, dir.: Igor Savchenko)
Brat naszego Boża (Our God’s Brother; Poland 1997, dir.: Krzysztof Zanussi)
Bumashnye glaza Prishvina (Prishvin’s Paper Eyes; USSR 1990, dir.: Valeri Ogorodnikov)
Chudotvorets (The Miracle Maker; USSR 1922, dir.: Alexander Panteleev)
Dekalog (The Dekalog: The Ten Commandments; TV-Mini-Series, Poland 1989, dir.: Krzysztof Kieślowski)
Dnevnoy dozor (Day Watch; Russia 2006, dir.: Timur Bekmambetov)
Doktor Vera (USSR 1967, dir.: Damir Vyatich-Berezhnykh)
Dzhalma (USSR 1928, dir.: Arnold Kordyum)
Einer trage des Anderen Last (Bear Ye One Another’s Burden; GDR 1988, dir.: Lothar Warneke)
Emberek a havason (Men on the Mountain; Hungary 1942, dir.: Istvan Szőts)
Femina (Poland 1990, dir.: Piotr Szulkin)
Goya—oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis (Goya or the Hard Way to Enlightenment; GDR/USSR/Bulgaria/Yugoslavia 1971, dir.: Konrad Wolf)

67 Benz, Geist und Leben der Ostkirche, 100–101.
68 See Florensky, Die Ikonostase; and Schlegel, “Ikone und Filmbild.”
Hlyab nad ogradite (Bread Over the Fence; Bulgaria 2002, dir.: Stephan Komandarev)
Idi i smotri (Come and See; USSR 1985, dir.: Elem Klimov)
Ikonostasat (The Icon Stand; Bulgaria 1969, dir.: Christo Christov/Todor Dinov)
Ikony (Icons; Czechoslovakia 1966, dir.: Martin Slivka)
Intolerance (Intolerance; Czechoslovakia 1969, dir.: Stefan Kamenicky)
Isten hátrafelé megvy (God Walks Backwards; Hungary 1991, dir.: Miklós Jancsó)
Istina i koster (Truth and Stake; USSR 1990 dir.: Viktor Ryzhko)
Ivan Grozny (Ivan the Terrible, Part I; USSR 1944, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Kárhoszat (Damnation; Hungary 1988, dir.: Béla Tarr)
Kladivo na charodějnice (Witches’ Hammer; Czechoslovakia 1969, dir.: Otakar Vávra)
Konec stalinismu v Chechách (The Death of Stalinism In Bohemia; UK 1990, dir.: Jan Švankmajer)
Kyvadlo, jáma a naděje (The Pit, the Pendulum and Hope; Czechoslovakia 1983, dir.: Jan Švankmajer)
Mat i syn (Mother and Son; Russia 1997, dir.: Aleksandr Sokurov)
Matka Joanna od aniołów (Mother Joan of the Angels; Poland 1961, dir.: Jerzy Kawalerowicz)
Mekhanika golovnogo mozga (Mechanics of the Brain; USSR 1926, dir.: Vsevolod Pudovkin)
Mięso (Meat; Poland 1994, dir.: Piotr Szulkin)
Minin i Pozharsky (Minin and Pozharsky; USSR 1939, dir.: Vsevolod Pudovkin/Mikhail Doller)
Molba (The Prayer; USSR 1967, dir.: Tengiz Abuladze)
Muselmanin (A Muslim; Russia 1995; dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)
Nad Nemanom rassvet (It’s Dawn Over the Neman; USSR 1953, dir.: Aleksandr Faintsimmer)
Nochnoy dozor (Night Watch; Russia 2004, dir.: Timur Bekmambetov)
Novaya Moskva (The New Moscow; USSR 1938, dir.: Aleksandr Medvedkin)
Nový Hyperion aneb Volnost, rovnost, bratrství (New Hyperion or Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood; Czechoslovakia 1992, dir.: Karel Vachek)
Novyye svedeniya o kontse sveta (Latest News of the End of the World; Russia 1992, dir.: Boris Kustov)
Obrazy starého sveta (Pictures of the Old World; Czechoslovakia 1972, dir.: Dušan Hanák)
Odchádza človek (A Man Leaves Us; Czechoslovakia 1968, dir.: Martin Slivka)
Oktyabr (October; USSR 1928, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Ona (The Mass; Czechoslovakia 1967, dir.: Dušan Hanák)
One love (Czech Republic 2005, dir.: Petr Zelenka)
Organ (The Organ; Czechoslovakia 1965, dir.: Štefan Vener)
Orda (The Horde, Russia 2012, dir.: Andrey Proskhin)
Ostrov (The Island; Russia 2006, dir.: Pavel Lungin)
Otets Sergy (Father Sergius; Russia 1918, dir.: Yakov Protazanov/Alexandre Volkoff)
Otets Sergy (Father Sergius; USSR 1978, dir.: Igor Talankin)
Ovod (The Gadfly; USSR 1956, dir.: Aleksandr Faintsimmer)
Padevniye Berlina (The Fall of Berlin; USSR 1950, dir.: Michail Chyauerci)
Perekryostok (Crossroads; Russia 2006, dir.: Ivan Golovnev)
Pogoda na jutro (Tomorrow’s Weather; Poland 2003, dir.: Jerzy Stuhr)
Pokanyiye (Repentance; USSR 1984, dir.: Tengiz Abuladze)
Poludnie-pólnoč (South by North; Poland 2007, dir.: Łukasz Karwowski)
Pop (The Priest; Russia 2009, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)
Posledniye Krestonostsy (Last Crusaders; USSR 1934, dir.: Siko Dolidze)
Prazdnik svyatogo Yorgena (Holiday of St. Jorgen; USSR 1930, dir.: Yakov Protazanov)
Prometey (Prometheus; USSR 1935, dir.: Ivan Kavalieridze)
Proshchaniye (Farewell; USSR 1984, dir.: Élem Klimov)
Pyshka (Boule de Suif; USSR 1934, dir.: Michail Romm)
Quo Vadis (Poland/USA 2001, dir.: Jerzy Kawalerowicz)
Salamandra (Salamander; USSR/Germany 1928, dir.: Grigory Roshal)
Satana likuyushchy (Satan Triumphant; Russia 1917, dir.: Yakov Protazanov)
Sátántangó (Satan’s Tango; Hungary 1994, dir.: Béla Tarr)
Schastye (Happiness; USSR 1935, dir.: Aleksandr Medvedkin)
Sibir. Monamur (Siberia. Monamour; Russia 2011, dir.: Slava Ross)
Skazka o pope Pankrate (Tale of Priest Pankrat; Russia 1918, dir.: Nikolay Preobrazhensky/ Alexander Arkatov)
Śmierć prowincjala (The Death of a Provincial; Poland 1965, dir.: Krzysztof Zanussi)
Sofrinskaya Bogoroditsa (The Holy Virgin of Sofra; Russia 2005, dir.: Ilgar Safat)
Sovetskaya elegiya (Soviet Elegy; USSR 1989, dir.: Aleksandr Sokurov)
Spokojny den v kontse voyny (Quiet Day At War’s End; USSR 1970, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)
Spříznĕni volbou (Elective Affinities; Czechoslovakia 1968, dir.: Karel Vachek)
Staroye i novoye (The Old And the New; USSR 1929, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Spokoyny den v kontse voyny (Quiet Day At War’s End; USSR 1970, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)
Sibir. Monamur (Siberia. Monamour; Russia 2011, dir.: Slava Ross)
Skazka o pope Pankrate (Tale of Priest Pankrat; Russia 1918, dir.: Nikolay Preobrazhensky/ Alexander Arkatov)

Bibliography

PART ONE

INSTITUTIONAL POWERS
It’s a bit strange to hear the voice of Stirlitz narrating the life of St. Sergius, but that’s the treat that awaits the viewer of the 2005 documentary Zhitiye prepodobnogo Sergiya Radonezhskogo (The Life of Saint Sergius of Radonezh; dir.: Tatyana Novikova). Vyacheslav Tikhonov, the venerable Soviet actor best known for playing Stirlitz, the Soviet agent in Nazi Germany in the hit series of the 1970s, Semnadtsat mgnoveniy vesny (17 Moments of Spring; dir.: Tatyana Lioznova), lends his famous voice to a post-Soviet documentary about Orthodoxy. Given the fact that Tikhonov is so associated with his Soviet-era character, it’s more than a little disconcerting to hear him discuss Russian Orthodoxy. Then again, his appearance as the documentary’s narrator tells us something about the changes Russia has undergone since 1991: Stirlitz, it turns out, is less a believer in Communism than in Orthodoxy.

It’s also surprising to learn as the opening credits roll that the film received the official blessing of the then-Patriarch of All Russia, Aleksy II. How the head of a church blesses a documentary and what this act tells us about the changes in Russian Orthodoxy and Russian culture more broadly are the subjects of this chapter. Zhitiye prepodobnogo Sergiya was not the only film blessed by Aleksy II, as we’ll see. Its appearance as one of three films (along with Yury Kulakov’s 2006 Kniaz Vladimir (Prince Vladimir) and Pavel Lungin’s 2006 Ostrov (The Island)) to receive patriarchal blessing in the 2000s therefore helps us understand more about the directions the official church took after Communism. The films all received patriarchal support after the 2000 “Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” was released, a document that did much to outline the church’s goals for the new millennium. Thus, the documentary brings into view several important processes underway in Russian culture, history, and remembrance since the fall of Communism. Its significance rests with what the film reveals about these processes.

Ostensibly made to commemorate the 625th anniversary of the Battle of Kulikovo, when forces led by Moscow Prince Dmitry Donskoy first defeated the Mongols, The Life of St. Sergius is itself primarily concerned
with providing guidelines on how to live a spiritual life in the present for Russian viewers. St. Sergius therefore acts as a medieval holy man who can help Russia find its soul yet again. Viewed this way, the documentary uses the past as a way for the Russian Orthodox Church to chart its own path through modernity. No wonder Stirlitz lent the project his voice. And no wonder the patriarch blessed it.

Guiding Light: A Saint’s Life Onscreen

Tikhonov’s narration opens with a major argument the documentary will make: interpreting the life of the saint as a servant of Russia and its Grand Prince Dmitry Donskoy, and therefore as one who helped to make the state great. Visually the opening minutes also provide a recurrent theme: scenes of contemporary Russians practicing their faith at the monastery Saint Sergius founded and therefore demonstrating that they are Sergius’s worthy spiritual heirs. Both Sergius of Radonezh and the Trinity Saint Sergius Lavra, as many scholars have recently argued, have served as powerful symbols of Russian nationhood over the centuries.1 The blessed documentary furthers this ongoing construction.

Directed by Tatyana Novikova, who would make a documentary about Andrey Rublyov in 2007, The Life of St. Sergius begins with the famous quotes from Vasily Klyuchevsky on St. Sergius and his monastery. Originally delivered as a speech at the 500th anniversary of the Lavra’s founding, Klyuchevsky declared that through his life and spirit, “Saint Sergius lifted the fallen spirit of the Russian people, aroused in them faith in themselves, in their strength, breathed faith in their future.”2 These words are followed by Pavel Florensky’s equally famous quote, made in his 1919 essay for the Bolshevik Commission for the Preservation of Monuments of Art and Antiquities at the Lavra, that to “understand Russia, one has to understand the Trinity-Sergius Lavra.” Florensky’s comment that “to understand the Lavra, one has to study the life of the saint” follows.3 Together, these

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1 David Miller argues that St. Sergius cult “had entered into scenarios of Russian historical consciousness and was an object of veneration up and down the social order” by 1605, concluding that the monastery had also become a “memory site” by that date. See Miller, Saint Sergius of Radonezh, 225. For more on the monastery and its significance, see Manushina, Morozov, and Nikolaeva, Troitse-Sergiyeva lavra.

2 Klyuchevsky, “Znacheniye Prepodobnogo Sergiya Radonezhskogo,” 44. For more on the anniversary and Klyuchevsky’s role, see Kenworthy, “Memory Eternal.”

3 The original comment appeared in Florensky, “Troitse-Sergieva Lavra i Rossiya,” 7. See also Scott Kenworthy’s analysis of this publication in his The Heart of Russia, 309–12.
opening quotes from 19th and early 20th century intellectual figures—and, by extension, pre-Soviet intellectuals—perform the work of history the film engages in. Sergius, his life, and his monastery are inherently Russian and therefore “Orthodoxy” and “Russian” are nearly synonymous. Florensky himself made the case in his article, where he stated that “as a microcosm and microhistory [the Lavra is] its own form of synopsis of the existence of our Russia” because “here is more tangible than anywhere else the pulse of Russian history.”

This recreation of the invented tradition is backed up by the journey the viewer visually takes, starting in present-day Radonezh and ending in present-day Zagorsk. These sites still exist and, as Tikhonov declares, they represent “ancient Russian towns” that “all stand on the same route.” The past is dissolved; ancient Russia is conjured up in this cinematic place-naming ceremony because portions of the past are brought into view onscreen. The cinematic act of showing us present-day locations while narrating the events that once happened there serve as a means of constructing history itself, of fashioning and re-fashioning versions of what once happened. The journey from Radonezh to Zagorsk taken onscreen is therefore a means of reviving the past while simultaneously revising it.

This dissolution continues throughout, as the saint’s life becomes a metaphor for the 1990s in Russia. We learn, as Tikhonov states, that Sergius (born Bartholomew, or Varfolomey) lived in an era that “was a difficult one for Russia.” Chronicles and icons from the 14th century “preserve the memory of those times” and attest to the Tatar Horde’s oppressive, punitive practices that divided Russia. The Yoke, as Stirlitz speaks, fostered “feelings of doom and helplessness.” Varfolomey was therefore born into a world that needed to be united. With present-day and past images flashing across the screen as his vita is narrated, the comparisons between Sergius’s time and the immediate post-Soviet era are conveyed. Given the way that many Russians living in the immediate aftermath of Communism’s collapse believed they were living in a state of permanent crisis and that “crisis” had become “normal,” Tikhonov’s words about the past once more collapsed the distance between it and the present. Feelings of doom dominated the 1990s and therefore the nation needs saving again.

The visual and verbal elements in the documentary essentially marry history and memory: as Tikhonov narrates the saint’s life, we see a mix

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4 Ibid.
5 I borrow these concepts from Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 6.
6 See, for example, Shevchenko, *Crisis and the Everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*.
of representations created over the course of the centuries. Mikhail Nesterov’s famous 1890 painting of a young Sergius receiving a vision is used to illustrate Sergius’s childhood. The camera captures statues built to the saint since 1991, other paintings of the saint and his monastery, chronicles written across the centuries, icons from the 17th century, and contemporary scenes of the faithful walking on the present-day places once trod by Sergius: the effect is to create a pastiche of timelessness that in turn further proves Klyuchevsky’s and Florensky’s statements. At one point Tikhonov even comments that the present-day scenes, all filmed in wintry landscapes, were a conscious choice meant to evoke both the saint’s famous ascetic lifestyle and the lack of clear roads when he lived.

The foundation of the monastery in 1340 also gets a subtle present-day political narrative: Sergius and his brother, after living as hermits and finding the spot they want to found a holy site, travel to Moscow and seek the church’s blessing. Then and now, in other words, Moscow is the seat of power and spiritual authority. The film immediately connects another important historical dot: after recounting the story of the founding, we are immediately taken on an onscreen tour of the Lavra by a current guide, Mikhail Dyakov, who starts first in the 1422 Trinity Cathedral (built after Sergius’s death) and then to the site where Andrey Rublyov’s famous Trinity icon used to hang, before it was “moved to the Tretiakov Gallery after the 1917 Revolution.” Here a whole bunch of time-travelling and historical interpretations get performed: the site is holy also because of Rublyov’s famous icon and the Bolsheviks are to blame for removing it from its intended site are two stops on the “you-are-there-in-the-past-and-present” tour.

Tikhonov follows up on this conflation by offering a timeless interpretation to Sergius’s life and work: “a fighter for a just cause,” he states, “that’s how people always saw Sergius.” Moreover, the saint’s spirit and his virtues, embodied in his asceticism, his spirituality, and his devotion to God continue to “reign supreme” in his monastery. His life and his belief in God’s mercy, Tikhonov will later narrate, are the best examples to emulate. Tikhonov was referring to the past, but as the documentary makes clear, the saint’s virtues can be emulated today too. Much of this contemporary memory work gets performed by Archbishop Yevgeny of Vereya, the Rector of the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary (formerly the Slavic Greek Latin Academy) located inside the monastery. “St. Sergius demonstrated in his life,” the archbishop begins in his on-camera appearance, “a depth of spirituality” marked above all with “his struggle with his own sins.” “For us,” he continues, “the image of St. Sergius is like a guiding
light.” To illustrate this point, the archbishop provides an example of an “unwritten tradition” within the Academy of everyone associated with it beginning the day by going to the saint’s relics and praying. Performing this task, he states, “gets them in a spiritual mood.”

Doing business in a spiritual mood is something all Russians today should emulate, the archbishop declares, for what is lacking in the new nation is a “spiritual education.” Secular education, he argues, has stressed just the accumulation of knowledge but has neglected the soul and with it, the traditions of the Orthodox Church and the 1000 years of history that accompany it. “Society today faces serious challenges,” he argues, “and in the mass media we see a lot of things that contradict the morals in the Gospels.” The main problem, as the archbishop sees it, is an historical one. “What was unacceptable in society several decades ago and one hundred years ago,” he muses, “became an ordinary, everyday phenomenon. A contemporary person accepts things he would have rejected several decades ago.” The temporal frame here is significant: “several decades ago and one hundred years ago” of course means before the Bolsheviks took power (earlier the archbishop had spoken about the harsh policies the Bolsheviks enacted). The godless Communists, in short, altered Russia’s spiritual education and ultimately damaged the nation’s soul.

At the same time, the archbishop recognizes that the church and its educational mission cannot simply turn back the clock. “We have to train clergy who can talk to contemporary people about Orthodox values,” Archbishop Yevgeny argues. He continues: “one of the main problems today is that our society is too proud of its freedoms.” The freedom of the 1990s also brought new violence in Russian society. A spiritual education can help combat this modern problem: “an Orthodox believer always knows what freedom is; above all, strict moral limitations that a person cannot transgress.” The archbishop invokes a long-standing debate about the nature of Russia’s “other freedom;” that is, Russia’s artistic and cultural heritage that embody a more personal, inner freedom rather than the classical freedom espoused by liberalism. Archbishop Yevgeny updates a nineteenth-century notion of Russian freedom vis-à-vis the West in order to comment on late twentieth- and early twenty-first century issues relating to Russia and the West.

The archbishop’s sermon-interview is immediately followed by the reintroduction of Tikhonov’s narrative about St. Sergius. “Like no one else,” he

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7 See Boym, Another Freedom, especially Chapter 2.
intones after Yevgeny's homily about freedom, “St. Sergius contributed to
the spiritual resurrection of Russia and the revival of Russian traditions
in everyday life.” After exploring these contributions, Tikhonov concludes
that “the name of St. Sergius of Radonezh will always be sacred for the
Russian people. Today, as ever, he teaches people simply truths: to be
truthful, courageous, industrious, and to believe in God.” Moreover, his
greatest gift may be the monastery he built, for it “has provided spiritual
support and refuge” to believers over the centuries. Tikhonov’s conclud-
ing words: “the 625th anniversary of the Kulikovo Battle reminds us of the
feats Russian people can perform when they are guided by a great goal.”

As a document that attempts to interpret (or reinterpret) the past
for present-day viewers, The Life of St. Sergius engages in what might be
termed “epic re-revisionism.” Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger have
recently analyzed the Stalinist state’s use of past heroes and past figures
as part of the attempt to make a “usable past” in the 1930s. Disparate fig-
ures such as Ivan the Terrible and Leo Tolstoy, to name just two, became
reinvented in Stalinist propaganda as patriots. This process—which Platt
and Brandenberger term “epic revisionism”—helps us evaluate the uses of
the past in the documentary.

Little is actually known about the life of Sergius. The basic sources for
anyone wanting to examine it are hagiographical. As David Miller has
recently written in regards to the life of the saint,

hagiography is a genre that operates according to different rules of narra-
tive and chronology from those employed by historians: it uses topoi to
describe decisive events in Sergius’s life that cannot be taken seriously as
casual descriptions of his motives; it describes events unverifiable in other
sources; it prefers an idealized pattern of saintly behavior to chronological
order in its narrative; and usually it is bereft of dates for events about which
other sources are silent, vague, or in conflict.

Historians such as Klyuchevsky have not been able to establish precise
dates for any aspects of Sergius’s life: he may have been born between 1314
and 1322. Ultimately, we have to take certain events on faith, for they were
primarily ascribed to Sergius by his disciple Epiphanius the Wise in 1418. In
the end, we cannot verify whether or not Sergius blessed Dmitry Donskoy
in 1380 before the Battle at Kulikovo; nor can we verify the central miracle

8 Brandenberger and Platt, Epic Revisionism.
9 Miller, Saint Sergius of Radonezh, 4.
of his life, the appearance of the Mother of God to him promising him that his house would be under her protection.

These issues ultimately don't matter, even if they help us understand the historical Sergius—who did exist and who did found a holy site that garnered attention throughout the divided Russian lands—versus the life of the saint. For, as Miller has argued, "however influential Sergius was in life, in death his impact on the emergence of Russia was greater." Saint-hood, as religious scholars have argued, is a social creation and construction, a formula that takes on meaning after the death of a holy figure and that continues to take shape over time, as the saint's promoters and succeeding believers negotiate the saint's significance over time. Over time, and certainly in the case of Sergius, factuality blurs with memory so that certain myths become history: Sergius is believed to have blessed Donskoy by most Russians, so therefore he did.

The film therefore acts as a postmodern life of a saint, an important part in the ongoing culture of remembrance that has developed around St. Sergius and his monastery ever since the 15th century. In the end, as Miller and Scott Kenworthy have noted, Sergius and his monastery became important components for how Russian nationhood developed and acquired meaning over time: Florensky's equation of the monastery with what it meant to be Russian, made in 1919, clearly was an attempt to revive the old culture of remembrance in the face of the new Bolshevik regime.

It's this additional historical component to Sergius's life after death that makes the work of the film epic re-revisionism. For, while the Stalinist state remade heroes in the 1930s, it did much to undermine other figures in the decade after 1917. Sergius's monastery, as Kenworthy has written, "inevitably became a focal point in the battle for the hearts and minds of ordinary Russians." The Bolsheviks nationalized the monastery while monks saw it plundered and robbed by armed men. The Commission for which Florensky wrote his famous essay was set up by the Bolsheviks to take stock of the monastery's valuable possessions; rejecting most of Florensky's and others' arguments, the new state nationalized Trinity-Sergius and even moved its famous Rublyov icon of the Trinity to Moscow. Soon after, as part of a Bolshevik attempt to combat Orthodoxy and its tenets,

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10 Ibid., 6.
11 Kenworthy, *The Heart of Russia*, 293.
12 See Hughes, "Inventing Andrei," 85.
Soviet authorities ordered the shrine of Saint Sergius to be opened and his relics to be exposed and examined. The saint had a particularly broad appeal to Russians, thousands of whom made pilgrimages to the monastery to see the saint’s relics every year. On 11 April 1919, in an effort to destroy the faith of the “dark masses,” Soviet officials opened the saint’s tomb during a tumultuous event. Over the course of the next year, the new state liquidated the monastery. Although the community of believers survived in the 1920s, the monks of Trinity Sergius were primary targets of Stalin’s purges in the 1930s. Only in 1943, in the midst of war, did the monastery officially reopen.13 And only in the 1990s did it truly flourish again.

*The Life of St. Sergius* therefore reverses the epic revisionism of the Soviet era and replaces it with some re-revisionism of its own. As a work of history, the documentary explicitly combats the Soviet-era attacks on Sergius, his monastery, and his faith. Pilgrims now travel to see the saint’s relics once more, as the scenes from the film make clear. Saint Sergius acts as a spiritual guiding light again to Russians looking for meaning in a chaotic world. And his monastery has returned as the heart of Russia. Thus, as a statement about the Russian Orthodox Church and its role in the New Russia, *The Life of St. Sergius* appropriates the past and its values as usable ones in the present. It also engages in reinterpreting the past for present-day viewers: the monastery and its founder have survived tough times and will continue to help others do the same. As part of a larger project to connect Orthodoxy and Russianness, the film and its support from the church clarifies some of the ways that the Russian Orthodox Church (hereafter ROC) has attempted to reassert itself in the last two decades and cast itself as the main component of a new Russian nationhood.

Besides *The Life of St. Sergius*, other films that have received the official blessing of the patriarch, including Yury Kulakov’s 2006 animated feature *Kniaz Vladimir* and Pavel Lungin’s 2006 *Ostrov*, also recast the past for present-day purposes. The former retrofits Prince Vladimir as a hero for our time and Kievan Rus as a site for timeless national unity. The latter suggests monasticism and spirituality survived in the Soviet Union and reinvents the tradition of the holy fool. All three films, therefore, use the past and more specifically, the Orthodoxy past to serve as the basis for a revived patriotic culture that places Orthodoxy, its history, saints, traditions, and holy sites at the center.

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13 Kenworthy covers these events comprehensively in his monograph, *The Heart of Russia*. 
But what about the act of blessing itself and the fact that the patriarch bestowed one on three films in the 2000s? *The Life of St. Sergius* first appeared on the new Orthodox TV channel, *Spas* (“The Savior”) and then received a lavish DVD edition by Ruscico, an arm of the Russian Cinema Council. *Kniaz Vladimir* got patriarchal support and then went on to become the highest-grossing animated film in Russian history when it first appeared (the record has since been broken).\(^{14}\) And Lungin’s *Island* became a surprise hit, particularly after Orthodox priests actively encouraged their parishioners to go see it because of Aleksy II’s blessing.\(^{15}\) It is significant, therefore, that Aleksy II felt the need to lend his support to the films in the most visible way possible, a blessing. These acts and the stories behind how they got performed tell us a great deal about how the church has gone about reasserting itself in the new Russia and how it has attempted to make a mark on the new patriotic culture that has developed in Russia since 2000.

Interpretations about the church and its role, whether in the past or the present, have too often produced broad generalizations. Robert Greene and Valerie Kivelson have pointed out the problem that “sweeping statements about Russian Orthodoxy surface frequently in discussions of Russian exceptionalism.”\(^ {16}\) Instead, they advocate viewing Orthodoxy as “a lived, adaptive, and flexible cultural system, rather than as a static set of rigidly applied rules and dictates.”\(^ {17}\) Greene and Kivelson were referring to scholarship about the tsarist-era church; nevertheless their words are just as appropriate for works about the church today.

Recent works on the ROC after Communism have not heeded these warnings. John and Carol Garrard argue that the revival of the church is a further sign of the divisions between Russia and the West, concluding that Russia can never be “Western.”\(^ {18}\) The Garrards make a lot out of a tendentious source alleging Aleksy II’s KGB ties, calling him at one point “one of the KGB’s best and brightest operatives.”\(^ {19}\) They also see his patriotic work.

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\(^{14}\) See Hicks, “Prince Vladimir.”
\(^{15}\) See Lipovetsky, “The Importance of Being Pious.” Both *Kniaz Vladimir* and Ostrov are explored in my book, *Blockbuster History*.
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 36.
as sinister, citing *Kniaž Vladimir* as a particular problem because its role in making “myth” and “pseudohistory.”20 “The real life Vladimir,” they write, was a ruthless and wily Viking who had blinded his brother (thus making him ineligible to rule), raped his brother’s fiancée, Rogneda, and had to give up about 1000 concubines (according to the horrified monastery scribe) to marry the Princess Anna, a lady so reluctant to accept the match that she initially declared that she would rather die. None of that will be mentioned in the classroom.21

Their basic point fits with the all-too-frequent and contentious argument that the ROC has acted as a handmaiden of the state in the past and continues to do so in the post-Soviet present.

The ROC has reasserted itself in Russia, particularly by connecting faith with patriotism, the Garrards argue, and this is bad. Led by a former KGB agent, the ROC’s proclaimed “spiritual revival of the Fatherland” is a naked attempt to make Russianness and Orthodoxy “one and the same.”22 The Garrards acknowledge that ROC activities are meant to overcome 75 years of official atheism, yet they tend to write with surprise that the church has involved itself in politics, in social life, and with other institutions such as the army, as if the ROC would not be doing this.

Zoe Knox’s recent book on the ROC takes a more nuanced view, but still divides the church into a neat binary: the official church, represented by the Moscow Patriarchate, versus the “unofficial church,” represented by “nonconformist clergy and lay activists.” “The great paradox of Russia’s post-Soviet religious renaissance,” she writes,

was the transition of the Moscow Patriarchate from a suppressed institution, directed and regulated by an atheist regime, to an institution which directs considerable effort to suppressing other religious bodies by discouraging religious pluralism and enjoying state-sanctioned privileges in a secular country.23

The key to her study is how the official church does not help to foster civil society and how the unofficial church does. Knox’s book is a sophisticated one that covers a lot of interesting ground; its core argument, however, takes Western theorists of “civil society” (the usual big guns from

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20 Ibid., 154.
21 Ibid., 156.
22 Ibid., 254.
23 Knox, *Russian Society and the Orthodox Church*, 1.
de Tocqueville to Habermas) and applies them to the Russian case to find it lacking.

But why do this? Why employ theory as if it’s a mathematical formula in order to prove that the ROC can best be understood through the sort of sweeping generalizations that have so often been employed before? Instead, we might better situate the blessed documentary within the ROC’s ongoing attempt to contextualize itself and the faith as a whole within the new Russian landscape. The 2000 “Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” mentioned only in passing in both the Garrards’ and Knox’s works, serves as an ideal starting point to interpret the new life of St. Sergius and unpack its patriotic messages.

Certainly the ROC has played a role in developing the “patriotic brand” that the state has attempted to provide in the 2000s, but, as Marlene Laruelle has posited, the patriarchate itself is an ideologically divided entity that faces many tensions. Many within it want the church to be a national one, to dominate Russian social and cultural life and to assert a xenophobic view of Russianness. Others are more liberal, wanting the church to play a role in Russian society but willing to acknowledge the primacy of the state in political life and the existence of others in the Russian nation.24 Still others fall in between these two poles. Many of these divisions came to the forefront during the August 2000 Bishops’ Council of the ROC, a gathering that one scholar has dubbed “historic.”25 The bishops consecrated the Cathedral of Christ the Savior and formally canonized nearly one thousand New Martyrs to the faith, individuals persecuted by the Soviet state for their beliefs. They finally adopted the “Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” the first-ever document about the ROC’s positions on politics and social life and one that reveals many of the tensions within the church. It also helps anyone understand why the patriarch got into the movie business.

The document opens with an overview of the church and its believers. It acknowledges the separation between church and state but stakes a claim on the ROC’s role in society, claiming a role in social, cultural, and political life. The second section is devoted to the church and the Russian nation. As the framers argue, the Israelis of the Old Testament offer a clear example of a nation both in the ethnic sense and the civil sense.

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24 See Laruelle, *In the Name of the Nation*, 160–75.
“The interrelations of the church and the nation,” the document notes, “must be examined in both contexts.” Believers, the authors argue, must be aware of their belonging to a larger, heavenly entity other than their nation, but they also reside in Russia and take part in a “national Christian culture.” Orthodox believers revere specific saints who are famous “for their love for their earthly fatherland and their devotion to it.” As an example, the document cites St. Sergius’s devotion and his blessing of Dmitry Donskoy in 1380. This is how nationhood works: the social contract employs contemporary notions of the nation and projects them back onto the past, making Sergius and other saints Russian nation builders.

The documentary accomplishes the very same task. Believers are called on to “preserve and to develop national culture” (as the document had phrased it) and in doing so, to advance a national awareness. Other faiths are acknowledged to have the right to worship in the document, but the main role the church desires in the contract is that of nation builder, openly asking for collaboration with the state on issues of spiritual and patriotic matters. Though warning against aggressive nationalism, the “Basis” equates Orthodoxy with Russianness. Both are ancient, timeless, and rooted to the land. The document therefore makes the church dependent on the nation and the nation dependent on the church. After the anti-religious campaigns of the Soviet regime and the official atheism that the state proclaimed, the Orthodox Church has attempted to articulate a new sense of nationhood that in part equates “Russian” with “Orthodox.” To be a member of the new nation, the document proclaims, means being faithful to church and state.

One way to promote patriotic culture in the new Russia, and to engage in the act of nation-building, is through new media. “The secular media plays an ever-expanding role in the contemporary world,” as the ROC’s contract section on media opens. Because of this fundamental fact, the church notes that it is necessary to cooperate with the media. At the same time, anyone associated with the church should be “great proponents and implementers of Christian moral ideas” when they do so. To help smooth the cooperation, the patriarchate created a cinema and television company, “Orthodox Encyclopedia,” which put out a number of documentary films. The goal, as Aleksy II stated, was “to increase the number of broadcasts, programs, and articles with spiritual and moral content on

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26 All references are my translations from the document, located on the patriarchate’s website. See “Osnovy sotsialnoy kontseptsii Russkoy Pravoslavnoy Tserkvi.”
television, on radio, and in the press.” To make the goal possible, the patriarch created the Office of Press Secretary and appointed Father Vladimir Vigilyansky in 2005. Alexy II also approved of the TV channel **Spas**, which broadcasts for 16 hours a day on educational and spiritual matters. It was also Vigilyansky, acting as a go-between for the more liberal members of the patriarchate, who persuaded Alexy II to bless the three films. Zhitiye prepodobnogo Sergiya, as noted above, premiered on the channel.

In the first decade of the 21st century, the patriarchate ultimately became more media savvy, blessing a host of cultural parables that used the past to offer spiritual lessons for the present. As the church proclaims in the “Basis of the Social Concept,” “the church’s educational, tutorial, and social missions compels it to maintain co-operation with the secular mass media,” while “the church also has its own media outlets, which are blessed by church authorities.” Ultimately, “the information presented to the spectator, listener, and reader should be based not only on the firm commitment to truth, but also concern for the moral state of the individual and society.”

While the church certainly views the media skeptically as a source of secularized, desacralized viewpoints, they also have adapted to the various roles media plays in contemporary society. Much like the Catholic Church in Poland “found ways to work within the institutions of mass politics and the genres of popular culture” in the 20th century, the ROC has done the same in the 21st and done so with far more complexity than it is often given credit for. Russian Orthodox modernity is not the same as other forms of modernity (liberal, stealth authoritarian, or others frequently invoked to explain the New Russia), but it is no less modern. Promoting patriotic culture by making films, blessing them, and airing them on the new Orthodox channel proves it. The ROC has managed to stay contemporary through the use of new media and its various projects while simultaneously articulating its own timeless role in Russian history and nationhood. And what better way to do so than by greenlighting a documentary film about St. Sergius, having Vyacheslav Tikhonov narrate it and Alexy II bless it.

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27 Yakovleva, “Dusha kak khristianka.”
28 See the channel’s website: http://www.spastv.ru.
29 Interview with Father Vladimir Vigilyansky, Moscow, July 12, 2008.
30 See Porter-Szűcs, Faith and Fatherland, 82.
Coda: Death and Renewal

Vyacheslav Tikhonov died on 4 December 2009. The funeral service for the venerable actor was held four days later in Christ the Savior Cathedral. He was buried at the Novodevichy Convent Cemetery. A simple Orthodox cross marks his grave.

The day after his death, Patriarch Kirill issued an official note of condolence. In it, Kirill claimed that Tikhonov’s fictional heroes had captured the hearts of “our people” for they “were always characterized by his courage, love of his fellow man, honesty and sincerity.” Kirill concluded by asking all to “pray for his immortal soul and to believe in the mercy of God.”

Stirlitz, in short, had ascended just as St. Sergius had before. It’s also worth noting that the note was issued in the form of a press release on the patriarch’s official webpage. The church, by blessing movies, issuing documents about society, and setting up a webpage full of press releases, has clearly made the jump to the digital age.

Filmography

Kniaz Vladimir (Prince Vladimir; Russia 2006, dir.: Yury Kulakov).
Ostrov (The Island; Russia 2006, dir.: Pavel Lungin).
Semnadtsat mgnoventiy vesny (17 Moments of Spring; TV mini-series, USSR 1973, dir.: Tatyana Lioznova).
Zhitiye prepodobnogo Sergiya Radonezhskogo (The Life of Saint Sergius of Radonezh; Russia 2005, dir.: Tatyana Novikova).

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In Russia there is a long tradition of the church and/or the state controlling film exhibition throughout the calendar year. In the Tsarist Empire film schedules had to respect the Russian Orthodox Church calendar. Cinemas closed during religious festival days or during Lent—public screenings were banned for approximately 40 days of the year. After the October Revolution this practice was reversed: film premieres would be scheduled for the time around the (recently abolished) Christmas and on the end of the calendar year—a Soviet tradition observed for many decades. Special interest was taken in the film program during the Easter season which should be either attractive enough to keep people in the cinemas, or of the enlightening kind which exposed bad clerical practices and would keep disenchanted audiences out of the churches. Sergey Eisenstein’s *Bronenosets Potemkin* (*Battleship Potemkin*, 1925—premiered in the Bolshoy theatre) and Dziga Vertov’s *Shestaya chast mira* (*A Sixth Part of the World*, 1926) both were released in the second half of December. Anti-religious films typically opened on the last day of the year or on 6 January, i.e. Christmas Eve, as Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas.

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1 The research for this article has been made possible by a Heisenberg Grant from the DFG (DR 376/6).
2 See Mikhaylov, *Rasskazy o kinematografе*, 64, quoting the Moscow daily *Novosti dnya* from 1900.
3 This habit persevered until later Soviet times when favored films would be screened in the days for the turn of the year. The Brezhnevian film *Ironiya sudby, ili S legkim parom* (*The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!* 1976, dir.: Eduard Ryazanov) had not only its TV premiere on New Year’s Day but also based its plot on a comedy of errors connected to drinking during this holiday.
4 One of these films was made in Sergiev Posad in the sixth week of Lent in April 1919, showing the exhumation of the highly revered saint Sergius of Radonezh. Obviously the opening of the grave just before Easter was deliberate. Even if Daniel Peris (Storming the Heavens, 86) in his description of the activities of the “League of Militant Atheists” does not mention cinema, his description applies to film events as well: “Although anti-religious events occurred year round, the League’s public exposure was greatest during its annual anti-Christmas and anti-Easter campaigns.”
5 The kultur-film *Opium* (1929, dir.: Vitaly Zhemchuzhny) presenting world religions as “the opiate of the masses” (Marx), was released on 31 December 1929.
according to the Julian calendar on 7 January. On 10 April 1929 a special circular was issued by the Glaviskusstvo (“Central Arts Administration”) about the cinema program in the “Easter days and the days leading up to Easter.”

Even if Russia has rediscovered its Orthodox identity in the last decade, this does not mean that the old, pre-revolutionary rules about the separation of the moving image and the sphere of the sacred still apply. “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” (2000) stresses the role of culture in the preservation of “spiritual heritage:” “for the message of Christ, any creative styles are suitable” if the “artist is God-fearing.” This goes for all the arts, and “cinema” is explicitly mentioned as one possibility. This article describes a relatively new phenomenon: the increasingly close ties of the Russian film industry to the Russian Orthodox Church. This article revolves around two case studies: Vladimir Khotinenko’s Pop (The Priest) and Nikita Mikhalkov’s Utomlennyye solntsem 2: Predstoyanie (Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus), both of which premiered in spring 2010. Special attention is given to their strategic positioning in the calendar of religious and national holidays.

Holidays and Film Premieres: A Symbolic Punctuation of Time

In Russia nowadays a religious holiday is no impediment to a film premiere—rather the opposite. The most noticeable example happened on Easter Sunday (4 April) 2010 when Vladimir Khotinenko’s film Pop premiered. The solemn premiere turned into a “landmark event in the history of the Russian motion picture industry,” as it was the first film screening

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6 An example of an agit-prop film released on 6 January would be Osobnyak Golubinykh (The Golubins Estate; 1925, dir: Vladimir Gardin).
7 Vishnevsky, “Yezhenedel’nik Narkomprosa.” All these dates can be found in the Chronicle of Russian Cinema assembled by Deryabin and Fomin in 2004 (Fomin/Deryabin, Letopis).
8 In tsarist times, religious motifs were not allowed in feature films—the Holy Synod had decided that cinema—like theatre—is not suitable to represent saints, Mary and Jesus. Pathé Passion films, imported from France, were banned. Icons and proper Orthodox behavior (e.g. crossing oneself in certain situations) are rarely to be found in pre-revolutionary Russian films. (See Drubek-Meyer, “Paradoxien”).
9 See the official website of the Russian Orthodox Church (http://www.patriarchia.ruxt/about.html).
10 See Jim Evans’ article in the online journal of the company Lighting & Sound which installed the projection (“Moscow cathedral screens first film premiere”).
in the building of a major church, specifically the Church Council’s Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

The tradition of providing religious and state holidays with a heightened symbolism has been introduced, or rather, revived noticeably in the last few years in Russia—cinema plays an important part here, as it combines enlightenment or commemoration with entertainment. In addition a film premiere can be turned into an event which will be noticed by the media. A conspicuous example for the combination of a film premiere and a secular holiday was another film by director Khotinenko, the nationalist costume drama about the end of the smuta (Time of Troubles). 1612: Khroniki Smutnogo vremeni (1612: Chronicles of the Dark Time) opened in 2007 on the holiday of National Unity, the 4th November. National Unity Day (Den narodnogo yedinstva) had been reintroduced in 2005 to commemorate the uprising led by Minin and Pozharsky against the Polish invaders of Moscow in November 1612. In addition, this holiday symbolizes the ability of the Russian people to stand up against foreign invasion and thus carries as many anti-Western overtones as it is a celebration of the non-ruling classes, the common people. It is often viewed as a more nationalist replacement of the 7th of November, the (abolished) commemoration of the October Revolution. But one should point out that the holiday goes actually back to tsarist times—it had been celebrated from 1649 till 1917. Khotinenko’s film was meant to explain the historical background of this holiday, which was not quite clear to many Russians.

**Predstoyaniye: The Film and the Word**

The other important Russian national holiday is Victory day (Den Pobedy), marking the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the USSR on the 9th of May 1945. It is celebrated with military parades, most notably on the Red Square. A film premiere planned for Victory day 2010—also on the Red Square—was Nikita Mikhalkov’s World War II epos about the Kotov family, Utomlennye solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye (Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus); in the end, the film premiered earlier, on 17 April, and not on the

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11 For a detailed analysis and comparison with the film Minin i Pozharsky (Minin and Pozharsky; 1939, dir.: Vsevolod Pudovkin/Mikhail Doller), see Scholz, “Sovetsky diskurs.”

12 In November 2011, Kirill stressed the similarity of these two holidays connected to Russian victory, adding that the victory over the Poles in the 17th is not less important than the one in the 20th century. See “Patriarch Kirill compared.”
Red Square but in the Kremlin. The film opened in cinemas on 22 April 2010 and was intended to be “our answer” (i.e. the Russians’) to Spielberg’s version of World War II.

The official English translation of the second part of the film title (Exodus) abandons the original meaning of predstoyaniye as “anticipation” or, in the religious sense: “prayer.” Predstoyaniye can also be used in the sense of standing in front of God, facing him in the moment of death. As a term in art history it describes the representation of figures, situated in front of saints, Jesus or God (hypostasis). Furthermore, predstoyatel is also a noun used to describe the head of a church, the “primate.” A controversial exhibition called Predstoyaniye/Deisis in the Tretyakov Gallery in 2004 introduced the otherwise rare word into a broader artistic context. By translating predstoyaniye as deisis, it brought to mind that figures facing saints and the sacred in Orthodox painting are mostly found in the deesis. Art historian Yekaterina Degot describes the exhibition:

Icon collector Viktor Bondarenko (who owns a very significant collection of icons from the 17th to 19th centuries) came up with the project consisting of synthesized portraits of characters from Biblical history and Russian saints, from Adam to Seraphim of Sarov. Artist Konstantin Khudyakov made digital photographs of numerous real-life people, assembled small fragments of them onto a computer, printed them in large format, then varnished and airbrushed them to look more and more like a painting, without actually being one. The portraits, resembling an iconostasis, were displayed in the Tretyakov gallery in a barely-lit room [. . .]. In the computerized version, the graphic part is shown on monitors as moving images, whereby each portrait is transformed into another; the suggestive influence here is not created by the play of light or sounds, but rather by the captivating metamorphosis of the same face.

Deesis (in Russian also: deisis or deisus), meaning “supplication,” is best known as the representation of Mary and St John the Baptist with their
arms raised in prayer in behalf of humanity, typically found on the Orthodox wall of icons (iconostasis). As the pictures in the exhibition consist of frontal portraits only, they lack the typical gestures of supplication stressing the other aspects of the word predstoyaniye. The art historian Degot stresses the fact that in the exhibition “Deisis, nationalistic, byzantophile, and ‘slavophile’ components are discernable. Khudyakov imparted almost all project’s characters, and even in some versions Christ himself, with Slavic traits.” The exhibition suggested that the people facing God are by definition (Russian) Orthodox. My argument here is not that Mikhalkov’s film Predstoyaniye was inspired by the exhibition—even if there is a coincidence in the title and in the fact that the icon-like faces were moving images. The 2004 exhibition, which subsequently toured Russia for five years, is probably not more than a subconscious context for the 2010 film. It seems more plausible that Mikhalkov appropriated the title from original religious discourses, hoping that predstoyaniye would give the film about the “Great Patriotic War” a sacred aura without having a clear religious concept—especially if compared with a title like Andrey Tarkovsky’s Offret (Sacrifice, 1986).

On the Russian internet, bloggers wondered what the word predstoyaniye could mean, and by making puns they stressed the fact that the title is obscure and pretentious at the same time. It is not quite clear how any meaning or concept of predstoyaniye could be connected to the second part of the Utomlennyye solntsem trilogy. Does “supplication” refer to Kotov and his daughter as the Russian mediators between humankind and God? Are the heroes of the film figures facing God? Somebody who probably would be able to explain what Mikhalkov had in mind with Predstoyaniye would be Kirill, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia. Of course the patriarch, who was among the few who actually praised the film, gave no direct explanation to Predstoyaniye/predstoyat. However on 9 May 2010, celebrating the 65th anniversary of Victory, Patriarch Kirill addressed the

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20 The deesis in the iconostasis itself contains the twelve “Great Feasts of the Orthodox Church.”

21 Degot, “Contemporary Art in the Time of Late Christianity.”

22 For example on the blog of Fuziler de Trashan (“Prodolzhaem perevirat stikhi”): “tse ne film, odno stradanye! /”I pri chem tut Predstoianye?”/”Budet, vidno, prodolzhenye”/”Gde sortir, proshu proshchenya?” (This is not a film but torture / And how is this related to ‘Predstoyan’ye? / Apparently there will be a sequel / Sorry, where’s the toilet?)

23 Mikhalkov in his video speech about the election of Kirill expresses his high opinion of the new patriarch; he also mentions that he has known him for 20 years. See “Mikhalkov ob izbranii Kirilla Patriarkhnom.”
question of the meaning of the war for Russia during the church service. On this
day he also performed a special Victory Day thanksgiving prayer; this “service of supplication” (*moleben*) on 9 May coincided with the Last Easter weekend when Jesus healed a blind man. Kirill built his sermon on this “wondrous coincidence” (*divnoe sovpadeniye*) of Victory Day and the healing of the blind. He stressed that this story is not only about physical but also “inner, spiritual sight” (*vnutrenneye, dukhovnoe zreniye*) which every Christian needs to develop.

In his sermon, he linked the memory of World War II with ideas of God’s punishment and divine providence which helped the Russians to win the war; on these grounds a victorious nation emerged. This victorious Russia, having regained its spiritual sight, is meant to play a special role in the world today:

*The Great Patriotic War punished us for our sins, but revealed the glory and the strength of our people. We defeated the most terrible enemy who could not be defeated by anyone else, and through this victory God seemed to tell us: “You can. Do not sin. Do not bend to sin. Live according to My Truth and you can achieve everything.” […]* The meaning of this holiday is that by remembering our Great Victory we are able to regain that kind of sight (*zrenie*) which is the most important one. […] We have the power to be victorious and together with this, the great responsibility not to evade this historical duty to be victors.*24*

Stephen Norris in his review of the film comes to the conclusion that the “film unfolds like a three-hour version of the patriarch’s sermon.”*25* If the sermon indeed more or less coincides with the message of Nikita Mikhalkov’s film *Predstoyaniye*, which preceded Victory Day by 18 days, several questions arise: Was the film a preparation and/or illustration for the new *moleben* (service of supplication)? Whose idea was it to connect the 65th anniversary of the end of the World War II with a deeper meaning of Russian Victory for the Orthodox world? And how does the metaphor of (spiritual) sight, which the patriarch diligently elaborates, fit into this agenda?

We do know that film director Mikhalkov has a rather close relationship with the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, specifically with the patriarch. There are images of Mikhalkov receiving the Holy

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*24* See Patriarch Kirill in the video of the sermon placed together with “V nedelyu o slepom” on the *Patriarchia Website*.

*25* See Norris, “Nikita Mikhalkov.”
Communion from Kirill; the director was also present during the service on the 24th of May 2009 in the Uspensky Cathedral in the Kremlin (where the aforementioned Filaret used the words predstoyaniye/predstoyatel). In a video clip on the internet site Pravoslavny Telekanal Soyuz one can see the director greeting the crowd on Red Square after the service, standing at Kirill’s side. Nikita Mikhalkov and Patriarch Kirill met in July 2009 for a discussion “about the religious and cultural life in Russia.” What would a film director and the religious head (predstoyatel) of the Russian Orthodox Church discuss in a private meeting: the need to organize the religious and patriotic education of young Russians, Mikhalkov’s next film—or both?

If we listen carefully to Kirill’s eloquent sermon at the Church of Christ the Savior, its rhetorical twists might remind us of his ties with Mikhalkov, in whom he is interested in both as a film director and Orthodox Christian: according to the patriarch “the Church does not look at the war as historians or politicians do.” The patriarch suggested that the war had redeemed Russia from its sins. This is the “particular stance, a particular spiritual point of view” of the church. Only “spiritual sight” takes away the blindness with which “some homespun historians” look upon Russian history, “thinking wrongly that evil here was as bad as there” (having in mind Hitler’s Germany).

The patriarch might have counted on Mikhalkov’s film as the most efficient way to show this “religious understanding” (religioznoe ponimaniye) of the war—setting it apart from films like Saving Private Ryan by Spielberg which shows the “secular” (the American) victory. The underlying idea would be that Mikhalkov’s film shows the Russian victory of the Great Patriotic War as a national, i.e. Orthodox, victory. The astute remark of film critic Valery Kichin—written before the moleben on Victory Day—reminds us of the fact that in the USSR of the 1940s, the ruling religion was Stalinism.27

26 See e.g. the website of the journal Komsomolskaya Pravda (18 June, 2009): http://kp.ru/photo/358108.
27 In his article “Voyna i mir” Kichin remarks that the fault of this film is the idea that the “war returned Russia to God” (a Mikhalkov quote): “Anyone who remembers Russia in the middle of the 20th Century,” Kichin posits, “will remember that it was a deeply atheistic country […] that worshipped another religion: The cult of Stalin. […] And Victory itself was proclaimed as proof of his genius. Now it is fashionable to explain a new tendency, to explain that the great victory was by the grace of God. This film specifically expresses this tendency.”
Let us come back to Kirill’s emphasis on the visions created by “spiritual sight.” Cinema belongs to those media addressing first and foremost the sense of sight. In the last centuries, special attention has been given to visual presentations of historical events in Russian and Soviet culture. It played an important role in the popularization of facts and ideas with those who could not read—which in Russia was a rather high percentage until the 1930s. Film was a modern medium using the old channels of visual communication. Its images could teach, explain, and entertain. Interestingly this investment in images as pedagogical and semiotic tools goes back to an old tradition of visual argumentation in Russia. As there was no scholastic tradition in Russian Orthodox theology and therefore hardly any theological writings until the 17th century, a strong visual theology developed in its place. Instead of formulating concepts in words, concepts were expressed in the shapes, compositions, and colors of icons.

The kleyma (the series of small icons surrounding the central icon) or the wall of icons, which we find in most Orthodox churches, amount to an even more complicated concept of communicating ideas and narratives. Similar to film montage, this earlier practice of icon walls works with the juxtaposition of images.

In the context of the Russian Orthodox Church’s attention to new media, the title Predstoyaniye seems to aspire to introduce the film screen as a modern icon wall with the Kotov family in predstoyaniye (supplication). Filaret, the metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk, used both terms predstoyatel/predstoyat in his greeting of the Patriarch Kirill on 24 May 2009: “You were destined by God to be the Head (Predstoyatel) of the largest Orthodox Church of the world […] You, your holiness, took it upon yourself to collect all spiritual and moral energies of the people, the heroic deed of supplication (predstoyaniye) on behalf of all of us before God’s throne.” In the two forms of the word predstoyat two semantical cores (leading, praying, and standing before the Lord for the Orthodox Church) are present—both dissolving into the verbal noun predstoyaniye, which in this context has the meaning of “mediating.” The priest has special qualities (which place him high up in the hierarchy) and therefore he is able to be a mediator between God and man, as he has “spiritual sight.” The predstoyatel, according to its literal etymology, stands (stoyat) before (pred)

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28 Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 225–6, quotes the 1937 census giving a literacy rate of still only 75%.
29 Trubetskoy, *Tri ocherka o russkoy ikone*.
30 “Patriarkh Kirill vozglavil bogosluzheniye.”
the people and at the same time in front of / under the saints and God, praying for the people, and bearing responsibility for his flock. Predstoyaniye is thus an activity of praying and ruling at the same time.

Attendance and Reception of Predstoyaniye (17/22 April 2010)

If we assume that Mikhalkov and the patriarch had certain expectations for the two Burnt by the Sun sequels, the films proved unable to fulfill them. What went wrong? The films certainly did not lack financial support. The production costs of Predstoyaniye were $40 million according to the director (other sources say $55 million). The film proved to be “Russia’s most expensive flop.” On the first weekend Predstoyaniye earned $3,743,578 and on the second weekend $1,386,464. No. 1 in that week was the American film Iron Man 2 with $7,678,178 in box office revenue, a sum Predstoyaniye could not match even with its total earnings of $7,465,086 in all the CIS countries. The film finished its run in Russian cinemas by the end of May 2010, and the last weekend total was only $5,845. At the end of April, pupils in the city of Vladivostok were asked by their teachers—to attend the screenings, obviously to boost the numbers of the ticket sales. Some of the parents refused to pay for the tickets though and did not see the film as a valid replacement of school instruction, notably history lessons.

The film started with 1079 release prints—a rather high figure (with the attendant costs involved) in comparison with the US film Iron Man 2, having opened with 915 copies but earning over $7 million already on the first weekend. Several weeks before the premiere, a massive advertising campaign for his film was launched with the slogan “A Great Film about

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31 “Byudzhet kartiny Utomlennyye solntsem-2.” In comparison with the historical $17 Million film Tsar (2009) produced and directed by Pavel Lungin, it was relatively cheap. Lungin’s film Ostrov (The Island; 2006) cost under $2 Million.
32 Harding, “Nikita Mikhalkov’s Burnt by the Sun.” It surpassed by 5 Mill. in cost Nikita Mikhalkov’s Sibirsky tsiryulnik (The Barber of Siberia; Russia 1998) which lavishly premiered in February 1999. “At least 6,000 people will today gather in the Kremlin for the world premiere of a film that is not only the most expensive in Russian history.” Reeves, “The last film tsar of all the Russias”.
33 All numbers of ticket sales are taken from “Byulleten Kinoprokatchika.” The last part of Utomlennyye solntsem 2: Tsitatel earned even less: roughly $1.5 Million. For comparison, the total of the ticket sales in Ukraine was $630,955; there Tsitatel ended on 23 May (with only $3,029 for the last weekend).
34 “Vladivostok pupils obliged.”
the Great War.” Obviously this campaign did not have the desired effect. Parodies of the film poster appeared on internet blogs (one poster changed the slogan to “A Great Film about Great Me;” another one turned Kotov’s hat into a Nazi helmet). By the end of April, satirical verses about Kotov and other figures like Dyuzehev appeared on the internet; among the most popular were the ones by a blogger calling herself The Mockturtle: “Dyuzehev enters. He is confused. In this ruse he can’t be used.”

Even the Russian press, which seemed easier to control or to influence, almost unanimously rejected the film. Film critic Mikhail Trofimenkov called the film “pornography of death” with the director “raping the viewer.” He pointed out that even the war veterans present at the premiere did not like the film, calling it a “spit in their face.” According to critic Yury Bogomolov, there are two leitmotifs in the film. Firstly, it is the “revenge for humiliation,” which he describes as being motivated by the director’s character. Secondly, it is “the Divine Providence:”

God is on the Russians’ side. Miracles keep happening. Kotov, played by the director, is miraculously freed from the Gulag by a German bomb. Nadya Kotova, played by the director’s daughter, swims quietly on a mine, which only a little later destroys an enemy boat. Film as evidence of God’s existence.

Journalist Kseniya Larina pointed out that the film contains many historical inadequacies; the “great’ film proved to be the greatest deceit in our film history.” Historian Dmitry Shusharin wrote, “American movies are made for the audience. Mikhalkov’s film was made for the chiefs,” and he added, “This is a total defeat for Nikita Mikhalkov—not as director but as a supporter of a certain model of the cinematic relations between the society and the government.”

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35 Vladimir Pozner ("Utornenyye solntsem") remarked on his blog how much he abhorred this “lozung”.
36 Mikhalkov reportedly first intended to sue them. See Kovalchuk, “Bloggers Offended.”
37 In the original: “Vkhodit Dyuzeiev. On kontuzhen. Po syuzhetu on ne nuzhen.” The Mockturtle, “Posmotrela Mikhalkova.”
38 Trofimenkov, “Gryaznye vosposominaniya o velikoy voyne.”
39 Bogomolov, “Dlinno, netsenzurno, sherrokhovato.”
40 Larina, “Teatr vremen Nikity Mikhalkova.”
Although the patriarch recommended Mikhalkov’s opus and called *Predstoyaniye* a “wonderful film” with a “clearly religious dimension,” the project had failed: the state-funded patriotic film matched the patriarch’s new *moleben* for Victory Day 2010 perfectly—but the audiences would not buy what they were sold. It was already a bad sign that neither Medvedev nor Putin attended the premiere of *Predstoyaniye*. Furthermore, the church seemed to anticipate Mikhalkov’s directoral failure in inspiring religious and patriotic feelings even before the film was released. Several problems became evident in the years of advance work leading up for the film’s production, which resulted in the decision to look for a less controversial director for future alliances.

*Tsitadel* (5 May 2011; originally planned for 4 November 2010)

Nikita Mikhalkov’s second part of *Utomlennye solntsem 2*, called *Tsitadel* (*The Citadel*) should have had its premiere on National Unity Day 2010—the idea obviously was to present both sequels in the year of the 65th anniversary of Soviet Victory over Hitler in 1945. The premiere date was changed due to the unsatisfying ticket sales of *Predstoyaniye* and bad press. When *Tsitadel* was delayed, a new meaningful date had to be found—so it opened exactly 6 months later, on 5 May 2011, preceding the symbolic date of the Day of Victory by 4 days as it had to fit into the normal program cycle. *Tsitadel* fared even worse than its predecessor, earning in the CIS countries a total of $1,523,405.

Mikhalkov has been increasingly under attack for different reasons in 2011, trying to counter the animosities against his person in a new internet presence as "Besogon" (Besogon TV on *youtube* was established in March 2011). Mikhalkov as a member of the Public Council of the Russian Ministry of Defense had (ab)used a flashing blue light that entitles cars to ignore traffic rules. When he was publicly criticized for using it privately, he had to give it up in May 2011. In the same month (that is, after the

42 “The Patriarch Kirill calls Mikhalkov’s *Predstoyaniye* a wonderful film.”
43 See Larina, “Teatr vremen Nikity Mikhalkova.”
44 Interestingly, the studio of the web designer Artem Lebedev—who was among the people whom Mikhalkov wanted to sue in March 2010—created the poster for *Tsitadel* a year later, which showed two faces staring at each other in close up: Kotov and Stalin.
45 Again the word does not have a clear definition or translation, its meanings ranging from “restless” to “liar” (criminal jargon).
Tsitadel premiere), he also resigned from his position as president of the Public Council of the Russian Defense Ministry. The official reason was a complaint about the organization of the Victory Parades in May 2010 and 2011.46

Pop (5 April 2010—Easter Sunday)

Let us take a closer look at the content of the patriarch’s sermon on Victory Day 2010: Punishing our (Communist) sins, the war revealed the grandeur of the Russian nation. This means implicitly that the death of millions during the war somehow must have had a positive side. The concept of sacrifice is indeed a Christian one—but somehow the sermon seems to be almost apologetic towards suffering, less concerned with commemoration of the dead than with a truly patriarchal gesture glorifying the war.47

Paradoxically, World War II had positive effects on the standing of the Russian Orthodox Church in the USSR. Stalin understood that patriotism would be boosted with the help of religion. Russian Orthodox religious life experienced a revival after 1943. Monasteries and churches were reopened. Another chapter of this history of religion during the war is the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church in the occupied territories. This was the topic of another film which also premiered in April 2010: the already mentioned Pop by Vladimir Khotinenko. Pop treats the highly sensitive topic of collaboration between Russian clergy and the Nazis in the context of the so-called “Pskov mission.” Between 1941 and 1944, a group of priests was sent by the Orthodox metropolitan of Vilnius and Exarch of Latvia and Estonia on a mission to the Pskov region, which was occupied by the Wehrmacht. The priests reopened closed churches and were able to alleviate the fate of the population. “Known as the Pskov Orthodox (sometimes Spiritual) Mission, the episode was written into Soviet history as a simple case of the Orthodox Church’s treasonous collaboration with the Nazis.”48

46 Among other things, he mentioned that the cadets from the Nakhimov and the Suvorov Military Schools were not present and that President Medvedev would sit during the parade. See “Nikita Mikhalkov sdal migalku.”

47 This becomes tangible in mentioning only the heroic “fathers”—as if only fathers died in World War II and not children, women or men.

48 Anemone, “Vladimir Khotinenko.”
Pop was the first feature film of the studio Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya (Orthodox Encyklopedia).\textsuperscript{49} The film was made “with a blessing of the departed Moscow Patriarch Alexy II, under the patronage of the President of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev and the Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.”\textsuperscript{50} The father of Alexy II (Ridiger) had been part of the “Pskov mission.”\textsuperscript{51} In addition Pop was blessed by the current patriarch Kirill. Pop received financial support mainly from the Ministry of Culture and GAZPROM. Anthony Anemone, specialist for Russian literature and cinema, calls Pop “a symptom not only of the powerful new role of the Orthodox Church in today’s Russia, but of the increasingly powerful links between government, business, and the church in today’s Russia.”\textsuperscript{52} The film received several prizes: it was the first film awarded the Patriarch’s Prize on 29 April 2010.\textsuperscript{53} Later in 2010 it received the Grand Prix from the film festival Light-Bringing Angel (Luchezarny angel), which takes place in the beginning of November; this is—as we remember—a special time in Russian collective memory.\textsuperscript{54} What is astonishing is that the first film commissioned by a film company under the aegis of the Russian Orthodox Church is not about a saint like Dmitry Donskoy—although there were plans to do a biopic on him—or the arrests of priests after the revolution. Instead it is—again—about the war. But Pop as a viewing experience is far more rewarding than Khotinenkos’s \textit{1612} and Mikhalkov’s \textit{Predstoyaniye}.

The film opened the discussion of a sensitive topic: the tolerance of Russian Orthodoxy and even rebuilding churches during Nazi occupation. The German authorities not only tolerated religious care for the population but also saw it as anti-Bolshevik propaganda.\textsuperscript{55} The Mission was headed by Sergy, Metropolitan of Vilnius and Exarch of Latvia and

\textsuperscript{49} The film company Orthodox Encyklopedia was founded by the ukaz (order) of Patriarch Alexy II in 2005 as part of the “creative holdings” of Orthodox Encyklopedia, i.e. in the same year as when “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church” was issued (see below).

\textsuperscript{50} Thus states the press release for the film.

\textsuperscript{51} During the occupation of Estonia by Nazi Germany (1941–44), Aleksy Ridiger attended services with his father Mikhail (an Orthodox priest) in German prison camps.

\textsuperscript{52} Anemone, “Vladimir Khotinenko.”

\textsuperscript{53} See “Filmu \textit{Pop} prisuzhdena.”

\textsuperscript{54} A journalist explains, “The dates of the film festival are timed to coincide with holidays: The National Unity Day and the Day of the Feast of the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan” (Zaripova, “Dobroye kino”). The icon of the Kazanskaya Bogomater has been considered Russia’s palladium; 4 November is one of her two feast days in the year.

\textsuperscript{55} On the Pskov Mission, see Obozny, \textit{Istoriya Pskovskoy Pravoslavny obshchestva}.
Estonia. Even the fact that the film distorts the historical biography of the main character, father Aleksey Ionov (1907–77), seems tolerable. Most priests who were active under the occupiers were sent to the Gulag—this is what happens to the priest in the film. Anthony Anemone states, “Khotinenko’s Priest, the first high-profile feature film to tell the story of the Pskov Mission, represents the latest stage of the Orthodox Church’s attempt to rewrite the history of its collaboration with the Germans during WW II.”

The ticket sales for this film were not overwhelming either: $1,672,683. Sergey Kravets, the producer of the film and head of Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya, explains why the box office receipts were not as good as expected: firstly, a version of the film was pirated three weeks before its release and was available on the internet even before it opened. Secondly, Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya had arranged private screenings for the clergy in 23 Russian cities in March 2010. Thousands of clergymen and obviously many other viewers saw the picture in the course of these previews. March, incidentally, was also the same time when Predstoyaniye ran its big marketing campaign. Was the almost parallel run of two films about World War II a coincidence, or was it intended? The timing of two film premieres about war, Russian history, and religion in one month does not seem very well thought-out. Maybe they were meant to compete? If yes, Pop won. In many ways, by dealing with the collaboration of the Russian Church with the Nazi occupiers, this film fulfilled the hopes of Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya to establish contact with audiences and also draw attention to the complex history of the Orthodox Church in Russia. In September 2011,

56 A critical stance towards the Exarch Sergy was expressed by the Greek church historian Vlassios Phidas in his history of the Estonian Orthodox Church. “The Patriarchate of Moscow hastened to appoint Archbishop Sergy, a Russian, as metropolitan of Vilnius and Exarch of Latvia and Estonia, riding roughshod over the Church of Estonia’s autonomous status and its charter even before Soviet control of the country was complete. During a brief period of German occupation in Estonia (1941–1944), secured by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1940, the Russian Exarch Sergy interfered arbitrarily in the internal affairs of the Estonian Church, causing a breach between Estonian and Russian Orthodox.” Phidas, “The Church of Estonia,” 517.

57 Ionov joined the German troops and fled the country in the end of the war. He emigrated to the US where he wrote his memoirs. See Ionov, “Zapiski missionera.”

58 Anemone, “Vladimir Khotinenko.”

59 See “Byulleten Kinoprokatchika.”

60 Sergey Kravets talks about this in an interview with Mariya Mukhina (“Svyatitel Aleksey”).
Pravoslavnaya Entsiklopediya finished their second feature film. Initially it was called Svyatitel Aleksy (Saint Aleksy), the final title is Orda (Horde; dir.: Andrey Proshkin). It is one of the “first socially significant projects which was financed with the help of the fund of social and economical support for Russian cinematography.” Its premiere was on the 20th of September 2012, the eve of the Day of Military Honour commemorating the victory over the Golden Horde in 1380. Even stronger than in Pop, the supremacy of Christianity over other religions is shown. Pop and the two sequels of Utomlennye solntsem 2 are about the “Great Patriotic War” but at the same time they have either a religious topic or were placed into a religious framework; this was achieved by timing the premieres close to a religious holiday or a state holiday seen from the “particular spiritual point of view” (Patriarch Kirill). By paying special attention to the distribution and exhibition dates of these films, this article revealed the intentions of film makers, producers, church and political leaders to cooperate on a project of sacralizing national history and nationalizing religion in Russia.

Filmography

1612: Khroniki Smutnogo vremeni (1612: Chronicles of the Dark Time; Russia 2007, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)
Bronenosets Potemkin (Battleship Potemkin; USSR 1925, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Ioniya sudby, ili S legkim parom (The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath! USSR 1976, dir.: Eduard Ryazanov)
Iron Man (USA 2008, dir.: Jon Favreau)
Minin i Pozharsky (Minin and Pozharsky; USSR 1939, dir.: Vsevolod Pudovkin/Mikhail Doller)
Offret (Sacrifice; Sweden/UK/France 1986, dir.: Andrey Tarkovsky)
Opium (Opium; USSR 1929, dir.: Vitaly Zhemchuzhny)
Orda (Horde; Russia 2011, dir.: Andrey Proshkin)
Osobnyak Golubinykh (The Golubins Estate; USSR 1924, dir: Vladimir Gardin)
Ostrov (The Island; Russia 2006, dir.: Pavel Lungin)
Pop (The Priest; Russia 2009, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)
Saving Private Ryan (USA 1998, dir.: Steven Spielberg)

61 The film is about Aleksy, the metropolitan of Kiev and Moscow who was sent to Saray to Khan Dzhanibek of the Golden Horde (1357–58) to heal the blind (!) mother of the Khan. It is also advertised as a film about the clash of civilizations in the fourteenth century.

Shestaya chast mira (A Sixth Part of the World; USSR 1926, dir.: Dziga Vertov)
Sibirsky tsiryulnik (The Barber of Siberia; Russia 1998, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)
Tsar (Russia 2009, dir.: Pavel Lungin)
Utomlennye solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye (Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus; Russia 2010, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)
Utomlennye solntsem 2: Tsitadel (Burnt by the Sun 2: The Citadel; Russia 2011, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)

Bibliography


"Mikhalkov ob izbranii Kirilla Patriarkhom, 27.01.09." Broadcast on Rossiya-1 TV Chanel. Last modified July 1, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XJ720O8i2M.


"V Nedelyu o slepom i 65-ju godovshchinu Pobedy v Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyne Svyat-evshy Patriarkh Kirill sovershil Bozhestvennyuyu liturgiyu, blagodarstvenny moleben


LONGING FOR THE EMPIRE: STATE AND ORTHODOX CHURCH IN RUSSIAN RELIGIOUS FILMS

Liliya Berezhnaya

The “history of empire” in Russia has turned out to be a perennial theme in East European studies of the last two decades. Almost every historical period provides a new definition of “empire,” which breeds irritations. While speaking about imperial subjects in this article, I prefer the most comprehensive definition as provided by Dominic Lieven: “Empire is, first and foremost, a very great power that has left its mark on the international relations of the era […] a polity that rules over wide territories and many peoples, since the management of space and multiethnicty is one of the great perennial dilemmas of empire.” Continually expanding literature on “imperial collapse and imperial revival” in modern Russian history fills numerous shelves of university libraries. What is new in this regard is the comparative approach to the Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman Empires which brings “imperiology” into the framework of the modernity studies. Another popular, though more traditional, trend explores the relationship between empire and nationalism in the second half of the 19th century. Scholars speak about the perspectives of the so-called “imperial turn” in Russian studies. A couple of years ago, the American journal Kritika compared this “imperial boom” with the “particular owl of Minerva that came on the heels of a quantum leap in the general theory of nationalism and ethnicity in the human sciences.” And the scientific journal Ab Imperio, perhaps the most influential forum of this kind on the post-Soviet space,

1 Lieven, Empire, xi.
3 The perceptual shift was heralded by Kappeler’s Russland als Vielvölkerreich.
4 Miller, “The Value and the Limits of Comparative Approach.”
5 Miller, The Romanov Empire and Nationalism; Barkey and Hagen, After Empire; Utz, Russlands unbrauchbare Vergangenheit; Martin and Suny, Empire and nation-making. The journal Russian Politics and Law has recently devoted a whole issue to the problem of the relations between imperial and nation-state forms in contemporary Russia (47, no. 2, 2009).
6 David-Fox, Holquist, and Martin, “The Imperial Turn,” 705.
devoted an editorial article to the analysis of imperial studies in “post-nationalist Russia.”

The interest in Russian imperial roots is spreading however not only among intellectuals but also within the Russian political milieu. The search for a lost imperium as a part of Russian identity is a constant theme in current political discourses. Imperial terminology forms a political stock of the right-wing activists and ruling elites. Already in 1999, Vladimir Putin pointed out that Russia was not nourishing “imperial plans” with regard to the CIS countries, though it intended to pursue its interests with regard to its “near abroad.” While openly denying the label of empire, the ruling elites remain under the “stigma of empire” in their “great power” inspirations.

Even more dubious seem the attempts of some liberal politicians to apply democratic terms to Russian imperial heritage. Probably the best known example is the formulation of a modern Russian “liberal empire,” suggested by former prime minister Anatoly Chubais. The popularization of the term “empire” in Russian political discourse during the last decade is an agenda for scholarly research, as seen by Mark Beissinger from Princeton University:

Irrespective of whether one accepts or rejects empire as an apt analytical description of contemporary Russia, the persistence of empire as a practical category of politics in the Eurasian region, it is a social fact that fear of, aspirations to, memory of, and longing for empire are widespread throughout the region and continue to shape the region’s culture and politics, begging for explanation.

One of the possible clarifications comes from the realm of the history of memory. If one uses the categories suggested by Igor J. Polianski, the Russian imperial past (particularly that of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century) recently floated from the category of the “warm memory” (which hurts when it is erased from consciousness) to that of the “hot” one (which means legitimating current societal order with constant references to history). Polianski finds the answer to the question why and

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7 Gerasimov, Glebov, and Kaplunovski, “In Search of a New Imperial History.”
8 Malinova, “Tema imperii.”
10 Lieven, Empire, 330.
12 Beissinger, “The Persistence of Empire in Eurasia.”
when this turning point appeared in Russian political discourse (and thus in public opinion in general) in Jan Assmann’s concept of “cultural memory” and the notion of “floating gap,” or the turning point in history. Since the cultural memory does not exist for more than 3–4 generations, exactly the period of the Soviet Union, Polianski places the two floating gaps as crucial points in modern Russian history on its beginning (the first decade of the 20th century) and the end (1990s). The trauma of the Soviet Union’s collapse was in this way replaced (and thus partly healed) by the “dream time” of the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire. The story of the “golden age” of tsarist Russia was born.

Among those who helped with the birth of this idea were not only historians and politicians. The new trend found its own resonance in literature, theater, and fine arts. Cinema was particularly sensitive in this respect and received new impetus in Putin’s time after the “volatile de-Sovietization ‘coma’ period.” Cinema’s role in this process is “paradigmatic not only in the sense that it constitutes one of the key cultural products” of societal communication, but also because the cinematographic “image generally fulfils the role of ‘naturalizing’ and so authenticating the ideological thrust of the written word.” In modern society, the general audience often gets its knowledge of the past from the screen rather than from books. To quote Clive Marsh, the audience uses films and other cultural audio-visual products (TV, radio, and MP3 production) to undertake its “meaning-making,” namely, to clarify its personal identity, and to gain an “understanding of social location.” In the article to follow, I will argue that both the so-called “imperial” and “religious” turns in Russian cinema affect political and historical debates in the country.

“Imperial and Religious Turns”
in Russian Films of the Last Two Decades

In the case of contemporary Russia, the pursuit of empire does not only mean an official “demand from above” to construct a new imperial narrative by cinematic means. The impulse is partly initiated by the film

14 Ibid., 70–71.
18 The Russian Law of Cinema, effective 1999, determined which films deserve special status in funding: children’s and youth films, debut films and chronicles. According to Jasmijn Van Gorp, this reflected “an increased awareness of the ideological function of
producers themselves. By the 1990s, Russia and other post-Soviet countries were being flooded by an unprecedented tide of various soap images. The efforts to forge a new image of imperial heritage in Russia initially took the form of a complex and contradictory set of responses to (and against) such “Western soap” images. It resulted in the post-Soviet imperial reaction against the self-flagellation of glasnost in films. The best advocate of the idea of imperial reconstruction in Russia, a “voice of the imperial turn” among Russian cinema makers, is Nikita Mikhalkov. In October 2010 he released a 10,000-word text titled Right and Truth. The Manifesto of Enlightened Conservatism. The film director affirms that modern society is a volatile cocktail of overarching Western liberal modernization, “clan chiefs,” and “insidious corruption,” which does not suit the majority of Russians. A veneer of economic reforms and liberal institutions are concealing traditional, ancient social relations [...]. We have to understand once and forever that Russia is a continental Empire, not a nation-state, [...] in which the church plays a strong role and the government is strong, appointing mayors and governors. Russia-Eurasia is not Europe, neither Asia, nor the mechanical combination of the two. It is an independent cultural-historical continent, organic and national unity, geopolitical and sacral center of the world.19

Although the form of the political manifesto remains exceptional in declarations of political views within the Russian cinematic milieu,20 it apparently reflects filmmakers’ interest in issues of politics, spiritual heritage, and Russia’s place in history. With this package, imperial themes almost inevitably come on the fore. The war films provided a convenient vehicle for this project.21 One of the most brilliant scholars of contemporary Russian cinematography, Nancy Condee, called this modern trend “the imperial trace” in the Russian cinema.22

The turn of the 20th–21st centuries witnessed the rise of documentaries, like Rossiya, kotoruyu my poteryali (Russia, That We’ve Lost; 1992) by Stanislav Govorukhin or Rossiyskaya Imperiya (The Russian Empire), a serial by cinema as an instrument for articulating national identity.” As a result, “five out of eight films set in the tsarist period” were subsidized in 1997–2000. Gorp, “Inverting film policy,” 250–51.

19 Mikhalkov, Pravo i Pravda. Manifest prosveshchennogo konservatizma.
20 Besides Mikhalkov, Stanislav Govorukhin is another film director active in Russian politics. As a deputy of the Russian Parliament, he was picked in December 2011 to lead Putin’s campaign to return to the Russian presidency.
22 Condee, The Imperial Trace.
Leonid Parfenov (2002/03). The history of empire in Russia became a topic of several feature films, including the famous Nikita Mikhalkov's *Sibirsky tsiryulnik* (*The Barber of Siberia;* 1998), the more recent Andrey Kravchuk’s *Admiral* (*The Admiral;* 2008),23 and Vladimir Khotinenko’s TV-series melodrama *Gibel imperii* (*The Fall of Empire;* 2005).24 With the exception of Parfenov’s serial,25 most of these films depict the 19th century Russian empire as a “land of glory and abundance.” This motto, engraved on the Bridge of Alexander III in Paris and quoted in Govorukhin’s film, recreates the myth of the paradise lost under the Bolshevik power.26 “The Golden Age of the Russian history,” as viewed by the cinema makers, runs from the second half of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century, a time when the Russian empire was entering the process of nationalization and Russification from above. No wonder, that (again, with the exception of the Parfenov’s serial) there is no confessional and ethnic plurality in the films about empire. Particularly symptomatic is *Sibirsky tsiryulnik*, which “packages the past for the present” and claims to present “Russianness.”27 According to Ilya Gerasimov, “this film shows a preference for the ethnic principle of national consciousness […] over the political principle of national belonging on the basis of civil rights.”28

The new “imperial trace” in films coincides with the radical splash of interest in religious topics in Russian cinema.29 The new wave of religious films (i.e., those exploring the relation of a hero to the Divine, as well as those attributed to the “transcendental style in cinema”)30 could be observed beginning in the mid-1990s. The movement came from two

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23 On this film, see Eva Binder’s article in this volume.
24 Nancy Condee suggests that watching this serial invites the spectators to “participate in empire’s continuity […] in the realms of ritual and belief, outside of which community has little independent existence.” Condee, “The State Face,” 182.
25 The 18-episode serial by Leonid Parfenov was consulted by several established experts in Russian imperial history, like Alexander Kamensky and Valentina Tvardovskaya. In 2004 the film was released in a 4 DVD-set.
27 Norris, “Packaging the Past.”
28 Gerasimov, “Rossiyskaya imperiya Nikity Mikhalkova.”
29 See the detailed analysis in Hans-Joachim Schlegel’s contribution to this volume.
30 Transcendental style in cinema, according to Schrader, “can bring us nearer to that silence, that invisible image, in which the parallel lines of religion and art meet and interpenetrate […]. Transcendental style stylizes reality by eliminating (or nearly eliminating) those elements which are primarily expressive of human experience, thereby robbing the conventional interpretations of reality their relevance and power. Transcendental style, like the mass, transforms experience into a repeatable ritual which can be repeatably transcended.” Schrader, “Transcendental Style in Film,” 176–82.
directions—from the film makers and from the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy itself. These were often the so-called “hagiopic” films pictur-
ing the lives of saints, priests, and believers. Among the most eloquent examples is the recent film of Pavel Lungin, Ostrov (The Island; 2006). It is set in an isolated monastery in Northern Russia in 1976 and depicts the fate of the monk Father Anatoly who searches for forgiveness after being forced to shoot his commander during WWII. The fate of the Russian clergy in the turmoil of WWII is also depicted by Vladimir Khotinenko’s Pop (The Priest; 2009).

Several films based on the screenplays of Yury Arabov could also be classified as religious, for they deal with the hero’s moral choice, penitence, belief and the final path to the church door. In a few genre films, the problem of God’s grace and providence comes to the fore. These are two recent blockbusters of Mikhalkov’s Utomlennyye solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye (Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus; 2010) and Utomlennyye solntsem 2: Tsitadel (Burnt by the Sun 2: The Citadel; 2011), a continuation of the Kotov saga (the main hero of Utomlennyye solntsem) during WWII. One might also include Vladimir Khotinenko’s action film Musulmanin (The Muslim; 1995) about the fate of a soldier who had converted to Islam before returning home from Afghanistan. Furthermore, Andrey Zvyagintsev undoubtedly belongs to the “faith-fueled film makers,” as the director of the award-winning drama Vozvrashcheniye (The Return; 2003), followed by Izgnaniye (The Banishment; 2007). Many of these films received praise from critics and official awards, as well as huge public resonance (especially in the case of Ostrov).

There are many new religious films shot by order of the Moscow Patriarchate and shown on various religious channels like Soyuz (“The Union”), Blagovest (“Church Bells”), or Spas (“The Savior”). As we shall further see, some of them provide a specific view on modern Russian history. One can already observe a tendency towards the proliferation of imperial subject films emerging from a campaign to restore pride in the “Orthodox Russian Empire:” Either the Russian Orthodox Church commissions films on

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31 Grace, Religious Film.
32 Among the most popular are Yuryev den (The Yury’s Day; 2008) directed by Kirill Serebrennikov; Apokrif: Muzyka dlya Petra i Pavla (Apocrypha: Music for Peter and Paul; 2005) by Adel Al-Khadad; Chudo (The Miracle; 2009) by Aleksandr Proshkin, and the recent Faust (2011) by Aleksandr Sokurov.
33 For more on this, see Natascha Drubek’s contribution to this volume.
34 The term is borrowed from Detweiler, “Christianity,” 120–25.
“imperial themes” from secular film producers, or the church authorities endeavor to film imperial history themselves.35

How do contemporary Russian films reflect these “imperial and religious turns” and how do they help constructing it? Also, how do these two trends influence each other? In other words, which role do religious topics play in the formation of Russian imperial narratives as reflected in modern cinema? Again, the focus rests mostly on the church-state relations within the imperial and/or national narratives. In the following, I have analyzed several documentaries and feature films which received public attention during the last decade.

*Russian Empire as a Cultural Heritage*

Of course, there are also films not sponsored by the Moscow Patriarchate which in one way or another explore the religious side of the Russian imperial past. This was the case with one of the best art cinema productions, Alexander Sokurov’s film *Russky kovcheg (Russian Ark)*; 2003), which grossed millions in the USA.36 Digitally shot as a single take, Sokurov’s conservative tribute to Russian visual culture attracted Western attention mostly through its revolutionary technology, whereas in Russia it was often valued for its appreciation of imperial past. The film gathered considerable scientific scholarship, and film critics and historians of Russia have intensively analyzed its visual symbolic content and its new approaches.37 I shall therefore limit myself to a brief outline of the film’s plot and Sokurov’s vision of empire.

An unseen narrator (voiced by Sokurov himself) awakens after some sort of accident to find himself back in tsarist Russia. Still confused, he joins a group of partygoers to enter the Hermitage with them through a series of passageways. The narrator, who remains invisible to all except for a certain Marquis (a real-life author of the travelogue *Russia in 1839*),38 walks through the museum halls and suddenly recognizes in its different

35 See film examples in the articles by Natascha Drubek and Stephen Norris in this volume.

36 Goscilo, “Introduction,” 221.

37 On religious and imperial motifs in the film, see Condee, *The Imperial Trace*, chapter 6, 159–84; Harte, “A Visit to the Museum,” 43–58; Also the contributions of José Alaniz, Birgit Beumers, and Nancy Condee in Beumers and Condee, *The Cinema of Alexander Sokurov*.

38 The allusion obviously refers to Custine’s, *La Russie en 1839*. 
corners the famous personages of Russian history—from the poet Alexander Pushkin to the tsar Nicolas I who awaits the apology of the Persian ambassador. Nearby, Peter I shows his anger to his subordinates, and Catherina the Great watches a theater performance.

In Sokurov’s film the Russian Empire, as a cultural phenomenon and a part of European heritage, gets the highest appraisal. He presents the empire as the Hermitage, a museum that stands for Russian imperial appropriation of the Western cultural tradition. Although *Russky kovcheg* can at first glance hardly be called a religious film (there is no sacred story or moral dilemma), nonetheless sacred motives are still to be seen there. The film thus can be included under spiritual cinema because, as ventured by Schrader in relation to Sokurov’s filmography, it “mixes elements of Transcendental Style—austerity of means, disparity between environment and activity, decisive moment, stasis—with other traditions: visual aestheticism, meditation, and Russian mysticism.”

The figure of the invisible narrator walking through the museum’s halls resembles a transcendental being which brings life into Russia’s historical past, enriching it with spirit and thus resurrecting dead figures. The mystical origin of the narrator who sees everyone and can judge everyone has clear transcendental connotations. The very title of *Russky kovcheg* implies the Hermitage, the symbol of the 300-year-old Russian Empire, is a second Noah’s Ark, in which the cultural heritage of Europe and the romanticized history of pre-revolutionary Russia are preserved from the 20th century catastrophes. The film’s Russian poster positions the Hermitage in the stormy waves of the River Neva thus making the metaphor of Noah’s Ark even more obvious. In an interview about *Russky kovcheg*, Sokurov ascribes art a soteriological function. “The Hermitage as a cultural guardian aids the transcendence of the past.” The narrator’s last words to the inhabitants of the ark, to the Russian Empire/Hermitage on the eve of great calamities are: “[...] the sea is around. And we will float forever, and we shall live forever.” The Russian Empire in its sacred form has sharply delineated chronological frames in Sokurov’s film. It is the time from Peter the Great till Nicolas II; the Soviet period is erased from this timeline as an epoch of devastation and emptiness. Sokurov brings the viewer only once in a dark room which symbolizes the blockade of

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40 Keghel, “Sokurov’s *Russian Ark*,” 85.
41 Ibid.
Leningrad in WWII and Russian 20th century history; nothing spectacular awaits there. For the Hermitage of the film, the Soviet time is associated with war, starvation, and ruin.

Russky kovcheg represents the “imperial turn” in post-Soviet cinema from a symbolic perspective. The more specific, Orthodox view of empire was presented in the years that followed by several films devoted to the fate of the last Russian monarch Nicolas II. The impetus came from the official canonization of the royal family murdered by the Bolsheviks in 1918, announced in 2000 by the Moscow Patriarchate. It spurred monarchical expectations within the Russian Orthodox Church and spilled over as a theme in various films aimed at restoring the tsar’s positive image. The official church position was expressed by the Vice-Chair of the Office for External Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Father Georgy Ryabykh:

It is important that TV screens show documentaries about their [the royal family’s, LB] lives. We have to recall the dates connected with their lives. It is important that this decision contributes to the full-fledged return of the pre-revolutionary heritage to modern Russia.

The first impetus in this process came from the mystical drama Tsareubiytsa (The Assassin of the Tsar; 1991, dir.: Karen Shakhnazarov), followed by numerous feature and documentary films about the Romanov dynasty. Some of these documentaries interpret the death of the last emperor as a ritual murder, like the 2-episodes Russkaya Golgofa (Russian Golgotha; 2003, dir.: Viktor Rozhko, a laureate of the Moscow Film Festival “Zolotoy Vitiaz”). Some films present the tragedy of the tsar as a result of a foreign secret services’ plot which thus hampered Russia’s rapid growth at the beginning of the 20th century (Nikolay II. Sorvanny Triumf / Nicolas II. A Disrupted Triumph; 2008, dir.: Yevgeny Krylov). There are however also several documentaries exploring the cultural impact of the Romanovs upon Russian history. The most telling example—the serial Plody prosvesheniya: Tsarskaya musa v semye Romanovykh (The Fruits of the Enlightenment. The Tsars’ Muse in the Romanov’s Family; 2008)—was shot by Tatyana Andreyeva with a commission from the Kultura-TV.

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42 On public debates around the canonization of the Romanov’s family, see Knox, Russian Society and the Orthodox Church, 125–28.
43 “Genprokuratura reabilitirovala Svyatuyu velikuyu knyaginyu Yelizavetu Fedorovnu Romanovu.”
44 For instance, Romanovy. Ventsenosnaya semya (Romanovs. The Royal Dynasty; 2000, dir.: Gleb Panfilov), or Bedny, bedny Pavel (Poor, Poor Pavel; 2003, dir.: Vitaly Melnikov) about the fate of the Russian emperor Paul I.
channel. The film recounts the cultural preferences and artistic tastes of the Russian emperors—from Peter I to Nicolas II. The latter is presented as a promoter of Russian cinema and a lover of classical music. But more importantly, Nicolas II appears as a devoted Christian, church benefactor, and a family man. The episode about the Holy passion-bearers (strastoterpy), a title applied to Nicolas II and his family, is the most “religious” one—Andreyeva emphasizes the Romanovs’ Orthodox faith as a constitutive element of their national identity. The Tsarina Alexandra Fedorovna spends hours embroidering church garments—thus shows her religious devotion and love of Russian folk traditions. The tsar dresses himself for the court ball into Russian national garb—thus demonstrating his attention to Russian traditions and spiritual culture. Finally, the narrator (played by Aleksandr Galibin) draws the conclusion: “The tsarist culture is a whole civilization.” In contrast to Sokurov’s vision of the Russian Empire as a museum and a quintessence of world cultural heritage, Andreyeva’s film (at least its last episode) focuses on national and religious aspects of imperial cultural legacy.

Most films on the Romanov dynasty present Russian imperial monarchy as an ideal state which could serve as a model for contemporary church/state and Russian/Western relations. Importantly, all these cinematographic apologias, even if they do not directly appeal for the restoration of monarchy, still present the imperial past as a definitively positive historical experience for Russia in opposition to the Western nation-state models.

Russian State and the Orthodox Church—Ideal Symphonia or Eternal Competition?

Monarchist sentiments do not however constitute the mainstream either in the Russian Orthodox Church or on the state TV channels. Importantly, an attempt to present the church’s official view on the Russian imperial heritage was undertaken recently in a monumental 10-part documentary Zemnoye i nebesnoye (Earthly and Heavenly; 2004, dir.: Sergey Miroshnichenko). It was aired for the first time on the state Russian RTR channel shortly after Easter 2004. Zemnoye i nebesnoye, which Patriarch Aleksy II commissioned and blessed, retells the story of the 1000-year history of the Russian Orthodox Church. Aleksy II not only initiated the film production, but also took an active part in writing the script along with the Orthodox
At the end of each 40-min episode, the patriarch himself summarizes the main outcomes of a certain historical period. Film director Sergey Miroshnichenko has defined its genre as a “documental drama,” or television program with a presenter, who tells the story and directs the dialogues. Each film has its own narrator, bringing individual (and sometimes own spiritual) nuances to the story. None of them are clergy, but all of them are Orthodox believers and representatives of the Russian artistic beau monde.

The landmark compendium by Metropolitan Makary, *The History of the Russian Church* (1883) delineates the major periods, moments and narratives of the pre-Petrine period, which Miroshnichenko’s documentary extensively replicates 120 years later. But in contrast to Makary’s depiction, the Russian state is another major character in the film, besides the church as an institution and a community of believers. Essentially, the six episodes narrating the history of the pre-Petrine church explain the role of Orthodoxy in the formation of the Russian state. The fifth episode, “The Third Rome” starring Fedor Bondarchuk, is the most crucial component in understanding the authors’ position on this issue (and thus also that of the Moscow Patriarchate in general).

The film starts with scenes from the fall of Constantinople in 1453; the camera then moves slowly to the northern Russian landscape with the Pskov Yelizarov Convent on the background. This visual reference is not coincidental, bringing a viewer to the famous doctrine of “Moscow, the Third Rome” commonly attributed to Filofey, a Pskovian monk of the early 16th century. The film’s narrator, accompanied by the Russian writer Valentin Kurbatov, walks around the snow-covered monastery walls. Kurbatov delivers a message to the audience which is meant to

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45 Its executive director, Sergey Kravets, run the group of consultants and script-writers of the series.

46 The Russian term for this presenter is a “dokumentalny chelovek,” or documentary person.

47 These were the artists Valery Zolotukhin, Irina Kupchenko, Stanislav Lyubshin, and Anatoly Petrenko; film producers Fedor Bondarchuk and Nikita Mikhalkov, and even the legendary rock star Igor Shevchuk.

48 Metropolit Makary (Bulgakov), *Istoriya russkoy tserkvi*. In the enhanced and edited version, this compendium became an official history textbook of the Russian Orthodox Church.

49 This stereotypical version of history has been recently challenged by a series of scholarly publications on the origins of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome. See Sinitsyna, *Trety Rim*; Rowland, “Moscow the Third Rome”; Poe, “Moscow, the Third Rome.”
explain the film’s concept and apparently hint at the future of church-state relations in contemporary Russia. The writer is an apologist of the mutual state-church support. The term symphonia refers to this ideal state of relations between church and state that supposedly existed in Russia until the Time of Troubles (an interregnum period of war and famine at the beginning of the 17th century) and later Petrine reforms. The pursuit of symphonia for the modern state and society is one clear message in this film. The Muscovite state is, according to Kurbatov (and the authors of Zemnoye i nebesnoye), a place of memory which should teach a lesson to post-Soviet Russia.

The idea of symphonia, of harmonic relations between church and state, was born in the Byzantine Empire. Its definition is attributed to the Emperor Justinian I (527–65), but it was never actually implemented in Russia’s pre-revolutionary history. The 18th-century reforms of Peter the Great were the most obvious manifestation of how the state established control over the church and abolished the patriarchate. It made the dissolution between the two powers complete. This fact, however, does not prevent the contemporary Moscow Patriarchate from declaring symphonia as the ideal of church-state relations. In “The Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church,” a document adopted in August 2000, the concept of symphonia is opposed to the norms of the modern secular state:

The Orthodox tradition has developed an explicit ideal of church-state relations. Since church-state relations are two-way traffic, the above-mentioned ideal could emerge in history only in a state that recognizes the Orthodox Church as the greatest people’s shrine, in other words, only in an Orthodox state.

The official patriarchate’s position on perspectives of the modern Russian state can be defined as centrist or traditionalist, “whose followers have important points of intersection with the centralizing, ‘strong-state’ ideas of the Putin-regime.” Irina Papkova notes on this occasion that “symphonia works best when Orthodoxy is part of the official state ideology.” This

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50 “The priesthood and the Empire are the two greatest gifts which God, in His infinite clemency, has bestowed upon mortals; the former has reference to Divine matters, the latter presides over and directs human affairs, and both, proceeding from the same principle, adorn the life of mankind.” The Enactments of Justinian.

51 Beljakowa, “Der Begriff ‘symphonia.’”

52 “The Basis of the Social Concept”; See also Knox, Russian Society and the Orthodox Church, 111–17.
could be problematic considering Russia is a constitutionally secular state. Therefore, the patriarchate’s solution is “lobbying for legislative and policy guarantees of the church’s position in Russian society, without asking for overt constitutional changes.”\(^{53}\) *Zemnoye i nebesnoye* as the patriarchate’s project is apparently a part of this strategy.\(^{54}\)

Seen from the *symphonic* perspective, the pre-revolutionary Russian Empire is the pure result of a forceful Westernization and secularization which were destructive both for the church and the secular powers. In *Zemnoye i nebesnoye*, this idea (a topos of several 19th century compendia of Russian church history)\(^{55}\) is propagated in the seventh episode, “Without the Patriarch” (starring Igor Shevchuk). Here the notion of empire is limited to the grandeur and apostasy of the ruling elites as opposed to the rising spirituality of the common people. Here, the empire holds negative connotations; for the authors of the film, the fall of this negative mentality occurred not at the beginning, but at the end of the 20th century. The Soviet state, by declaring its interference into church affairs and officially persecuting the church, followed the path of the Russian emperors and thus persisted in destroying the Muscovite church-state *symphonia*.

The only modern period presented positively in the film is the post-Soviet church revival (*God’s Summer*, with Nikita Mikhalkov). The negative perception of empire (Russian and Soviet) is distinguished from the restoration of church life in modern Russia, as interpreted in sacred terms. “Holy Russia” appears to be a nation-state, not an imperial term and idea. Thus the story of the ideal church-state relations has gone full circle in the film. The imperial era has been practically lost for church-state relations, or described as a time of tragedy and false leaders. The film illustrates a historiographic tradition that interprets Russian history as the realization of the nation-state. This interpretation of history goes back as early as Nikolay Karamzin’s *History of the Russian State* (1816–26), but was developed most influentially in the scholarship of the Russian “state school” and its successors. “Under the influence of this powerful model of a

\(^{53}\) Papkova, *The Orthodox Church and Russian Politics*, 20; 73.

\(^{54}\) Besides this, there are also several other informal factions within the Russian Orthodox Church, actively supporting different political parties. According to Papkova, these are the leftists, “whose adherents generally subscribe to the ideology of Russian liberal political parties […]; on the right are the fundamentalists, whose anti-Semitic political positions resonate with the anti-globalist […] ideas of the […] Communists and ultranationalists.” Ibid., 20. For the sake of the truth one should admit that these non-centrist factions do not demonstrate much influence upon the recent cinema production.

\(^{55}\) Most prominently in Kartashev, *Ocherki po istorii russkoy tserkvi*. 
unitary Russian state, any non-Russian or non-centralizing traditions were viewed as foreign and useless.”

And this was precisely the case for the authors of *Zemnoye i nebesnoye* as well. Ukraine presents the best example of the foreign and ephemeral destructive tendencies that threaten the centralization of the Russian state and its unity with the Russian Orthodox Church. The film authors devoted a special fourth episode (“Brotherhoods,” with Anatoly Petrenko) to the development of the Ruthenian (early modern Ukrainian and Belorussian) Church. This episode’s narrative is mostly constructed upon 19th century historiographic models; the film uses extensively fragments from the black-and-white Mosfilm propaganda production (for instance, the 1941 Igor Savchenko’s feature film *Bogdan Khmelnitsky*). It is not strange then that the film was banned from Ukrainian TV-channels on the basis of “ideological contradictions.”

The *symphonic* and Russian national-state approaches in interpreting the imperial past did not get much resonance among Russian audiences, although *Earthly and Heavenly* has been aired several times on Russian TV. It took several years until this topic found a mass viewership in Pavel Lungin’s latest film, *Tsar* (2009), which was screened at the 2009 Cannes Film Festival. The film is devoted to the relationship between Ivan the Terrible and Metropolitan Filipp, the 16th century story of a friendship which ended with the martyrdom of the metropolitan through a death sentence proclaimed by the tsar. It is also a film about the rapidly growing conflict between Ivan and Filipp over the issues of duties and mercy, loyalty to the tsar and the Orthodox faith. The whole set of moral problems connected with the contradictory figure of Ivan IV provoked a wave of discussions in Russian media. Apparently, there is also a history of distorted *symphonia*, a gradually growing conflict between church and state when a secular ruler refuses to recognize the validity of spiritual authority.

The film is divided into four parts, each presenting different stages in the degradation of church-state relations. It starts with “A Prayer for the Tsar,” in which Ivan and a crowd of knee-fallen Muscovites meet Archimandrite Filipp entering Moscow to become the church’s head. Although Ivan first appears as a penitent man and his devotion borders on exaltation, his fascination with violence still strikes Filipp as noteworthy. The second

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56 Hagen, “The Russian Empire,” 58.
57 “Ukrainskiye telekanaly.”
58 The official canonization of Metropolitan Filipp took place in 1652. See Eva Binder’s article in this volume for a detailed analysis of Lungin’s film.
59 See Norris’s review of Pavel Lungin’s *Tsar*.
part, “The Tsar’s War,” describes how Filipp tries to calm down the tsar, who is obsessed with suspicions about his subordinates’ disloyalty. The metropolitan’s attempts to convince Ivan to come to his senses fail when the tsar ordered the voyevodas (provincial governors) to be impaled and their horses hacked to pieces. The third part, “The Tsar’s Wrath,” depicts the metropolitan, who refuses to bless the tsar in the Dormition Cathedral of Kremlin. His appeal to Ivan deprives this powerful secular ruler of any spiritual virtue: “I do not see the sovereign here; I do not recognize him, neither by his clothes nor by his deeds . . . Look at what you are doing to the state! You execute innocent people!” In return, the tsar orders to arrest Filipp for treachery and impiety: “I don’t have a metropolitan anymore.” Finally, in the fourth part, “The Tsar’s Joy,” Ivan enters the final stages of his madness and gives the order to kill Filipp.

In a way, the film illustrates the idea of corrupted symphonia as a major failure of Russian history. Although the issue of empire is not directly highlighted in Tsar, one could assume that the imperial period in Russian history is interpreted similarly to that of Earthly and Heavenly. Lungin, in contrast to Earthly and Heavenly, poses the question more precisely of when exactly the harmony between the two powers was destroyed. He asserts that it is the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the mid-16th century (and not the beginning of the 17th as in the patriarchate’s documentary) that severed these relations. Made by a secular director, Tsar is a lesson to Russia and its secular rulers. It’s no accident that after two premières in Cannes, the Kyiv and Moscow Film Festivals, and before public screening in November 2009, the film was shown in the Kremlin specially to the Russian government’s members and several monks of the Moscow Sretensky Monastery.60 “Ivan the Terrible’s lesson” did not, however, meet with any particular enthusiasm among the general audience.61 This is possibly due to Ivan’s ambiguous role in Russian history, or to the fact that the imperial theme is not clearly articulated in Lungin’s film.

Byzance après Byzance?

The real breakthrough in attracting public attention for the church-state issues came earlier with the documentary Gibel imperii. Vizantiysky urok (The Fall of an Empire. The Lesson of Byzantium; 2008). The film was

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60 “V Gosdume sostoyalsya zakryty pokaz filma Tsar.”
61 With the 15 mln USD budget, the total box office of Tsar compiled 5 mln USD. http://www.kinopoisk.ru/level/85/film/407285.
commissioned by the state TV channel “Russia,” which also promoted the film and aired it three times. The film makers received the Russian Golden Eagle Award. Significantly, the screenwriter, director and narrator is the Archimandrite of the Moscow Sretensky Monastery, Father Tikhon (Shevkunov), a professionally trained film producer.

The film brought an unprecedented wave of debates into media and society. The discussion was held along the old-Russian lines of “Westernizers” versus “Slavophiles,” otherwise interpreted as “liberals” and “conservatives.” The film definitely hit a nerve in Russian society. Not only film critics and historians, but also political leaders found it necessary to publicly express their opinion on film. From the liberal side, Yury Afanasyev, a former Gorbachev’s political adviser and the rector of the Russian State Humanitarian University, called *Gibel imperii* “a very, very slimy film.” In contrast, the right-wing newspaper “Zavtra” classified Father Tikhon’s film as the “most important ideological event in Russia, [...] which shows where our people are, and where the enemies of the Fatherland.” The official church position remained reserved (“Father Tikhon’s vision is his personal opinion”), while the variety of film interpretations among clergy and believers reflected ideological cleavages within the Russian Orthodox Church.  

What does this lesson consist of? The idea of *translatio imperii* (transfer of Christian imperial rule), of Russia’s Byzantine heritage, is not new. I have already touched on the issue above, in connection with the theory of the “Third Rome” ascribed to the monk Filofey of Pskov. Since Nicolae Iorga’s groundbreaking work (1935), scholars traced the impact of Byzantine art, political system, rituals, and religion on the successor Orthodox states in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. The scholarly question of how persistent the “Byzantine Commonwealth” is for modern Russia, however, leads Father Tikhon to unexpected conclusions. In contrast to previous contributions in the field, *Gibel imperii* focuses exclusively upon a political message to be delivered to modern post-Communist societies. Father Tikhon has publicly called this message “a warning to Russia.” He does not hesitate to call the modern Russian governmental structure an imperial one, while drawing direct parallels between the last centuries

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62 For a detailed outline of the debates, including the quotes’ sources, see Papkova, “Saving the Third Rome.”

63 Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance*.

of Byzantine history and that of post-Soviet Russia. Telling the story of Byzantium, Father Tikhon addresses his public in quite recognizable language, applying terminology known to every modern Russian citizen: “oligarchs,” “stabilization fond,” “national revolution,” “foreign aggression,” “Western hate,” “Jewish capital,” “vertical of power,” “national question,” and even samostiynist (“independency” in Ukrainian).

The film propagates anti-Western sentiments as reflected not only in its text passages (the West is called “the barbarians”), but also in its musical arrangements (the fragments accompanying the Western images are dynamic and sometimes even aggressive, while the passages on Byzantium are quiet and melodic). Also the visual symbols of the West are very suggestive. It is often presented as an enigmatic figure hiding his face behind a Venetian masque, or as a sculpture or painting fragment associated with power and richness, as well as cruelty and heartlessness. Nonetheless, in the middle of the film, Father Tikhon asserts:

It is senseless to say that the West was to blame for Byzantium’s misfortunes and fall. The West was only pursuing its own interests, which is quite natural. Byzantium’s historical blows occurred when the Byzantines themselves betrayed their own principles upon which their empire was established.

These state-ordering principles are clearly defined in Gibel imperii: “faithfulness to God, to His eternal laws preserved in the Orthodox Church and fearless reliance upon Byzantine own internal traditions and strengths.” Once the Byzantine Empire betrayed these two pillars (referring to the Florentine Union with the Catholic Church in 1439 and Western influences on Byzantine economy and politics), the fall was inevitable. Importantly, this film presents the change in perspective on the Russian medial discourse about imperial heritage. Now in contrast to the earlier idealization of the Russian Empire (or pre-Petrine Moscovy), it is Byzantium that serves as a model for the ideal policy and church-state relationship in Russia.

Particular attention in the film is paid to the relationship between the Byzantine core and the peripheries. The scenes depicting the separation of Serbian and Bulgarian provinces from the Byzantine Empire (12th century) are conspicuously modernized: The interactive map of this historical region is presented in blue and yellow, the Ukrainian national colors. The rise of the separatist movements on the Byzantine borderlands is shown as a marketplace scene: A ruthless Venetian figure destroys the stands with oranges and provokes turmoil (a clear reference to the Ukrainian Orange Revolution of 2004).
Father Tikhon’s *Gibel imperii* is not a religious film but rather resembles more closely the Soviet and American Cold War propagandistic cinema productions. Still, it is full of religious symbolism which aims at embodying the sacred character of the Byzantine state (and modern Russia consequently). The final scene of how the Byzantine Empire ends is also allegorically charged. The symbols of the four Evangelists—a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle—leave the Constantinople city walls; the Byzantine imperial coat-of-arms is erased from the Book. In the same way, the film illustrates the idea of *translatio imperii* through the departure from Byzantium towards Moscow. The camera slowly brings us from a view over modern Istanbul where the muezzin chants to the snow-covered small Russian church and then to the Moscow Sretensky Monastery. The chanting gradually disappears. We recognize the same male figure, symbolizing the Apostle Matthew who left Constantinople, among the seminarians and believers attending the Vespers church service in the Sretensky Monastery. This is how the sanctity of the fallen state becomes transmitted to modern Russia.

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Imperial legacy in recent Russian films reflects not only the rise of interest in the historical past but also a new attempt to reconsider Russia’s place in world history from a religious perspective. Although the films analyzed here are very different both from conceptual and artistic points of view, most of them opt for the reconstruction of empire or a *symphonic* church-state unity as a necessary precondition for the preservation of Orthodoxy and state integrity. They demonstrate a clear tendency towards glorifying Byzantine and/or Russian imperial heritage. Ultimately, such a view regards the Eastern Slavic (state) unity as one of the elements of this process.

Few of the analyzed films could be called religious. Although elaborating on the issues of religious life on the post-Soviet space, with the exception of *Zemnoye i nebesnoye* episodes, little attention is paid to religiosity and devotion nowadays. Instead, most of the films discussed elaborate the church-state relationship in Russian history and its future perspectives. The role of religion in this context is as omnipresent as subordinate. Often the initiative to re-consider the church-state patterns in cinematographic forms comes from the Moscow Patriarchate. The pursuit of a new

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65 Cf. Shaw, “Martyrs, Miracles, and Martians.”
model that can achieve this balance sometimes pushes the film makers to see their work as a next “lesson for Russia,” or just as a “warning.” It is not strange though that some feature films bear characteristics of documentary propagandistic movies. These films are aimed at constructing a new historical narrative in which imperial legacy occupies a meaningful place. The process of “sanctifying” the Russian imperial discourse on the cinematic level is steadily taking place.

**Filmography**

*Admiral* (*The Admiral*; Russia 2008, dir.: Andrey Kravchuk)

*Apoprif: Muzyka dlya Petra i Pavla* (*Apocrypha: Music for Peter and Paul*; Russia 2005, dir.: Adel Al-Khadad)

*Bedny, bedny Pavel* (*Poor, Poor Pavel*; Russia 2003, dir.: Vitaliy Melnikov)

*Bogdan Khmelnitsky* (USSR 1941, dir.: Igor Savchenko)

*Chudo* (*The Miracle*; Russia 2009, dir.: Aleksandr Proshkin)

*Faust* (Russia 2011, dir.: Aleksandr Sokurov)

*Gibel imperii. Vizantiysky urok* (*The Fall of an Empire. The Lesson of Byzantium*; Russia 2008, dir.: Father Tikhon [Shevkunov])

*Gibel imperii* (*The Fall of the Empire*; Russia 2005, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)

*Izgnaniye* (*The Banishment*; Russia 2007, dir.: Andrey Zvyagintsev)

*Musulmanin* (*The Muslim*; Russia 1995, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)

*Nikolay II. Sorvanny triumf* (*Nicolas II. A Disrupted Triumph*; Russia 2008, dir.: Evgeny Krylov)

*Ostrov* (*The Island*; Russia 2006, dir.: Pavel Lungin)


*Pop* (*The Priest*; Russia 2009, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)

*Romanovy. Ventsenosnaya semya* (*The Romanovs: An Imperial Family*; Russia 2000, dir.: Gleb Panfilov)

*Rossiya, kotoruyu my poteryali* (*Russia, That We’ve Lost*; Russia 1992, dir.: Stanislav Govorukhin)

*Rossiyskaya Imperiya* (*The Russian Empire*; TV-Series, Russia 2002–3, dir.: Leonid Parfenov)

*Russkaya Golgofa* (*Russian Golgotha*; Russia 2003, dir.: Viktor Rozhko)

*Russky kovcheq* (*Russian Ark*; Russia 2002, dir.: Alexander Sokurov)

*Sibirsky tsiryulnik* (*The Barber of Siberia*; Russia 1998, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)

*Tsar* (Russia 2009, dir.: Pavel Lungin)

*Tsareubiytsa* (*The Assassin of the Tsar*; Russia 1991, dir.: Karen Shakhnazarov)

*Utomlennye solntsem 2: Predstoyaniye* (*Burnt by the Sun 2: Exodus*; Russia 2010, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)

*Utomlennye solntsem 2: Tsitadel* (*Burnt by the Sun 2: Citadel*; Russia 2011, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)

*Vozvrashcheniye* (*The Return*; Russia 2003, dir.: Andrey Zvyagintsev)

*Yuryev den* (*The Yury’s Day*; Russia 2008, dir.: Kirill Serebrennikov)

*Zemnoye i nebesnoye* (*Earthly and Heavenly*; Russia 2004, dir.: Sergey Miroshnichenko)
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A CINEMATIC CHURCHMAN: METROPOLITAN ANDREY SHEPTYTSKY IN OLES YANCHUK’S VLADYKA ANDREY

John-Paul Himka

Oles Yanchuk is a unique phenomenon in Ukrainian cinema. He has directed five feature films in the Ukrainian language, infused with a Ukrainian nationalist worldview. Except for the film to be discussed in this paper, he has worked independently of the niggardly government funding for the Ukrainian film industry. Instead, he has raised money, particularly in the overseas Ukrainian diaspora, by making films that respond to the ideological sympathies of his donors. Even though the American dollar goes far in Ukraine—and this was especially true for the early years of Yanchuk’s career, his films are necessarily low budget with corresponding production values. Still, in spite of their amateurish moments, shortfalls, and heavy ideological hand, his films stand out in the Ukrainian “kino-landscape” as a coherent body of work by a director who has a vision and considerable energy.

His first feature film was Holod-33 (Famine-33). It came out in 1991, long before President Viktor Yushchenko came to power and implemented his campaign to have the world recognize the manmade famine of 1932–33 as genocide against the Ukrainian people. Yanchuk’s film was a powerful indictment of the criminality of the Soviet regime as responsible for the death by starvation of millions of the rural population in what was once an unusually productive agricultural region. The film toured North America and introduced Ukrainian communities there to a new and youngish director (born in 1956), who was sensitive to the same issues as they were.

This was followed in 1995 by a film about the wartime and postwar leader of the most violent faction of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, Stepan Bandera—Atentat: Osinne vbyvstvo u Myunkheni (Assassination: An Autumn Murder in Munich). The intended audience for this film was Ukrainian nationalists, concentrated in both the overseas diaspora and in

1 I have benefited tremendously from discussions with Chrystia Chomiak, Liliana Hentosh, Andrij Hornjatkevyč, Father Athanasius McVay, Sister Sophia Senyk, and Oleh Turii. This does not mean that they would agree with me on all points.
one region of the homeland, namely Western Ukraine, where Bandera and his movement made their greatest impact (Yanchuk himself was born in Fastiv, near Kyiv, outside Western Ukraine). Only in early 2010 did outgoing Ukrainian president Yushchenko posthumously make Bandera a Hero of Ukraine, a decision that was controversial within Ukraine and abroad.\(^2\)

With *Atentat*, even more than with *Holod-33*, Yanchuk put himself in the nationalist vanguard in Ukrainian cinema.

In 2000 he released a film about another leader of the Bandera movement, Roman Shukhevych, who became the supreme commander of the nationalist armed forces, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, late in 1943. The film was called *Neskorenyi* (*The Undefeated*). This glorification of Shukhevych preceded by seven years President Yushchenko’s posthumous award of Hero of Ukraine to the nationalist military leader. However, the president appreciated Yanchuk’s work and created an atmosphere in which it could reach a larger audience. On Ukrainian Independence Day (24 August) in 2007, a few months after Yushchenko made Shukhevych a Hero of Ukraine, three of Yanchuk’s film were shown on the Ukrainian-language TV channel 1+1: *Atentat*, *Neskorenyi*, and *Zalizna sotnya*.\(^3\)

*Zalizna sotnya* (entitled *The Company of Heroes* in English; the literal translation of the Ukrainian title is *Iron Company*) came out in 2004. It was sponsored and produced by an Australian Ukrainian, who had written a memoir on which the film is based. The action takes place in 1944–47 in Ukrainian-inhabited regions of Poland. In the end, the company of heroes fights its way into Bavaria and surrenders to the Americans.

Yanchuk’s fifth feature film, the subject of this chapter, concerned the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in the first half of the twentieth century, Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is one of the Byzantine-rite churches in union with Rome. It retains many features in common with Eastern Orthodoxy, particularly in liturgical matters, while also displaying some hybridity with Roman (Latin) Catholic practices. In Sheptytsky’s time, the church was limited to the territory of Galicia in Western Ukraine as well as to the diaspora in North and South America. The historical and geographical congruence between the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Ukrainian nationalism remains strong to this day.

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\(^3\) Yanchuk, “Yakby.”
Andrey Sheptytsky was born Roman Szeptycki to an aristocratic Polish family that had Ukrainian origins. In the past, the Sheptytsky family had produced three Greek Catholic bishops. But by the time the future metropolitan was born in 1865, his family had changed from the Greek Catholic to the Roman Catholic rite and was thoroughly polonized. Young Roman, however, decided to return to the church of his ancestors. It was a radical step at the time, taken in the context of a Polish-Ukrainian political conflict that had been underway since 1848. He entered the Greek Catholic Basilian monastery in Dobromyl in 1888, taking the name Andrey. Given his aristocratic and Polish-Ukrainian origins, as well as his intelligence and charismatic personality, he rose rapidly in the clerical hierarchy. In 1900 he was appointed to the highest post in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, namely metropolitan of Halych and Archbishop of Lviv. He served in that capacity until his death on 1 November 1944.4

During his tenure as metropolitan, regimes changed frequently. Lviv (also known as Lemberg, Lvów, and Lvov) was part of the Habsburg monarchy when Sheptytsky was appointed its Greek Catholic archbishop. The city also had a Roman Catholic and an Armenian Catholic archbishop. In 1914 the Russians conquered the city but did not hold it for long. In 1918, when Austria-Hungary collapsed, the West Ukrainian National Republic was proclaimed in Lviv, but it only maintained power there for a few weeks. From late November 1918 until September 1939, Lviv lay within Poland. When Poland was split between the Germans and the Soviets, Lviv fell to the Soviet Union and was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. In June 1941, the Germans occupied Lviv. An attempt by the Bandera movement to proclaim a Ukrainian state in Lviv was not successful. In July 1944, Lviv was retaken by the Soviets. Several months later, Sheptytsky passed away. The period in which he served as metropolitan, as even this brief outline indicates, was tumultuous and violent, a perfect setting for a historical drama.

Yanchuk had been interested in making a film about Sheptytsky since 2001, when he began working on the screenplay with Mykhaylo Shayevych,5 but he was also busy with other projects. When he did finally return to the Sheptytsky film, he applied for and received significant government funding for it; this was the first time he had received a government

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4 On Sheptytsky, see Magocsi, Morality and Reality. For a brief nationalist treatment of the churchman, see Zagrebelny, “Vladyka Andrey—Kniaz tserkvy i narodu.” On the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, see Himka, Religion and Nationality in Western Ukraine.

5 Yanchuk, “Yakby.”
subsidy. In 2004 the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture promised to subsidize *Vladyka Andrey* (*Metropolitan Andrey*) to the amount of ten million hryvnyas (then about two million USD). Ironically, funding for the film was interrupted as a result of the government shake-up following the Orange Revolution of late 2004. Although the street demonstrations in Kyiv brought to power a president, Yushchenko, who would embrace the nationalist heritage and make heroes of the same historical figures as Yanchuk had, the disruption of the bureaucracy and malfunction of the government under Yushchenko delayed the funding. By the end of 2006, the government had only signed over eighty-three thousand hryvnyas.6 The filming was able to carry on thanks to funds received from two West Ukrainian oblast administrations: three hundred thousand from Lviv Oblast and one hundred thousand from Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast. There was also funding from the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America, which had previously funded *Atentat* and *Neskorenyi*, but the amount the Committee allotted for *Vladyka Andrey* has not been specified. In the end, the government provided eight million hryvnyas for the film.7 Total expenditures came to eleven million hryvnyas.8

The film gives the impression that the shooting proceeded on a shoe-string budget until the very end, and that the bulk of the government money must have arrived too late to be used effectively. This can be discerned from how different locations figured in the film. *Vladyka Andrey* was mainly shot in Lviv. For example, the office of the mayor of Lviv, originally built in Austrian times, served as the office of Emperor Franz Joseph in the film. Some scenes were shot in Kyiv and Ivano-Frankivsk as well. But at the end Yanchuk also filmed in Crimea, the Vatican, and Austria.9 The two short scenes in Crimea both show the metropolitan taking the sea cure. (He suffered from a debilitating illness that eventually put him in a wheelchair.) But the star of the film, Serhy Romanyuk, as well as the director and some of the crew, must have had a pleasant time at the resort on the Black Sea at the Ukrainian government’s expense. As to the Vatican, there are only typical tourist shots incorporated into the film. The meeting between Pope Leo XIII and Sheptytsky and his mother was shot elsewhere, in a very un-Vaticanly gothic setting. The shooting in Austria also consisted only of typical tourist shots. Thus the late arrival of the...

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6 Cherednychenko, “Interview with Oles Yanchuk.”
7 Pluhator, “Todi rezyser.”
8 Yanchuk, “Khochu.”
9 Yanchuk, “Yakby.” Yanchuk, “Khochu.”
government money meant that a disproportionate amount of it was spent on pleasurable, but cinematically superfluous travel. (The film not only suffered from the delay in funding, but it also encountered Ukrainian-style bureaucratic obstacles that delayed production).

*Vladyka Andrey* was supposedly first shown at Cannes in May 2008, although this information could not be confirmed on the Cannes festival’s official website. Its national premiere was on the eve of Independence Day, that is, 23 August, 2008. President Yushchenko was in attendance. The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church at that time, Lyubomyr Huzar, was also invited to the premiere. The film was released for general distribution to Ukrainian theaters on 4 September 2008. Like all of Yanchuk’s films, it is available on DVD with English subtitles.

*Vladyka Andrey* is a historical film that raises important questions about generic conventions. Robert A. Rosenstone argues that good historical film must be more than costume drama, but also that accuracy in historical material culture is an important feature of the genre:

> The major way we experience—or imagine we experience—the past on the screen is obviously through our eye. We see bodies, faces, landscapes, buildings, animals, tools, implements, weapons, clothing, furniture, all the material objects that belong to a culture at a given historical period, objects that are used and misused, ignored and cherished, objects that sometimes can help to define livelihoods, identities, and destinies. Such objects, which the camera demands in order to make a scene look “real,” and which written history can easily, and usually does, ignore, are part of the texture and the factuality of the world on film.

Yanchuk took pride in how accurately he displayed the material culture of the past in this film. This was possible because so many historic buildings and artifacts were still preserved in Lviv. Yanchuk did not have to build any sets at all—everything he needed could be found. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church let him use the grounds of the metropolitan palace at St. George’s Cathedral. The church also lent him the genuine chair and genuine hand cross Sheptytsky used. Care was taken to duplicate his clothing as captured in photographs. To film a scene at a ball, Yanchuk

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10 Cherednychenko, “Interview with Oles Yanchuk.” Yanchuk, “Yakby.”
11 Pluhator, “Todi rezhysyer.”
12 “Vladyka Andrey Olesia Yanchuka pobachyly v Donetsku.”
14 Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 16.
used the hall of mirrors in the Lviv opera house and invited the more chic Lviv elite to act as the guests.\textsuperscript{15}

While he made use of genuine articles, Yanchuk did not have much knowledge of the past and milieu in which his film was set. For example, when the young Roman Szeptycki and his mother visit the Holy Father in the Vatican, they genuflect on their left knees instead of on their right knees. This is an error obvious to anyone brought up in a Catholic environment. Also, the scenes that are supposedly set in a Basilian monastery were actually shot in a Studite monastery. But these are monasteries with completely different sacral esthetics, leaning toward Latin Catholicism in the case of the Basilians and toward Eastern Orthodoxy in the case of the Studites. This dissonance is particularly jarring when Sheptytsky is shown entering the monastery at Dobromyl, at that time in fact run by the Jesuits:\textsuperscript{16} above the entrance is a very Eastern icon of the visage of Christ as imprinted on a towel in Edessa, Syria. The Jesuit and Basilian equivalent would have been the Veil of Veronica. The film also gets the name of one of the eighteenth-century Sheptytsky bishops wrong—Anastasius instead of Athanasius (Atanasy).

Inattention to the sensibilities of the era also comes through in the way the film handles language. Almost the entire film is in Ukrainian, with two exceptions. A scene with a Russian Orthodox bishop is conducted in Russian. One of Josef Piłsudski’s officials speaks the only words in Polish in the entire film. Russian and, in Western Ukraine, also Polish are well understood by contemporary viewers in Ukraine. German is not, but entire scenes are in that language. Sheptytsky’s audience with Emperor Franz Joseph is in German, as is a scene in which SS men want to search the metropolitan’s residence. The actor who plays Sheptytsky speaks Russian much better than German, while for the historical personage he plays, it was the other way around. Most remarkable is that the Sheptytsky family speaks Ukrainian throughout the film, when in reality the main languages of the aristocratic Sheptytsky household were Polish and French. This choice on the part of the director retroactively ukrainianizes the linguistic practices of the Sheptytsky family, thus intensifying the Ukrainianess of the metropolitan. It has also been noted that the Ukrainian dialogue

\textsuperscript{15} Yanchuk, “Yakby.”

\textsuperscript{16} The reform of the Basilians by the Jesuits began in 1882 and was regarded by the Ukrainian intelligentsia of Galicia as a Polish plot to polonize and latinize the Greek Catholic Church. The existence of the plot seemed to be confirmed when the young Polish Count Sheptytsky entered the novitiate at Dobromyl monastery.
is in modern standard Ukrainian rather than the Galician version used in Sheptytsky’s environment during his lifetime. The language choices made in *Vladyka Andrey* correspond to the nationalist ideal of a Ukraine in which modern Ukrainian is the predominant language and projects it into the past.

The director had difficulties understanding the religious aspects of his subject, which is a serious handicap when composing a portrait of a churchman. There is almost nothing about Metropolitan Andrey’s pastoral activities, for example. The only scene where we see him acting like a bishop is when he makes an official visitation to a parish in the Carpathian Mountains. Improbably, Sheptytsky is shown making the visitation alone on horseback. He is greeted by Hutsuls, a Ukrainian mountain people, in their colorful costumes and a priest in vestments embroidered with traditional Ukrainian designs. Coming out of the scene, we see Sheptytsky riding through picturesque Carpathian landscapes and listen to a voiceover reading from a beautiful and moving pastoral letter that Sheptytsky wrote, in language almost erotic, expressing his love for those under his care. It is a scene that works for the film, but not one that illuminates the issues that preoccupied the prelate.

The neglect of Sheptytsky’s activities in his episcopal office was a missed opportunity. A historical film is not a scholarly monograph, but it can be an effective means of conveying what happened in the past; in some respects, cinematic treatment of history can be superior to treatment in scholarly texts. Films are also often more influential than scholarly texts as shapers of collective memory. Thus historical films bear some responsibility to engage in an informed and intelligent manner with the history that is being presented. The choice of illuminating episodes, the metanarratives around the film narrative (in this case a nationalist metanarrative), and many other factors elucidated in a growing literature have a bearing on how we evaluate a historical film. Yanchuk’s film on Sheptytsky could have been enriched by including the metropolitan’s delicate negotiations with the other bishops he had to deal with. Greek Catholic Bishop Hryhorii Khomyshyn of Stanyslaviv was consumed by envy of the great metropolitan and made life difficult for him. Relations with the Polish bishops were also very tense at times. The other Greek Catholic bishops

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17 Filevych, “Pafos zamist svyatosti.”
18 In addition to Rosenstone’s central text, see also Hughes-Warrington, *The History on Film Reader.*
and the Vatican wanted Sheptytsky to impose celibacy on the priests of his archeparchy, but he would not do it. Sheptytsky had to deal with rivalries among his most influential clergy as well, notably the enmity between his most trusted lieutenant and eventual successor, Iosyf Slipy, and a brilliant but erratic favorite who was eventually to betray the church, Havryil Kostelnyk. In the absence of a Ukrainian state, Sheptytsky took upon himself and his church many infrastructural tasks that would have naturally fallen to a Ukrainian government, such as establishing in Lviv a national museum, a Ukrainian hospital, and an institution of postsecondary education. With almost a million and a half faithful to care for, Sheptytsky had his hands full as a bishop. None of this comes out in Vladyka Andrey.

Yanchuk and his screenwriter were only partly successful in exploring the religious themes so central to Sheptytsky's concerns. They exhibited a healthy instinct in dealing with Sheptytsky's preaching. The film quotes powerful passages from Sheptytsky's pastoral letters, in which he emphasizes the importance of love, which indeed lay at the core of Sheptytsky's thinking. But generally, the director shows little understanding of Christian teachings or the Greek Catholic Church. It is characteristic of the director's superficial, gestural approach that to familiarize the actors who played the young and mature Sheptytsky with the religious life, he made arrangements for them to spend a few days at the Basilian monastery in Krekhiv.

An interviewer congratulated Yanchuk that in Vladyka Andrey he "managed to avoid too much religiosity." The director replied: "I wanted, in the first place, to show the person. I did not want to erect a monument or shoot a film exclusively for the church." Yanchuk tried to get at "the person" by showing Sheptytsky as an extraordinary man who could have become successful at whatever he turned his hand to. He could have made a military or government career, he was attractive to women, he was wealthy, yet he chose to devote himself to God's work. He was destined for this from the opening scene, in which he is in a church with his mother and experiences a strange sensation. His mother explains to him: "God held you in His hand." Later in the film, while Roman Szeptycki is serving in the cavalry, he tries to dissuade a friend from fighting a duel with another officer, since this is an offense to God. His friend tells him: "You're strange, not of this world." Yanchuk leaves Sheptytsky's religious passion on this level, as something mystical, beyond comprehension. Thereby he

19 Yanchuk, "Khochu."
excuses himself from having to explore this subject in any depth. Yet it is an interesting question that Yanchuk avoids: how a man in Sheptytsky’s troubled time and place chooses God and what he does with that choice. Instead, Yanchuk fills his film with three principal themes: Sheptytsky’s interaction with the regimes that changed so rapidly and starkly in this particular borderland; Sheptytsky’s relations with his family; and the story of a monk who betrays him.

Sheptytsky and Secular Powers

The first theme, the theme of the regimes, is initially engaged in a scene in which Sheptytsky has an audience with Emperor Franz Joseph. This is based on an actual event, Sheptytsky’s audience with the emperor in 1902. Both in the scene and in the historical event, Sheptytsky is there to plead with the emperor to establish a Ukrainian university in Lviv. The film offers no background on this issue, but a bit of research could have given the director something interesting to work with. In the previous year, 1901, Ukrainian students collectively withdrew from the polonized University of Lviv to study elsewhere. Sheptytsky was drawn into the issue when his own seminarians joined the boycott. Initially upset by their behavior, he soon embraced the cause of the university as his own and emerged as its most important champion. He sent his seminarians to study at Catholic universities across Europe and often paid their expenses with his own money. In Yanchuk’s presentation, however, the issue, and as a result also the scene, is reduced to bare bones. Sheptytsky tells the emperor that the Ukrainians in Galicia are being oppressed by the Poles, and the emperor responds that he tries to do what is best for the empire but it is too much for him to manage. The gorgeous interior of the mayor’s office (cast here as the emperor’s reception hall) is lovingly photographed, but in this scene Yanchuk’s oversimplification of the education issue prevents the film from transcending the genre of costume drama.

Sheptytsky next encounters the Russian occupation regime of 1914, which arrests him, deports him to the interior of Russia, and keeps him under surveillance and house arrest in a monastic cell. After his release, a voiceover informs us, the Polish authorities do not allow Sheptytsky to return to Lviv for several years. In 1921 he is granted an audience with Marshall Piłsudski (the Polish leader is played by Yanchuk himself), but shadowy, unidentified Polish security agents prevent the audience from happening. The scene is so ambiguous that it is contentless. The lack of
content is underscored by the leap in the narrative from 1921 to 1939, when the Polish regime is replaced by the Soviet regime.

Yanchuk is more interested in the first period of Soviet rule in Galicia (1939–41) than in the earlier regimes. He has Sheptytsky tell his closest circle in 1939 that Stalin and Hitler are a warning to humanity, that a terrible time is about to descend. Yanchuk depicts the Soviet secret police, the NKVD, as absolutely ruthless and murderous. They execute Sheptytsky’s younger brother Leon and his wife, as well as a priest who just happened to be with them. They recruit a young monk to spy on Sheptytsky, a subplot to be discussed below. As a general outline of the first period of Soviet rule in Galicia, 1939–41, Yanchuk’s characterization is apt.

The portrayal of the Nazis and their attitude to Sheptytsky is well done, and it is likely that the director and screenwriter worked from genuine historical documentation. In the film, the SS comes to St. George’s Cathedral to search the metropolitan’s complex. Metropolitan Andrey emerges in full regalia in his wheelchair, saying that he is not engaged in politics; they can search the grounds if they want to, but only on one condition—over his dead body. The SS men leave, but they argue among themselves. One objects that he is hiding three hundred Jews, but the other points out that Sheptytsky is a person of influence and that influence can be useful to the Reich—hiding a few hundred Jews is just a petty matter. The story of the attempted search is a dramatization of the historical situation, not of an actual event, but it conveys the correct historical messages: Sheptytsky’s revulsion at the Nazi regime, his protection of its victims, and his readiness to lay down his life. As to the disagreement between the SS men, it is very similar in content to a memorandum on Sheptytsky written by the governor of Distrikt Galizien, Otto von Wächter, in May 1944.20 The chronology is tampered with in the Nazi-occupation sequences, but this results from the kind of compression in historical film that does no harm and is often useful.

Yanchuk also shows Sheptytsky talking to a rabbi under his protection as well as arranging the rescue of many Jewish children. The historical Sheptytsky was indeed very concerned over the Holocaust and rescued several hundred Jews,21 mainly children. Yanchuk’s attention to this is

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20 Himka, “Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky and the Holocaust.” On Sheptytsky and the Holocaust, see also Redlich, “Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, Ukrainians and Jews during and after the Holocaust.”

21 In several interviews, though not in the film, Yanchuk spoke of Sheptytsky saving two thousand Jews instead of two hundred, which is what scholars currently estimate.
consistent with his nationalist approach; the nationalists use the example of Sheptytsky to counter accusations that Ukrainians harmed Jews during the Holocaust. Also consistent with Yanchuk’s nationalist approach are some omissions in this same regard. Sheptytsky was horrified by the widespread complicity of Ukrainians in the murder of the Jews. Numerous pastoral letters and other texts from 1942 and 1943 lament and condemn the epidemic of murder perpetrated by members of his flock. He was particularly concerned about the participation of the Ukrainian police in the liquidation of ghettos. There is no possibility, however, that such themes would appear in a movie directed by Yanchuk, which proceeds from the nationalist premise that Ukrainians can only be victims, never perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

When the Soviets return to Lviv, the film indicates that they want to kill the metropolitan in order to eliminate a competing authority. The film even hints that they are responsible for his death. There is no historical basis for this particular insinuation, which reflects rather Yanchuk’s leanings toward a conspiratorial view of history. Quite rightly, however, Yanchuk shows the ruthless suppression of the Greek Catholic church in the wake of the metropolitan’s death.

Sheptytsky and His Family

The second major theme of the film is Sheptytsky’s relationship with his family, again underscoring Yanchuk’s interest in “the person,” the human being intimately connected with others. Sheptytsky’s mother, Countess Zofia Fredro Szeptycka, is an important presence in his life. The film’s first scene has young Roman and his mother praying together, then riding together. He is with his mother at the papal audience. She is present at the family gatherings at their Prylbychy estate, lovingly evoked in the film. She defends Roman’s choice of a vocation and helps to overcome her husband’s resistance to it. The film shows the metropolitan visiting his mother shortly before her death in 1904 and then offers sentimental flashbacks of their relationship. After the metropolitan’s death, the ghost of the countess visits the prison barracks where another of her sons, also a Greek Catholic churchman, is spending his last days. However, the facts that Andrey Sheptytsky loved his mother and that she loved him are not developed in such a way as to shed light on the metropolitan’s character. Indeed, these scenes are banal and sentimental, and the viewer is left wondering why so much footage is devoted to commonplaces in a film.
about a historical personage of Sheptytsky’s stature—there were many more interesting and significant themes that called for attention.

Truly lamentable, however, is the attention paid in the film to a romantic subplot involving Sheptytsky’s younger cousin Zosia Szembek. In the film, Zosia develops a childhood crush on her dashing older cousin, first a cavalryman, later a monk. Whenever Zosia appears, romantic music plays in Mykhailo Hronsky’s score until Zosia, her love necessarily unrequited, enters the convent. She still figures in the film thereafter. As Sheptytsky preaches at Christmastime in Nazi-occupied Lviv, we see her in the crowd, listening longingly. Resting in the Crimea shortly before his death, Sheptytsky reads a letter from Zosia which slips from his hands and floats romantically in the wind towards the sea. The very last scene of the movie shows Zosia, who has survived many of the other characters in the film, hoping to reunite with Roman/Andrey in the afterlife. Perhaps in Hollywood no film is complete without a love interest, but in this historical film, it is nothing more than an inappropriate filler. It is, again, banal and sentimental, bearing little relation to Sheptytsky as a historical actor and or to the facts of his biography. (Perhaps so much attention was paid to Zosia, because Zosia as a child was played by Viktoriya Yanchuk.)

A much more relevant relationship depicted to some extent in the film is that between Roman/Andrey and his brother Kazimierz/Klymentii. In the film, we see Kazimierz surprise his family by also donning a monk’s robes, and thereafter we see him, now as Klymenty, at Sheptytsky’s side in the metropolitan’s palace. Near the end of the film, we see Klymenty sharing a bit of bread with a fellow prisoner and then dying in the barracks, presumably of a heart attack. We learn nothing about Klymenty’s personality, except that he was a holy man similar to his brother, though of lesser format. What is truly interesting about Klymenty is completely ignored in the film. Although we see him become a monk, we have no idea what kind of monk he became. It would have been an excellent opportunity to explore Sheptytsky’s neo-Byzantine policies in the Greek Catholic Church, since Klymenty became a Studite monk, in fact the archimandrite of the Studites. The Studites were brought into being by the Sheptytsky brothers as a revival of Eastern Christian monasticism. The tensions between the Eastern and Western heritages in Greek Catholicism have a long and formative history, and Sheptytsky’s way of dealing with them was visionary. It deserved attention.
The third theme of the film was a subplot that serves most of all to highlight Yanchuk’s predilection for ambiguity and conspiracy theory. It takes up an inordinate portion of the film, weaving its way in and out. Partly told through flashbacks, this subplot requires considerable work on the part of the viewer. According to the film, in 1939, when the Soviets occupied Lviv for the first time, the NKVD picked up a young monk named Stefan Pavlyuk and recruited him to inform on Sheptytsky. A villainous NKVD major tortured Stefan by smashing a rubber stamp on his fingers and pressing it down. Perhaps there is some symbolism here. In spite of the precise name of the informer, he is not a historical character. That there were informers in the Greek Catholic Church is, of course, true. As presented in the movie, young Stefan belonged to the metropolitan’s innermost circle. We are shown that he tried to placate the NKVD by bringing them the draft of a sermon or pastoral letter, but they demanded items of more significance from him. Whether he provided them or not is a question left to the viewer to answer. Sheptytsky knows that Stefan is an informer and confronts him about it during a chess game. Even so Stefan remains close to the metropolitan.

After the interlude of the Nazi occupation, the NKVD again picks up Stefan. The same major gives Stefan some “medicine,” straight from the Kremlin, which supposedly will revive the metropolitan’s flagging health. He wants Stefan to slip the medicine into Sheptytsky’s milk or coffee once a week. Later we see Stefan struggling with himself over this “medicine.” He dumps all of it in a glass of water and considers drinking it down himself. Instead, he throws it on the floor. Still later, we see Stefan giving the metropolitan a drink, and we wonder if it contains the Kremlin “medicine,” obtained by a refill of the “prescription.” Perhaps, we are led to understand, Sheptytsky was poisoned by the NKVD. After his death, his successor and other church officials are arrested by the NKVD and herded into a truck. Stefan is picked up with the rest of them, but the NKVD major, much to Stefan’s dismay, releases him.

Throughout the film, we also see an enigmatic character who is reading archival documents and watching old newsreels and other actuality footage. This character is only identified in the credits, where he is given the name “Syvy”—the grey one. This part of the film is set in the post-Soviet period. From his investigations, “Syvy” learns about Stefan’s past and knows that he is still alive. So every day he calls Stefan, now an old man and a grandfather, but Stefan is reluctant to pick up the phone. My
reading of “Syvy” is that he is a veteran of the Security Service of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, reactivated in retirement. He is about the right age. His identification by only a pseudonym in quotation marks is very characteristic of the nationalist underground. On the phone, he tells Stefan that he cannot be indifferent to what he has done, since he—“Syvy”—is “a believer.” The idea is that the Organization is still righting wrongs against the church and nation.

We are shown old Stefan wrestling with his past, telling himself that he actually betrayed no one and that his life is the punishment for his wrongdoing. We later see “Syvy” and Stefan meeting on a park bench. Stefan tells “Syvy”—cynically or cryptically, I am not sure—that if he believes that he must destroy Stefan’s family in order to compensate for the wrong he has done, so be it; he will carry on. The preference for inventions that push the movie in the direction of a romance or a thriller over historic substance is a recurring problem in Yanchuk’s film. Yanchuk’s three previous films had glorified the Bandera wing of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, and it is perhaps natural that he avoided depicting the relations between that movement and the metropolitan, because Sheptytsky was an outspoken opponent of its brand of violent nationalism. In fact, the story of Sheptytsky and Ukrainian nationalism more generally would have provided excellent material for high political and moral drama. In the interwar period, which Yanchuk’s film barely touched upon, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists successfully organized a number of high-profile assassinations of Polish government officials. The Ukrainian population of Galicia considered the young nationalists to be heroes; Sheptytsky considered them to be murderers.22 His remonstrances fell on deaf ears or alienated the radical nationalist youth. When the German-Soviet war broke out in 1941, the Bandera nationalists proclaimed a Ukrainian state in Lviv. Misled by their representatives, Sheptytsky endorsed their state, but then drew back in horror as he witnessed the violence that they used against their enemies, which included the older wing of the nationalist movement as well as Jews, Communists, and Poles. The Bandera movement attempted to seize power in each locality and place their own militias in charge. Sheptytsky sought to have the traditional elders of the community as well as the pastors set up the local infrastructure, and he warned against the godlessness and violence of the young nationalists. In 1943 the Bandera wing began the systematic slaughter of the Polish

22 Himka, “Christianity and Radical Nationalism.”
population in Western Ukraine. Sheptytsky condemned this decisively and called upon the priests and elders in communities to save the Polish population from destruction. What a rich film could have been made of these events, of this clash of perspectives.

The problems with Vladyka Andrey are those of the contemporary intellectual and creative world of Ukrainian nationalism. There are certain topics that nationalist intellectuals, academics, writers, artists, and directors cannot broach because they upset nationalist mythologies. Yanchuk could not work creatively with Sheptytsky’s many confrontations with Ukrainian nationalists because saints and heroes must walk hand in hand. He tried to create a combination of a national hero and a national saint. Making that myth was much more important for him than historical accuracy. The material of Ukrainian history, including Sheptytsky’s role in it, is filled with tension, drama, conflict, and tragedy. Imprisoned in his nationalist theematics, Yanchuk chose instead to erect a hollow monument to one of the most compelling characters of modern Ukraine.

Filmography

Atentat—Osinnye vbyvstvo u Myunkheni (Assassination: An Autumn Murder in Munich; Ukraine 1995, dir.: Oles Yanchuk)
Holod-33 (Famine-33; Ukraine 1991, dir.: Oles Yanchuk)
Neskorenyi (The Undefeated; Ukraine/USA 2000, dir.: Oles Yanchuk)
Vladyka Andrey (Metropolitan Andrey; Ukraine 2008, dir.: Oles Yanchuk)
Zalizna sotnya (The Company of Heroes; Ukraine 2004, dir.: Oles Yanchuk)

Bibliography


PART TWO

SACRED AND PROFANE IMAGES
Over the past decade, Russian cinema has shown a remarkable interest in Russia’s national history, which is, particularly in mainstream cinema, generally constructed with the help of patriotic narratives of the Russian nation. This tendency has led, first, to a wave of patriotic films on World War II and, second, to a respectable number of historical films covering a broad range of historical periods from medieval Russia to the Russian Civil War. When dealing with cinematic representations of history, the most enlightening question is not whether the depicted events are true, but rather how the past is conceived from the perspective of the present.\footnote{This commonly acknowledged insight into the relation between history and film was concisely rendered by Robert A. Rosenstone as: “History does not exist until it is created. And we create it in terms of our underlying values.” See Rosenstone, \textit{Visions of the Past}, 43.} Historical films, therefore, provide an insight into the ways history is interpreted for present needs, which may range from promulgating an official ideology to raising critical questions about society and politics.

In this examination of historical films produced in Russia in recent years, the interrelationships between nation and religion will be addressed by focusing on the figure of the martyr and on the question of how martyrs are created in the currently ongoing process of rethinking history. Since the figure of the martyr is well suited to incorporating heroic, patriotic and religious moments, it can, on the one hand, illuminate the encounters of nation and religion in Russian cinema and, on the other, shed light on the complex process of transferring a typical religious figure and concept into the profane medium of cinema. These questions will be dealt with through a close investigation of two films, which approach Russian history from quite different standpoints and with opposing intentions: \textit{Admiral} (\textit{The Admiral}; 2008, dir.: Andrey Kravchuk) and \textit{Tsar} (2009, dir.: Pavel Lungin). Despite overt ideological and aesthetic differences, both films make use of the concept of martyrdom—with the Admiral of the White Army in the Russian Civil War, Aleksandr Kolchak, as a martyr in a
metaphorical sense and with Metropolitan Filipp, who was murdered at the behest of Tsar Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) and later canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church, as a truly religious martyr.

Guided by textual analysis, the article will focus on cinematic techniques and textual strategies such as character development, iconography and narrative patterns. The major question is how martyrs are created in cinema and thus transferred from the realm of religion into popular culture. In addition, several further questions will be addressed, among them issues of film production and the national traditions of filmmaking, along with the political and ideological implications of the films discussed. Furthermore, the process of transferring the traditional media of religion (icons, church services, veneration of saints) into modern mass media will be explored. Finally, the analysis of the films Admiral and Tsar will be preceded with some general remarks on film production and ideology in Putin’s Russia and on the concept of martyrdom.

**Historical Films, State Interest and the Russian Film Market**

Following the collapse of the former state structures of production and distribution, it took more than 10 years before post-Soviet cinema achieved a resounding commercial success at the Russian box office with Timur Bekmambetov’s fantasy thriller *Nochnoy Dozor* (*Night Watch*; 2004).\(^2\) Until that point, crime and mafia thrillers along with action films had been the most popular with audiences. After the turn of the millennium, war films set during World War II, literary adaptations and historical films managed, despite the unbroken domination of American cinema, to break onto the Russian film market and joined the contemporary genres that had acquired mainstream success in the 1990s. The wave of commercially successful historical films that managed more or less to hold their own against international productions at the box office began with *Turetsky gambit* (*The Turkish Gambit*; 2005, dir.: Dzhanik Fayziev), an adaptation of the bestselling novel by Boris Akunin set during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877/78 that centers around the Siege of Plevna (in what is today Bulgaria). In contrast to the Akunin adaptation, which for a historical film

\(^2\) The films of the director Timur Bekmambetov, besides *Nochnoy dozor* (*Night Watch*; 2004), its sequel *Dnevnoy dozor* (*Day Watch*; 2006) and in particular the comedy *Ironiya sudby. Prodolzhenie* (*The Irony of Fate 2*; 2007), are among the biggest box office successes of Russian contemporary cinema.
had relatively low production costs that it was able to recoup several
times over due to its box office success, Admiral’s profit margins were
much more modest due to its high production costs. However, based on
audience figures, Admiral, which was seen by 5.38 million cinemagoers in
autumn 2008, is by far the most successful historical film in contempo-
rary Russian cinema. Vladimir Bortko also achieved remarkable success
by drawing in an audience of 3.78 million for his Gogol adaptation Taras
Bulba (2009). In contrast, Vladimir Khotinenko’s 1612: Khroniki Smutnogo
vremen (1612: Chronicles of the Dark Time; 2007) and Pavel Lungin’s Tsar
were well behind with audience figures of around one million and there-
fore could not recoup their production costs at the box office. Neverthe-
less, they had a considerable impact on public debate. In addition, the
last few years have produced numerous other films that center around
historical figures and events, for example Alexandr. Nevskaya bitva (Alex-
ander. The Neva Battle; 2008, dir.: Igor Kalenov), Gospoda ofitsery. Spasti
imperatora (Gentlemen Officers: Save the Emperor; 2008, dir.: Oleg Fomin)
and Yaroslav. Tysyachu let nazad (Iron Lord; 2010, dir.: Dmitry Korobkin).

Undoubtedly, the turn towards historical subjects has received con-
siderable impetus from Putin’s cultural and educational policy and the
repeated complaints that young people have an inadequate historical con-
sciousness. The cultural political line taken under Putin emanates from a
decree of the president of February 2001, which contains a state program
for the patriotic education of citizens of the Russian Federation. One of
the most obvious measures in the implementation of Putin’s “patriotic
rearmament,” as Jutta Scherrer succinctly described the ideological posi-
tion in 2001, is the introduction of a series of textbooks and teaching
materials on the history of the 20th century, commonly referred to as
Filippov’s textbook.6

3 For information on the most popular Russian films of recent years (including 2010), see
the Special Issue of Russian Film Business Today, 4. Audience figures for the film Admiral
are also given on the website KinoPoisk.ru: http://www.kinopoisk.ru/level/1/film/280938.
4 Scherrer, “Zurück zu Gott und Vaterland.”
5 Particularly, the release of Aleksandr Filippov’s teachers’ manual Noveyshaya istoriya
Rossii, 1945–2006 gg.: Kniga dlya uchitelya and a textbook derived from it for senior high
schools by Aleksandr Danilov was surrounded by controversial discussions. According to
Elena Zubkova the labelling “Filippov’s textbook” no longer refers to a specific book but
can rather be understood as a cultural phenomenon that sheds light on the Russian edu-
cational system and on Russian life as a whole. See Zubkova, “The Filippov Syndrome,”
861. For a critical discussion of the series of textbooks written by Filippov and his co-
authors, see also the other articles published under the heading “Ex Tempore: Toward a
In the sphere of film production, the minister of culture Aleksandr Avdeyev announced in summer 2008 that the once familiar practice of state commission, the “goszakaz,” would be revived. Accordingly, from 2009, the state would promote the production of films possessing a human, spiritual and patriotic character. Since 2009, the “Federalny fond sotsialnoy i ekonomicheskoy podderzhki otechestvennoy kinematografii” (Federal Fund for Social and Economic Support of Domestic Cinema) has only financed a small number of films directly. The lion’s share of its budget has gone to select studios and producers. A repeated criticism is that the primary criterion for the support of a film is not artistic quality, but rather its social relevance. However, no state-subsidized film has even come close to recreating the success of Admiral, in turn bringing into question the social relevance of the newly introduced funding program.

The film Pop (The Priest; 2009, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko), which was produced by the theological center of the Russian Orthodox Church Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya (Orthodox Encyclopedia) and funded by the state, is the first example of the direct cooperation between state and church within the realm of feature film. At the centre of the film, which takes place at the time of World War II, is an idealized village priest who takes part in the so-called Pskov Orthodox Mission. This was an initiative by the Orthodox metropolitan of Latvia that aimed to send priests to the areas occupied by Germany in order to revive the Orthodox faith among the population. The Pravoslavnaya entsiklopediya is a state-sponsored research center that has not only published a multivolume encyclopedia of Orthodoxy for many years, but has also developed a media information network. The institution produces a weekly documentary for the TV channel TV Tsentr and runs the internet portal Sedmica.ru. In 2010, its second film project also received state funding: the historical film Orda (The Horde; 2012), set in the period of Tatar rule and directed by Andrey Proshkin with a screenplay by Yury Arabov, was finished at the end of 2011.


6 In the original: “[…] gosudarstvo budet stimulirovat sozdaniye kinolent, imeyushchikh gumanny dukhovny patriotichesky kharakter.” See “Novy ministr kultury privez.”

7 For more on this, see “The Film Industry in the Russian Federation.”

8 On the funding of “socially significant film projects” in 2011, see “Fond kino raspredelil.”
According to Christian teaching, Jesus Christ is the “archetypical martyr,” “who through his death on the cross confirmed the truth of his message.”

The martyrs for the faith venerated by both the Catholic and Orthodox churches give witness to the truth (the Greek word *martyrion* means a witness in court) in that they sacrifice their lives for their faith. Together with ascetics and hierarchs, martyrs belong to the oldest categories of Christian saints. The veneration of martyrs goes back to the persecution of Christians in the 2nd century and marks the beginning of the Christian devotion of the saints. Within the Catholic Church, the three criteria formulated by Pope Benedict XIV (1740–1758) in the 18th century still govern the inclusion of a martyr for the faith in a martyrology and the associated canonization: (1) the fact of a violent death (*martyrium materialiter*); (2) the perpetrator must have been motivated by hate of the faith and the church (*martyrium formaliter ex parte tyranni*), and (3) the victim must demonstrate a testimony of faith as a clear motive (*martyrium formaliter ex parte victimae*). Political resistance is no more grounds for martyrdom in the Christian sense than is a death through voluntary sacrifice.

Within the centuries-long tradition, the manner of the veneration of saints in general and of martyrs in particular has changed fundamentally. In the Middle Ages, the veneration of the martyrs centered around relics, which made the saints incarnate and materially present; at the same time, they could not be seen because they were stored in shrines or crypts. The advance of secularization, above all connected with the urban middle-class, brought about a shift away from the belief in the miraculous power of the saints towards an *Imitatio Christi* in the sense of leading a spiritual and moral life. As a result, the saints acquired a human countenance and were increasingly adapted to the ethical principles of the daily life of the urban middleclass.

Over the centuries, one can observe a similar shift in emphasis in the Russian Orthodox tradition “from miracles to services for the church and a life of personal sanctification,” which took place in the 16th and

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10 See Maier, “Politische Märtyrer,” 16.
12 See Voss, “Das Gediächtnis der Märtyrer.”
13 See ibid., 35.
14 See ibid., 36.
17th centuries, when, above all, monastic founders and pious clerics were canonized. In addition, due to the instable political situation, new martyrs emerged. A prominent example for a clergyman persecuted by the political regime is Metropolitan Filipp, who appears in the film Tsar. Filipp was murdered at Ivan IV’s behest in 1568. In the words of theologian Vladimir Ivanov, the reason for his canonisation in 1652 was actually his “brave resistance against the anti-Christian policy of Ivan the Terrible and his terror.”

During the reign of Ivan the Terrible, canonization was put forward as part of an all-Russian program aimed at transforming the Kingdom of Muscovy into the Russian empire. The church councils convened by Metropolitan Makary in 1547 and 1549 led not only to a sharp rise in new canonizations but also to a new wave of hagiographic literature. Nine holy fools—a distinctive type of saint within Orthodox Christianity that became a widespread religious and cultural phenomenon in Russia from the 14th century onwards—were among those canonized. A most striking characteristic of the yurodivye or blazhennye (holy fools) was their unusual behaviour: they broke “normal” social standards by shouting, crying or abusing people in public places. They also pretended to be or were indeed stupid; yet at the same time they were assumed to be clairvoyants. Furthermore, their outward appearances were unique: they were either naked or wore spectacular rags. The holy fools were presumed “holy sinners”: regarded as simultaneously pure and impure, they were believed to sin “for the sake of humility rather than for personal advantage.”

Whereas the attitude of the church toward holy foolishness was ambivalent, the Russian people in villages and urban surroundings venerated the yurodivye’s doings and lives (based on their descriptions in folk legends). This discrepancy between official doctrine and folk religion leads Ewa M. Thompson to the conclusion that “[h]oly foolishness appears to be not so much an Orthodox phenomenon as a superimposition of folk tradition on Russian Orthodoxy.” Particularly in the 19th century, holy fools became an essential part of what was regarded as national Russian character. Consequently, Georgy Fedotov compares the role of the holy fool within the

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16 Ibid., 45–46.
17 Ibid., 44.
18 Thompson, *Understanding Russia*, 4.
19 Ibid., 95.
Russian Church to that of its secular equivalent *Ivan-durak* (*Ivan the Fool*) in fairy tales.\(^{20}\)

With Tsar Peter I and the establishment of the Holy Synod canonization decreased dramatically. That is, whereas from the mid 16th century to the end of the 17th century about 150 saints were canonized, in the synodical period only 25 were canonized (ten by the metropolitan and 15 by a local priest or bishop). The majority of these became saints under Nicholas II.\(^{21}\)

After more than 60 years of Soviet rule, a historical turning point for the Russian Orthodox Church came in 1988 with that year’s millennial anniversary celebrations of the baptism of Russia. It set in motion preparations for the canonization of new martyrs who had been the victims of the Communist regime. The main task was to formulate criteria for the canonization of new martyrs. The most controversial case was the question of the canonization of the tsar and his family shot in 1918 because it was feared “that a canonization of this sort could be understood as a restoration of monarchist ideology in the official teaching of the Russian Orthodox Church.”\(^{22}\) Those in favor of the canonization of the imperial family drew on the ecclesiastical concept of suffering and decided at the anniversary Synod of Bishops in August 2000 to canonize Nicholas II and his family alongside around 1,000 new martyrs. The synodical decision was as follows:

In the suffering borne by the Imperial Family in prison with humility, patience and meekness, and in their martyrdom in Ekaterinburg in the night of 4 (17) July 1918 was revealed the light of the faith of Christ that conquers evil, as it has shone in the life and death of millions of Orthodox Christians who were persecuted for Christ in the 20th century.\(^{23}\)

The understanding of martyrdom common in 20th-century social discourses certainly draws on Christian traditions. However, it has been adapted to the needs of secularized societies that communicate via the mass media. Since the second half of the 20th century in particular, the concept of martyrdom has been widened discursively through the

\(^{20}\) Fedotov, *Svyatye drevney Rusi*, 98. The well-known work on saints in ancient Russia by the historian Georgy Fedotov, an émigré who was closely linked to Orthodox institutions in Paris and New York, was first published in Paris in 1931. In the Soviet Union it appeared in 1990.

\(^{21}\) Ivanov, “Die Heiligsprechung der neuen russischen Märtyrer,” 46.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 50–51.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 50.
application of the term to the victims of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century and the semantic displacement of Christian martyrdom for the faith by a political and humanistic understanding of martyrdom which emphasizes universal principles such as human rights and dignity.24

Admiral: Historical Revisionism in the Digital “Cinema of Attractions”

“Where can I find a face like this?” is the central question of the frame story in the film Admiral. The face referred to is that of Anna Timireva, which belongs to a culture that was wiped out by the Soviet regime. The person looking for the face is the director Sergey Bondarchuk,25 adapting Tolstoy’s Voyna i mir for the film studio Mosfilm in 1964. However, the actual face itself and all the other faces in the film Admiral are from the present—i.e. the lost faces exist once again.

The three periods brought together by this frame story (which is perhaps the densest and most interesting scene of the entire film) indicate how Russians today are trying to understand the traumatic upheavals of the 20th century and reach a social consensus in the sphere of popular culture on what Russia once was, what it is today and what it can be in the future. At the same time, the film can be seen as an illustrative example of how popular and patriotic cinema is made in Russia today.

At the center of Admiral’s plot is the tragic, historically documented romance—between Aleksandr Kolchak, a famous admiral of the White Army in the Russian Civil War, and Anna Timireva—which evolves against the backdrop of two wars. The film’s story begins in 1916 and traces, parallel to the unfolding love story, Kolchak’s military and political career: from brave Russian officer, who defeats a German cruiser by daringly luring it into a minefield, via his promotion as commander of the Black Sea Fleet to admiral of the White Army and the supreme ruler of Russia during the Civil War, and who finally is summarily executed by the Bolsheviks in Irkutsk on 7 February 1920. With the Communist regime responsible for Kolchak’s violent death, the historical figure of Kolchak definitely appears well suited for contemporary understandings of martyrdom.

The interest in the figure of Kolchak, one of the main bogeymen of Communist propaganda and Soviet depictions of the Civil War, is by no means new and can be traced back to the late Soviet period. In 1986,

24 See Maier, “Politische Märtyrer,” 23.
25 The director, who died in 1994, is portrayed in Admiral by his son Fedor Bondarchuk.
Vladimir Maksimov published the novel *Zaglyanut v bezdnu* (*To Look into Abyss*) while in exile in Paris, and the work made its way into the Soviet Union under Perestroika. Maksimov, who as an émigré edited the literary, political and religious journal *Kontinent*, included in his novel on Kolchak an entire chapter on the murder of the tsar in Yekaterinburg. Nikita Mikhalkov gave further impetus for a revision of history in his multipart documentary *Russkie bez Rossi* (Russians Deprived of Russia; 2003). In an episode devoted to Kolchak, *Dialog s Kolchakom* (Dialogue with Kolchak), both Mikhalkov, who quotes letters, diary entries and official documents, and Kolchak’s grandson, who lives in Paris, speak about the White Admiral.

The historical figure created by the director Andrey Kravchuk and the scriptwriters Vladimir Valutsky and Zoya Kudrya conforms to the image of a contemporary, military, masculine hero on several levels. The first thing to stand out is the casting of Konstantin Khabensky in the title role. Khabensky became known through the (*Nochnoy/Dnevnoy*) *Dozor* series as a rugged yet sensitive late-Soviet everyman with a deep, sonorous voice. He does not accentuate the lofty and heroic, but rather invests the character with mundane attributes and human fallibility. For instance, when he is arrested, we see his hands shake as they reach for his cigarette case. At the same time, the figure is an example that should inspire patriotism, endowed with the outstanding characteristics of a firm faith, an officer’s honor and loyalty. The figure is depicted as a man of action and decision during war and battle; he is surrounded by phallic symbols, which repeatedly enter the screen in a striking manner. These include the battleship, the barrel of the cannon and the golden sabre which Kolchak, close to tears, throws into the sea off Sevastopol rather than hand it to the rebellious soldiers’ soviet. In addition, the character exhibits a masculine behavior which is here positively connoted—for example when he sits smoking at his desk next to a portrait of his true love, Anna Timireva, with a glass of cognac in front of him.

With the scene of the retreat of the White troops from Omsk a little over half way through the film, the character’s willingness to seize the initiative transforms into a suffering passivity and a gradual, increasingly humble acceptance of the military defeat that recalls the endurance of the

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26 Criticism came from various quarters for the film’s portrayal of an idealized Kolchak that ignores entirely the dark sides of the historical figure, for example his anti-Semitism, his abilities as a commander in a land war and the atrocities committed in his name.
Orthodox martyrs.\textsuperscript{27} The turning point is the scene depicting the admiral’s speech to his army and the assembled inhabitants of the city in which he begins by announcing the march of the Whites on Moscow, but ends with a reference to the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13: 12–13): “As the Apostle Paul said, even if today we see the future through a glass darkly and can only speculate about it, then nonetheless faith, hope and love accompany us—and the greatest of these is love. So help us God.”\textsuperscript{28}

The biblical quotation placed here in Kolchak’s mouth can be seen as the semantic center of the cinematic narrative around which the symbolic images of resurrection are grouped. The historical martyrdom of Kolchak ends in the film with the cruciform hole in the ice into which the corpse of the admiral is thrown after his execution. The recurring underwater shots in the film are, when read in the Christian context, symbolic images of resurrection or, in the political/ secular understanding, signs of rebirth and the return of the lost past. On the one hand, \textit{Admiral} visualizes the abandonment of the noble values of the past through fetishized objects such as the general’s sabre that sinks into the sea and the photographic portrait of Anna Timireva in its silver case, which falls from her hand onto the ground. On the other hand, the water shots recall those victims of history who were murdered for their loyalty and belief in another political system. Thus, the film’s narrative ends with Kolchak’s corpse sinking into the water in slow motion. The concluding climax of the martyr’s death is anticipated by a memorable image of the officers shot in Sevastopol, who float under the water bound to ropes as if they had been crucified.

The enmeshment of religion and politics that defines the conceptual characterization of the main protagonist is underpinned by religious rituals, which are presented in their performativity both acoustically and through synchronous and asynchronous montages of images and sounds. Religious rituals and objects are as present in \textit{Admiral} as in the well-known antireligious propaganda films and film scenes of the 1920s and

\textsuperscript{27} The film also depicts the suffering and the self-sacrifice of the main female character, Anna Timireva, as positive. At the same time, the spouses of the two main protagonists, who go into exile, are contrasted to Kolchak’s and Timireva’s struggle for the motherland.

\textsuperscript{28} In the original: “Kak skazal apostol Pavel, pust seychas my vidim budushcheye kak-by skvoz tuskloye steklo, gadatelno, no pribyvayet s nami vera, nadezhda, lyubov, i lyubov iz nikh bolshe. Da pomozhet nam Bog.” The exact wording in the New King James Bible is as follows: “(12) For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. (13) And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”
1930s, albeit imbued with an opposite meaning. These include scenes of common prayer before or during a battle, for example during the battleship’s journey through the minefield, characters making the sign of the cross, the images of the priests blessing the soldiers at the front or the veneration of icons. During his only appearance in the film, the tsar gives Kolchak, who has just been promoted to supreme commander of the Black Sea Fleet, an icon of the suffering Job and blesses him with the sign of the cross as he leaves.

The numerous signifiers of the Russian Orthodox faith, however, provide no spiritual dimensions to the film. Rather, they are aimed at evoking national Russian culture and function as essential generators of national identity. In addition, the performativity of the rituals conceals the unbridgeable contradiction between resolute, rational action and trust in God’s aid, which the characters constantly call upon. The effortlessness with which the film reveals social and historical contradictions without actually discussing them is evident from the first scene with Kolchak. While there is a traditional medium of religion—an icon of Our Lady of Kazan—on the desk of the ship’s commander, his officer Sergey Timirev confronts him with the above-mentioned photographic portrait of his wife. The religious/sacral medium of veneration and its modern secular counterpart by no means contradict one another; rather, they are placed on a par with each other and merged into an apparently harmonic image of the world.

However, let us return to the frame story mentioned at the start in which the director Sergey Bondarchuk is desperately looking for a suitable face. The scenes that frame the film’s plot contain above all a metafictional statement on how the director and his film team position themselves within the national cinematic tradition and how they think one should make successful mainstream cinema in Russia. In its use of montage, special effects and camera work, Admiral follows the rules of the contemporary digital “cinema of attractions” as set out by American cinema. The orientation towards the successful model of Hollywood,

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29 One thinks of the corresponding scenes in Eisenstein’s Oktyabr (October; 1927), of the supplicatory processions in Eisenstein’s Staroe i novoe (Old and New; 1926–29), of Dziga Vertov’s Enthusiasm (Enthusiasm; 1930) and the shots of Orthodox priests blessing the soldiers in the trenches in Esfir Shub’s Padenie dinastii Romanovykh (The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty; 1927).

30 In her introduction to the edited volume The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded Wanda Strauven summarises the history, usage and applicability of the term “cinema of attractions” as “coined in the mid-1980s by Tom Gunning and André Gaudreault in relation
which was also the explicit goal in two periods of Soviet film history (in the 1930s with Boris Shumyasky and in the 1970s under the head of Goskino Filipp Yermash), has set the trend over the last decade due to the competitive situation on the Russian film market. This orientation is strongest in the technical areas and stylistic elements. In the case of Admiral, the indicator for this is the invitation of the experienced editor Tom Rolf, who has worked with notable directors in American cinema, to edit the film.

Therefore, while the film Admiral itself reveals how a commercially successful and yet patriotic cinema might look technically and formally, the frame story indicates what examples patriotic Russian cinema draws on from its own film history. Sergey Bondarchuk’s four-part film Voyna i mir is known as the most elaborate and expensive spectacle produced by Soviet cinema. The film was shot on 70mm film in the Sovscope format, the best that there is. The filmmakers’ belief in the superiority of today’s digital material is made evident in the color quality, as the Soviet Sovcolor technology produced faded colours and weak reds, something particularly evident in the ball scene at the end. The central message of the frame story is, therefore, that one has an advantage over the Soviet past in two respects: firstly, in the cinematic technology and secondly in the beauty of an elite life which Admiral has brought from the past into the present. As the film in general and the closing ball scenes in particular show, Admiral reproduces the faces for which Sergey Bondarchuk searched in vain among the grey-toned Soviet citizens of the 1960s.

Tsar: Alternative Lessons from History?

Pavel Lungin’s film Tsar decidedly rejects the simplistic patriotic phrase of “for tsar and fatherland" that sets the tone for Kravchuk’s Admiral.

31 In addition to Sergey Bondarchuk, this self-elect line of great Soviet directors who made popular cinema includes, of course, Sergei Eisenstein, whose films are recalled in Admiral through visual quotations. These include the massacre of workers in the finale of Stachka (Strike; 1924) in the scene in which officers are shot by the soldiers of Kronstadt, the mutiny scene on the ship in Bronenosets Potyomkin (Battleship Potemkin; 1925), the S-shaped procession of the people on their pilgrimage to the tsar at the end of the first part of Ivan Grozny (Ivan the Terrible; 1944).

32 Ziborova, "Istoriya Rossii," 110. See also Liliya Berezhnaya’s contribution to this volume.
Figure 1. Tsar Ivan the Terrible: “Where is my people?” (actor: Petr Mamonov, Tsar, Russia 2009, dir.: Pavel Lungin)

Figure 2. Metropolitan Filipp (actor: Oleg Yankovsky, Tsar, Russia 2009, dir.: Pavel Lungin)
and other historical films which conjure up Russia’s imperial greatness. In addition, Lungin’s film does not draw primarily on commercial cinema and its mixture of historical subject matter, opulently decorated costume drama, breathtaking battle scenes with special effects, a sentimental love story and a heroic central character with a simplified psychology. Instead, Lungin’s historical film evokes images of the dark Middle Ages and confronts the audience with naturalistic depictions of torture, physical suffering and a downtrodden people.

The simple fact that Lungin’s examination of Russian history focuses on perhaps the most controversial figure of Russian history, Ivan the Terrible, leaves no doubt that the film views political power critically and that in it, history serves as a mirror for the present. As a result, it is all the more important to ask what lessons for contemporary society Lungin takes from Russian history. The following will try to answer this question by looking at the portrayal of the film’s three main protagonists: the tsar, his adversary the Metropolitan Filipp, and the people.

As the representative of political and temporal power, the tsar is depicted by Lungin as an ambivalent and divided figure, uniting the two contradictory myths of Ivan the Terrible. According to the historian Dmitry Volodikhin, the first myth sees Ivan IV as “a formidable, farsighted, wise ruler, a great strategist, a remarkable diplomat, a subtle writer and a Christian of high moral standards.”33 The second portrays him as “a half-mad psychopath, a bloody murderer, a man who inculcated an inclination for political repression among the Russian people, who destroyed the flower of the Russian army on the field of battle and practically ruined the church.”34 In Lungin’s film, the tsar appears, on the one hand, as a God-fearing doubter and, on the other, as a paranoid ruler with diabolical characteristics who is obsessed with the apocalypse. This depiction is underpinned by Petr Mamonov’s eccentric acting, which he had already displayed in his portrayal of a monk as a holy fool in Lungin’s previous film Ostrov (The Island; 2006).

The nevertheless clear judgment on the tsar’s behavior is founded on the concept of divine justice. While Ivan increasingly arrogates the power

33 In the original: “Grozny, dalnozorky, mudry pravitel, veliky stratég, zamechatelny diplomat, tonky pisatel i vysokonravstvenny christianin.” For the quotes see Yakovleva, “Bez tsarya.”
34 In the original: “polubezumnny manjak, krovavy ubiytsa, chelovek, kotory privil russkomu narodu vkus k politcheskim repressiyam, ulozhil na pole boya luchshiye sily russkoy armii i fakticheski razoril Tserkov.” Ibid.
to preside over good and evil during the film, his adversary Filipp stands for belief in the judgment and grace of God—for the “truth of Christ” as the hagiographic/historical biography by Georgy Fedotov puts it.\footnote{Fedotov, Sobraniye sochineny, 7.} This antagonism which defines the dynamics of the plot is particularly marked in two scenes. The scene in the first part of the film in which the tsar is dressed shows how Ivan goes from doubting penitent to mighty tsar, in that his entourage—his bloodthirsty second wife Marya Temryukovna and his notorious personal guard, the oprichniki—one after the other adorn the tsar's laughable and piteous body with the insignia of power, from a gold-embroidered cloak and pearl-studded cross to the imperial crown. The inverted counterpart to this comes in the third part of the film, when the Metropolitan Filipp is stripped of the clothes that signify his position as the highest representative of the church.

While depicting the development of the two characters in opposite directions, Lungin uses dramatic images to show the tsar's descent into the hell of temporal power and the ascension of the metropolitan to martyrdom. In order to “translate” the martyr's narrative of suffering for the medium of film, Lungin—no less than Kravchuk—employs both the performativity of religious ritual and the conceptual figure of the martyr. Thus, Lungin's film, too, has scenes of prayer: with the exception of the fourth and last part, every section of the film begins and ends with a prayer or part of a liturgical celebration. In addition, Filipp's prayer in the prison cell is expressively staged in concise cinematic images reminiscent of a music video.\footnote{In addition to the manifold representations of Orthodox belief in the film's narrative, the role the Orthodox Church plays for the film can be highlighted by studying the paratexts on the film in the mass media. The newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda reported right before the film's release that Oleg Yankovsky asked for and received Patriarch Aleksey II's blessing for work on the film; see Nechaev, “Tsar Pavla Lungina.” Furthermore the media reported about the practicing priest Ivan Okhlobystin who took the role of Ivan's blasphemous fool Vassian, which finally lead to the dismissal of the priest in February 2010; see Kurilovich and Yermachenko, “Mezhdu ekranom i amvonom.”}

However, in conceiving the martyr Filipp, Lungin does not turn to the faith and spirituality of a servant of God, which are difficult to translate into today's popular culture with its materialistic values, but rather the contemporary political and humanist concept of martyrdom mentioned above. Indeed, Filipp represents the spirit of the Renaissance, which Orthodox theology views extremely critically: in one of the first episodes, the metropolitan introduces the German oprichnik Andrey Shtaden to the
technological inventions of Leonardo da Vinci; in the film’s fourth section, the same instruments are converted into terrible instruments of torture in the hands of the tsar. In particular, the contrast of the Renaissance with the “dark” Middle Ages evokes Andrey Tarkovsky’s Andrey Rublyov (1966), one of the best-known Soviet films about mediaeval Russia. This reference to Tarkovsky’s cinema is strengthened through the casting of Oleg Yankovsky, who played the leading role in the former’s film Nostalgya (Nostalgghia; 1983). Tarkovsky’s moral concepts draw on humanistic ideals and are spiritual yet divorced from a particular confession. Humanistic ideals also provide the central point of reference for Lungin’s portrayal of the martyr. In contrast, religious concepts of piety and grace are only included at the level of performative rituals and not as concepts that guide the film.

Lungin ends his film with the lonely tsar on the throne asking for his people (“Gde moy narod?”—“Where is my people?”)—an echo of Aleksandr Pushkin’s tragedy Boris Godunov, which concludes with the silence of the people in response to the atrocities committed by the state. In a further respect, Lungin refuses to create patriotic cinema: he depicts the people as a submissive, bloodthirsty mob demanding gold coins, reminiscent of the audience of Roman gladiatorial combats. Lungin portrays the tsar and the people as the two equally culpable sides of a concept that has had a destructive impact, above all in the 20th century. He creates these associations most clearly in a direct visual reference to Sergey Eisenstein’s film Ivan Grozny (Ivan the Terrible; 1944). A scene in the opening sequence shows the tsar publically complaining about the absence of a metropolitan in Moscow and being pulled across the snow on a carpet. The people follow him on their knees in a long procession, recalling the scene of the people making a pilgrimage to the tsar at the end of the first part of Ivan Grozny. However, while Eisenstein uses the scene to present the visual apotheosis of a totalitarian leader, Lungin shows a mob that is swept up in the madness of the miserable figure of the tsar. In his negative, naturalistically distorted depiction of the people, Lungin turns not only against the nationalist idealization of the people, but also against a cinematic tradition of depicting the masses inextricably linked to the Soviet avant-garde.

In contrast, Lungin ascribes positive connotations to an allegorical image of the people and Russia with media roots in folk legends and hagiographies. Thus, Lungin devotes an individual narrative strand to the character of the blond girl Masha and her symbolic attribute, an icon of Our Lady of Vladimir. The girl, whom characters in the film repeatedly describe as a blazhennaya, evokes the Orthodox tradition of yurodstvo,
while at the same time draws on concepts of Russia that can be traced back to the 19th century and by which national identity is envisaged in “female” qualities: she is naïve, innocent, patient, trusting and overly credulous. During the film, she flees the oprichniki, is protected by Filipp, and saves the Russian army on the battlefield with the help of Our Lady of Vladimir, who is believed to be the protector of Russia. She is seduced and abused by the tsar and his henchmen. The miracle-laden narrative of the girl and the icon conveys a didactic message about Russia: if Russia is in the hands of the church, it is safe; however, if the country is at the mercy of a corrupt temporal power that dares to preside over good and evil, it is doomed. By using folk legends and saints’ lives, for example the legends of the miracles of the icon of Our Lady of Vladimir protecting Russia from hostile conquerors, Lungin shows himself to be a director who, as in his earlier film Ostrov, revives traditional genres and translates them into the medium of film.

Undoubtedly, Lungin rejects contemporary patriotic cinema in his historical film by reversing the typical value judgments, above all the ideas of the necessity of a strong hand and a hostile and treacherous Europe. However, one important similarity between Tsar and Admiral is the main characters’ lack of alternative or leeway to act. The central protagonists in Tsar have only two options: kaznit (to execute) or pomilovat (to pardon). While the tsar seeks to put to death all those whom he suspects, the metropolitan begs for everyone to be pardoned. There is no space between the poles of good and evil, light and dark where the powerful and the powerless can interact with and against each other. If Lungin had wanted to make a statement about Russian history that could really give insight into contemporary questions and problems, his film probably should not have focused on the Tsar Ivan the Terrible and the Metropolitan Filipp.

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If, by way of conclusion, one examines what the Christian tradition of martyrdom could mean for the present beyond the logic of violence and victimization, today’s popular Russian film offers no more guidance than does international mainstream cinema. Victimization and self-victimization tied up with violence are a dominant aspect of the modern media world in general and its fundamental subdomains of cinema.

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37 Among the characteristics ascribed to ideal Russian womanhood and to Russia as a whole in cultural discourses are such qualities as passivity, submissiveness, softness or grace. See Cheauré, Napp, and Vogel, “Gender und Nation in Bild und Text,” 185.
and television in particular. One example is the ceaseless production of scapegoats; another is the media exploitation of victims who are stylized as sacrificial icons.\footnote{Niewiadomski, “Märtyrer, Selbstopfer, Selbstmordattentäter,” 282.} The discourse of victimhood and suffering employed by the national narratives in contemporary Russian cinema describes a closed circle in which people perceive “dying as the real origin of life and death as the last secret of reality.”\footnote{Ibid., 279.} In Christian theology, it was Jesus Christ’s surrendering himself up to his father and the connected act of forgiveness and loving one’s enemy that made it possible to rupture the enclosed logic wherein violence led to death. Contemporary Russian historical films, once again, are unfortunately rather silent as to how the logic of victimization in a secularized world might be broken.

*Translated from German by Christopher Gilley*

**Filmography**

1612: *Khroniki Smutnogo vremeni* (*1612: Chronicles of the Dark Time*; Russia 2007, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)
Admiral (*The Admiral*; Russia 2008, dir.: Andrey Kravchuk)
Andrey Rublyov (*USSR 1966*, dir.: Andrey Tarkovsky)
Bronenosets Potyomkin (*Battleship Potemkin*; USSR 1925, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Dnevnoy dozor (*Day Watch*; Russia 2006, dir.: Timur Bekmambetov)
Enthusiasm: *Simfoniya Donbassa* (*Enthusiasm: Symphony of Donbass*; USSR 1930, dir.: Dziga Vertov)
Gospoda ofitsery: *Spasti imperatora* (*Gentlemen Officers: Save the Emperor*; Russia 2008, dir.: Oleg Fomin)
Ironicaya Sudby. *Prodozhenie* (*The Irony of Fate 2*; Russia 2007, dir.: Timur Bekmambetov)
Ivan Grozny (*Ivan the Terrible; Part I*; USSR 1944, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Nochnoy Dozor (*Night Watch*; Russia 2004, dir.: Timur Bekmambetov)
Nostalgiya (*Nostalghia*; Italy/USSR 1983, dir.: Andrey Tarkovsky)
Oktyabr (*October*; USSR 1928, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Orda (*The Horde*, Russia 2012, dir.: Andrey Proshkin)
Ostrov (*The Island*; Russia 2006, dir.: Pavel Lungin)
Padenie dinastii Romanovykh (*The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*; USSR/USA 1927, dir.: Esfir Shub)
Pop (*The Priest*; Russia 2009, dir.: Vladimir Khotinenko)
Russkie bez Rossii (*Russians Deprived of Russia*; Russia 2003, dir.: Nikita Mikhalkov)
Stachka (*Strike*; USSR 1924, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Staroe i novo (Old and New; USSR 1926–29, dir.: Sergey Eisenstein)
Taras Bulba (*Russia 2009*, dir.: Vladimir Bortko)
Tsar (*Russia 2009*, dir.: Pavel Lungin)
Turetsky gambit (*The Turkish Gambit*; Russia/Bulgaria 2005, dir.: Dzhanik Fayziev)
Voyna i mir (War and Peace; USSR 1965–67, dir.: Sergey Bondarchuk)
Yaroslav. Tysiachu let nazad (Iron Lord; Russia 2010, dir.: Dmitry Korobkin)

Bibliography


When it comes to religion and spirituality, the case of the Czech Republic seems to be somewhat different from other Central and Eastern European countries. Current sociological research has repeatedly stated that the population of the Czech Republic is now overwhelmingly atheist. The statistics of officially declared religiosity—as recorded by official, nationwide censuses conducted in Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic since 1921—clearly reflect this trend: The affiliation of Czech people to churches has been dropping constantly over the past ninety years, and the decrease has accelerated since the fall of Communism in 1989.¹

There are, for sure, historical reasons for this. The history of the Czech relationship to religion is complex, even traumatic. Towards the end of the 14th century, Czech preachers were amongst the first in Europe to criticize corruption, profligacy, gluttony, and other types of abuse in the then dominant Christian church and to demand reform. Jan Hus (1369–1415) became the most prominent of these religious reformers, and although he was burnt at the stake by the church in 1415, Hussite Protestantism prevailed in Bohemia.² Religious freedom for both Catholics and Protestants in Bohemia lasted for almost two hundred years, until the defeat of the Protestants by the Catholics at the Battle of the White Mountain near Prague in 1620. It resulted in Catholic hegemony and absolutist rule under the Habsburg dynasty. The Austrian state then ruled the Czech Lands until the end of the First World War in 1918, when an independent Czechoslovakia was created. While cultural practices in Bohemia throughout the 19th century were firmly anchored in the Catholic cultural tradition, the Czech National Revival, which strove for the cultural and political emancipation of the Czechs since the beginning of the 19th century, was deeply inspired by the “glorious Protestant Czech past.” This historical narrative

¹ See “Population by denomination and sex.”
became an integral part of the Czech national mythology, especially in the works of the revered 19th century Czech historian František Palacký and the future first president of the Czechoslovak Republic Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Religion as a form of power politics has always interfered with the ethical and religious quest of the Czechs. Under sustained political pressure, most Czechs, originally Protestant, became Catholic nominally, but it seems fair to say that many of them developed a suspicious attitude towards organized religion. Libor Prudký argues that in 2009, the Czech Republic belonged among the most atheist countries in Europe. According to Prudký, this is the current hierarchy of values in the Czech Republic: 1) “the family,” 2) “friends and acquaintances,” 3) “free time” (a value associated with hedonism), and 4) “work.” Then there is a large gap. After the gap, “politics” is in fifth place and “religion” is in sixth. Secular values prevail over religious values by a ratio of 3:1. Faith in God is weaker than faith in some kind of other spiritual force: sixty per cent of the population believes in some kind of spiritual force.

Czech cinema reveals traces of the complex history that connects nationalism, religion and Czech national mythology. Thankfully, cultural theorists like Geert Hofstede and Stuart Hall have provided a useful framework to analyze the details of this relationship. The anthropologist Hofstede defines culture as a collective programming of the mind which manifests itself in adherence to a certain set of values, heroes and rituals. These can be easily found in literary and film texts. In Hofstede’s view, social systems are directly based on the stable mental programming of their citizens. As a result, culture as an example of spiritual programming is a crystallization of history. Cultural norms rarely change by accepting values from other cultures and rarely change quickly. Usually it takes many decades of internal developments for cultural attitudes to change. As Stuart Hall says, meaning is produced by a set of interconnections between our cultural and linguistic codes. Stuart Hall and other cultural theorists argue that films are the product of ideologies that stem from larger class and economic structures. In their view, research should concentrate on

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3 Palacký, Dějiny národu českého v Čechách a v Moravě; Činátl, Dějiny a vyprávění; Plaschka, Von Palacký bis Pekař.
4 Masaryk, Jan Hus; Opat, T. G. Masaryk, Evropan, světoobčan; Szporluk, The Political Thought of Thomas G. Masaryk; Funda, Masaryk.
5 Prudký et al., Inventura hodnot, 287–312.
6 Hofstede, Culture’s Consequences, 1–15.
the mythological structures of contemporary society that constitute ideology. To analyze ideology means to analyze the unconscious structural processes that form the basis of “natural,” “obvious,” and “common sense” attitudes. Hall visualizes ideology as “maps of meaning” that provide the foundation for the production of cultural artifacts including film and television.\footnote{Hall, “Encoding/Decoding.”} Or, with Althusser’s vocabulary, ideology is “the representation of imaginary relationships to their real conditions,” which can use (filmic) narratives to map social reality.\footnote{Heck, “The Ideological Dimension of Media Messages.”} Michel Foucault adds that narratives always take place within particular discourses, which are associated with power. According to Foucault, a discursive formation always sustains a “regime of truth.” It creates the impression that the discourse which a particular narrative disseminates is “the truth.”\footnote{Foucault, \emph{Power/Knowledge}.}

In the light of what Hofstede says about the speed of changes in the cultural norm, it does not seem to be particularly surprising that the construction of the Czech national mythology has displayed remarkably enduring features. What emerged as the Czech national narrative in the 19th century was taken over, almost without change, by both the interwar democratic Czechoslovak Republic and the Czechoslovak Communist regime of 1948–89. Brief periods of liberalization under Communism and the post-Communist period have witnessed minor variations in the prevailing national narrative, but on the whole the Czech national mythology, as formed in the 19th century, seems to have survived to the current day. A suspicious and detached attitude towards organized religion, in particular the Catholic Church, seems to be an integral part of this national mythology.

\textit{Prologue: Religion in Czech Films from the Communist Era}

It is a moot point to what extent films made under the Communist regime represented the discourse prevalent within society. The Communist regime tried hard to influence what and how its citizens thought through the power discourse of its propaganda. This pressure of course varied in different periods. It was extremely strong in the Stalinist 1950s and again in the post-invasion 1970s, but in the 1960s, on the other hand, the pressure was almost non-existent.
Just as in West European societies, the relationship between propaganda and the value system of ordinary citizens was extremely complex. John Fiske argues that "every individual and every social group makes and remakes the culture on their own terms."\(^{12}\) For instance, some members of the public would have been irritated by the anti-religious propaganda of the Communist regime while others would have been influenced by it. This paper will not attempt to analyse what impact religious motifs in Czech cinema may have had on the population. It will limit itself to a strict record of what religious and spiritual motifs Czech cinema contains.

The Communist regime in Czechoslovakia of course misused and manipulated the Czech national mythology to its own ends. Nevertheless, it used this very cleverly and efficiently, presenting itself as the natural inheritor of the “most illustrious” traditions of the Czech nation. The Czech national discourse under Communism was fairly monolithic. As we will see below, the only exception was the era of the liberal 1960s, the period of the celebrated “Czech New Wave Cinema.” In this period, there were some pluralist variations on the rigid 19th century national mythology. In this sense, there is a direct link between the ethos of the liberal 1960s in Czechoslovakia and the post-Communist period.

It seems remarkable that the construction of social attitudes towards religion and religious dignitaries in Czech cinema is almost identical in the films made both during and after the Communist era. The attitude of Czech cinema towards organized religion comes across as basically negative. The only exception seems to be the period of the liberal 1960s, when a handful of films sympathizing with religion and religious attitudes were made.\(^{13}\)

In the 1950s, several feature films were made in Czechoslovakia by director Otakar Vávra (1911–2011) dealing with the themes of the 15th century Hussite revolution. In these films, the Catholic Church is depicted as a corrupt, oppressive, power-based secular structure which suppresses free thought and enslaves people. Vávra’s historical drama *Jan Hus* (1954) details the history of the last three years of the Czech religious reformer’s life.\(^{14}\) The second and third part of Vávra’s trilogy, *Jan Žižka* (1955) and

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\(^{12}\) Jenkins, “Why Fiske still matters.”

\(^{13}\) I would like to thank Tomáš Koloc, Prague poet and writer, for valuable comments related to this section of the article.

\(^{14}\) It is perhaps noteworthy that the Vatican made sure that the film was not shown at the 16th International Venice Film Festival in 1955. See *Český hraný film III*, 82.
Proti všem (Against All; 1956), traces the development of the Hussite movement and the rise of its gifted commander Jan Žižka. The dramatic historical spectacle is highly idealized.

Jaroslav Hašek’s cruelly satirical, literary accounts of Austro-Catholicism are reflected in several film adaptations of his work, including Karel Steklý’s Dobrý voják Švejk (The Good Soldier Švejk; 1957). Just like Hašek’s novel, this film includes a brutally cruel scene of a completely drunk army chaplain Katz attempting to give a sermon in church. Similarly negative and irreverent images of the Catholic Church and its dignitaries appear in the animated films based on Hašek’s novel, which use the well-known illustrations by Josef Lada.

Religious motifs are also often associated with fairy tale and folklore motifs in some of the films made in Communist Czechoslovakia. The popular adaptation of Jan Drda’s fairytale Hrátky s čerTEM (Playing with the Devil; 1957) requires the intrepid main character to visit hell and to retrieve a couple of contracts that two young girls signed with the devil in order to get handsome bridegrooms. In Josef Mach’s comedy Florián (1961), a grateful saint gives the farmer Florián JírovéC a golden cord, with which the farmer can regulate the weather at will. Predictably, mayhem ensues.

Attempts to reconcile religion and Communist rule appear in the films of the reformist director Vojtěch Jasny. In the episode entitled “Anděla” from Jasny’s Touha (Desire; 1958), a conflict between Anděla, a middle-aged woman and private farmer, and the local Communist cooperative farm is at least temporarily resolved. The same motif is developed in Jasny’s film Procesí k Panence (The Pilgrimage to the Holy Virgin; 1961).

The occasional religious characters appearing in films made during the “normalisation” period, i.e. in the 1970s and 1980s following the Soviet invasion of 1968, are generally also negative. Zdeněk Troška’s tabloid trilogy about life in the South Bohemian village of Hoštice Slunce, seno, jahody (The Sun, Hay, Strawberries; 1983), Slunce, seno a pár facek (The Sun, Hay and a Few Slaps; 1989) and Slunce, seno, erotika (The Sun, Hay, Sex; 1991) includes the comic figure of a confused, eccentric village parson.15 A negative image of a fanatical Catholic priest also appears in Troška’s historical drama Poklad hraběte Chamaré (Count Chamaré’s Treasure; 1984). In Zánik samoty Berhof (End of the Lonely Farm Berghof; 1985), directed by

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15 Troška is gay and hence somewhat anti-Catholic.
Jiří Svoboda, the leader of a group of Nazi murderers, roaming through the Czech countryside after 1945, is a woman dressed as a nun. This is a trope that recurs frequently in various Communist TV series. The post-1968 propaganda used Hašek’s stereotypes and made them even more blatant: priests are usually self-indulgent hedonists and religious people are of limited intelligence.

There are only a few exceptions from the “normalisation” gallery of criminal and lunatic priests. One is Count Friedrich Sylva Tarouca from a film biography (bio-pic) about the 19th century Czech painter Josef Mánes Paleta lásky (Palette of Love; 1976), directed by Josef Mach. A second instance is the Slovak Catholic priest in Dušan Klein’s film Dobří holubi se vracejí (The Good Pigeons Come Back; 1988), who is an inmate in a hospital for alcoholics and takes good care of his fellow patients, but this work is already the product of late perestroika.

Even during the hard line stages of its existence, the Czechoslovak Communist regime assumed a relatively positive attitude towards the Czech Protestants. It was especially generous to those associated with Hussitism because the regime regarded the movement almost as a precursor to Communism. In line with the prevalent national mythology from the 19th century, the regime was very tolerant towards Protestant intellectuals and clergymen, who were seen as “progressive.” This applies to the film biography of the great 17th century Czech educational reformer Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius, 1592–1670), a Protestant bishop who was forced to leave Bohemia because of his faith. Otakar Vávra’s blockbuster Putování Jana Ámose (The Wanderings of Jan Ámos; 1983) also portrays the Protestant bishop and his environment with sympathy. The Jesuits and the Catholics are the villains.

The portraits of Catholic priests in Czech cinema softened with the arrival of the liberal 1960s. In Zdeněk Podskalský’s satirical comedy Bílá paní (The White Lady; 1965), an hilarious yet serious, almost sociological study of Communist rule in a small town (a synecdoche of Czechoslovakia), the ironic character of an “enlightened,” technological-minded Catholic priest buys spark plugs for his motorbike and is ready and willing to collaborate with the Communist authorities. During the Prague Spring of 1968, several films were made which feature humane and understanding Catholic priests. One of these is the parson Roch in Jiří Menzel’s adaptation of Vladimir Vančura’s novella Rozmrné léto (Capricious Summer; 1968). Another humane priest can be found in František Vláčil’s 13th century historical drama Údolí včel (The Valley of the Bees; 1968), even though
the main female character is murdered here by a fanatical member of a German religious order. In Hynek Bočan’s 17th century historical drama Čest a sláva (Honour and Glory; 1968), a post-invasion homage to the courageous individuals who were willing to fight and sacrifice their lives even for lost causes, a fanatical Protestant crowd murders a Catholic priest. Remarkably, this vindication of a Catholic figure is the only such incident in the entire history of Czechoslovak cinema, which otherwise, especially in the Communist era, operates fully within the constraints of the 19th century Czech nationalist anti-Catholic mythology, as constructed by Palacký, Masaryk and Zdeněk Nejedlý, the Communist minister of education in the Stalinist 1950s.

In Petr Tuček’s film Svatej z krejcárku (Saint from Krejcárek; 1970), the eternally-patient main hero confesses to a Catholic priest after he has been driven to murder by the people around him. The priest is seen here as the ultimate authority and the source of absolution. A sympathising portrait of a Catholic priest can also be found in Jiří Menzel’s film Zločin v šantánu (Crime in a Music Hall; 1968), to which Josef Škvorecký wrote the script. Particularly remarkable is the semi-mystical film Farářův konec (The End of a Priest; 1969), also written by Škvorecký and directed by Evald Schorm. This is the story of a sacristan who is invited by country people to a village where the local church has been empty for decades, evidently due to the policies of the ruling atheist regime. But the local people need a priest and they “create” him out of the visiting sacristan. Due to their strong faith, he is given an almost magical religious power. When he is eventually unmasked by the church authorities as a “fraud,” he dies in a scene reminiscent of Christ dying on the Cross.

One of the most horrifying images of a representative of the Catholic establishment is the Inquisitor Boblig of Edelstadt in Otakar Vávra’s film Kladivo na čarodějnice (Witches’ Hammer, 1970). Boblig is called by a local priest to a Czech town in the middle of the 17th century to investigate instances of possible witchcraft. The ambitious priest-investigator sets up a series of show trials. Using intimidation and torture, he forces a number of women in the town to memorize fabricated confessions which he had written for them. In order to obtain the wealth of the town’s rich citizens (or residents) he also accuses them of witchcraft and successfully has them prosecuted and condemned to death. The film is a frightening metaphor of the Stalinist show trials of the 1950s. The Catholic Church functions as an oppressive, totalitarian organisation which uses torture and kills people.
Religion in Czech Cinema of the Post-Communist Period

The national cultural mythology seems to have been modified very little after the fall of Communism. Those observers who assumed that post-Communist Czech cinema after 1989 would continue the 1960s trend of the relative freedom seen in “Czech New Wave” were disappointed. Rather than continuing the tradition of “subversion” from the 1960s, in which religion and genuine spirituality received a better cinematic treatment, post-Communist film makers returned instead to the tried and tested anti-/non-religious national mythology. Although several films were made in the early 1990s which sympathized with the priests persecuted in Stalinist labor camps, these films were primarily a critique of Communist totalitarianism. They were not motivated by a desire to deal with religious themes. On the whole, in post-Communist film, religion and religious organizations are equated with ideology, which is always seen as constricting. The motif of religion is often associated with oppression and death, no matter what type of religion this is. The post-Communist Czech film-makers look just as critically at Jewish religion as they do at Christianity. Organized religion is particularly suspect. The role occasionally played by esoteric faiths as a substitute for organized religion in Czech post-Communist cinema stems from a parallel growth in the popularity of esoteric practices among the Czech population.

Spiritually-inspired Films

Using a framework based on the work of a number of film theorists, Czech film critic and theoretician Jaromír Blažejovský has coined a definition for an authentically spiritual film, in contrast to other films which merely contain religious motifs but do not necessarily have a spiritual content. In Blažejovský’s view, profoundly spiritual films are created by means of certain structural qualities within the works in question. Blažejovský defines spiritually-inspired film by its inherent, characteristic features and by its special mode of vision. To quote the theoretical remarks by the Russian film director Andrey Tarkovsky, spiritually-inspired films present the
artist’s subjective, authentic image of reality: “This image is not a construction. It is not a symbol. It is something indivisible, integral, amorphous.” An image, unlike a symbol, has unlimited meaning. Film is not there to be deciphered; the richer it is, the more it gives us directly, empirically. Another important characteristic of spiritually-inspired film is, as Tarkovsky says, “time, captured in its concrete forms and manifestations.” The filmmakers’ work is like carving a statue out of time. In Blažejovský’s view, spiritually-inspired film uses what David Bordwell calls a marked, “parametric” mode of narration. This is a communicative mode in which technical parameters and stylistic procedures become functionally just as important for the structure of the film as its narrative components. Style becomes an important function of the *sujet*. According to Blažejovský, the characteristic features of spiritually-inspired film are transcendental time (expressed in long scenes which function as still lives), the passivity of the characters and the intense concreteness of the material world.

Very few Czech films have been made that conform to this implicitly but profoundly religious definition. According to Blažejovský, František Vláčil’s mediaeval epic *Marketa Lazarová* (1967) fully conforms to all the characteristic features of spiritually-inspired film described above. It has often been compared it to Tarkovsky’s *Andrey Rublyov* (1966) or Kurosawa’s *Shichinin no samurai* (*Seven Samurai*; 1954). In 1998, Czech film critics voted *Marketa Lazarová* the most significant film in the history of Czech cinema. This label cannot be attributed however to the critics’ esteem for its religious meaning, which is not explicit in the film’s narrative structure.

As another instance of this cinematic mode, the Olomouc theoretician Vladimír Suchánek places animated film in the category of spiritually-inspired cinema. Suchánek sees the process of creating animated films as analogous to the process of Creation. The human world is transcendental for the puppet, but the animator is not in the position of God: he remains a mere instrument of creation, whose hands are guided by the Holy Ghost. Animated puppet films by Czech author Jiří Trnka, especially his first animated feature film *Špalíček* (*A Treasury of Fairy-Tales*; 1947), are imbued with deeply spiritual tones, as was also noted by

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18 Tarkovskij, *Krása je symbolem pravdy*, 44.
21 Suchánek, *Vdechl duší živou*. 
Ronald Holloway.\textsuperscript{22} In Špalíček, traditional customs and tales of the Czech village are depicted in six separate sequences: “Shrovetide,” “Spring,” “The Legend of St. Prokop,” “The Fair,” “The Feast,” and “Bethlehem.”

While a number of Czech films from the golden era of the 1960s touch upon the numinous or use intertextual biblical references (see above), according to Blažejovský, none of these films ever attempted to create the spiritual mode.\textsuperscript{23} The first such attempt after Marketa Lazarová was not made until the end of the 1980s when Miloš Zábranský completed his feature film Dům pro dva (\textit{House for Two}; 1987). Blažejovský sees Bresson-esque influences in this film. Dům pro dva is the story of two step-brothers, Bóža, the good one, and Dan, the wicked one. Blažejovský points to the mode of “passivity,” the behavior of some actors as “puppets” and in particular Bóža’s ability to sense telepathically whenever his brother is committing evil deeds, including the seduction of his wife. In line with the characteristic features of the spiritually-inspired cinema, Dům pro dva highlights everyday, routine life and its repulsive nature. There are five highly stylized, parametrical sequences in which the movement of printing machines is intercut with images of people’s legs walking down the street and the wheels of moving prams and vehicles. According to Blažejovský, these sequences refer to “transcendental time,” because they highlight the mechanization of human bodies as a form of still life. The moments of Bóža’s “illumination” are characterized by rain falling onto his face; rain is usually interpreted in “transcendental” films as signifying divine Grace.

Blažejovský also finds characteristic features of “spiritually-inspired” cinema in some of the works of the contemporary Czech director Zdeněk Tyc. Tyc uses the style of spiritually-inspired” cinema in his debut film Vojtěch, řečený sirotček (Vojtěch, \textit{Called the Orphan}; 1990), a film about an outsider who is destroyed by the closed village community into which he moves. Black-and-white cinemascope in the age of color cinema is in Blažejovský’s view a characteristic signal of “otherness.” The film starts and ends with long scenes that emphasize the intensive concreteness of the material world and the importance of natural elements, especially water. The film is fragmentary in nature and the viewer must work to complete the narrative. Tyc uses these stylistic techniques to make his film poetic and unusual, but there is no explicit spiritual or religious content. In this

\textsuperscript{22} Holloway, \textit{Beyond the Image}.

\textsuperscript{23} Blažejovský, \textit{Spiritualita ve filmu}, 229–44.
way, Tyc provides an example of an authentically spiritually-inspired film based on its formal features rather than its thematic content. Tyc uses the spiritual mode also in his second film Žiletky (Razor Blades; 1994), which is also a semi-autobiographical attempt of a young man to come to terms with the pressures of his hostile surroundings. Transcendental time is featured in the famous long, passive, lyrical sequence when the hero, during his military service, climbs up a tall, industrial chimney in the middle of a snowy, freezing landscape, and refuses to come down, staying there during a blizzard. Parametric style is also used according to Blažejovský in Tyc’s film Smradi (The Brats; 2007) which seems to be a film about the problems of a white Czech family that adopt Romany children, but in reality, as Blažejovský argues, “it is a morality play about sin and absolution.” In all these films, Blažejovský finds a number of formal features which in his view confirm their spiritual orientation. He explains that content may contribute to the spirituality of the film, once the formal visual features of spirituality are present.24

Religious Motifs After the Fall of Communism

After the fall of Communism, we find several images of persecuted Catholic priests drawn with sympathy. The priests appear as political prisoners in Stalinist labor camps. But although they are depicted sympathetically, they are only supporting characters. Černí baroni (The Black Barons; 1992), directed by Zdenek Sirový, is a Švejkian comedy arguing that in spite of totalitarian oppression, the “good old ordinary Czech” and his values of self-indulgence, good company, drinking, and good cheer will always prevail, diluting and neutralising any oppressive ideology. Bumerang (Boomerang; 1997), directed by Hynek Bočan, is a more serious account of oppression in a Stalinist labour camp that also features Catholic priests in a positive albeit minor role. In 1995, Ludvík Ráža made a weak historical film V erbu lvice (A Lioness in her Coat of Arms). This was the first ever Czech film made in celebration of a Catholic saint. The work was conceived as an homage to Zdislava of Lemberk (c. 1220–56) who was

24 When discussing the spiritual cinema of Yasujiro Ozu, Paul Schrader notes that character ambivalence and irony are important features of the transcendental style of filmmaking. In this sense, he argues, Ozu’s use of character ambivalence and irony is similar to that of Miloš Forman. Both Ozu and Forman “perfected a form of light comedy which contrasted documentaray ‘realism’ with flashes of human density.” Forman however did not develop towards transcendental film making. Schrader, Transcendental Style in Film, 46.
proclaimed a saint by the Catholic Church in 1995. It is the only openly religious film ever made in the Czech environment, but rather than extolling the virtues of a religious figure, the film seems to be a portrait of a gifted folk healer. Thus the work appears to be related to the fairly strong tradition of alternative non-religious spirituality, which has developed in the post-Communist period (see below).

*Tichá bolest* (*Quiet Pain*; 1990), directed by Martin Hollý, is the only film ever made in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic which records the Communist regime’s oppression of Czech Protestants. *Tichá bolest* is a balladic film, set in the Moravian countryside in the Stalinist era of the 1950s. A defiant Protestant grandfather takes care of a young boy whose father was a fighter pilot in the British RAF during the Second World War and was executed by the Communist regime after the war. The Protestant boy is ostracised by the village community, which is predominantly Catholic and collaborates with the Communist regime. Interestingly, the film offers an interpretation which is in direct conflict with the received version of Czech history, where it was always the Protestants who were cultivated by the Communist regime and the Catholics who were oppressed. The script for the film was written by well-known script-writer Jiří Křižan (1941–2010). Křižan came from an old Moravian Protestant family and the oppression of Protestants was a personal topic for him. When Křižan was ten years old, his father was sentenced to death in a show trial and executed. Though Křižan was the author of a number of important film scripts, he refused to accept the Klement Gottwald State Prize in 1980 for his First World War drama *Signum laudis* (*The Medal*; 1983), saying that he would not accept a prize named after the “murderer of his father” (Gottwald was the Head of the Czechoslovak Communist Party when Křižan's father was executed). After the fall of Communism, Křižan became an advisor to President Václav Havel. In 1995 he returned to script writing and authored the film scripts for *Je třeba zabít Sekala* (*Sekal Has to Die*; see below) and *Pokoj v duši* (*Soul at Peace*; 2009), a highly moral drama about corruption in a Slovak village, which became a major box office hit in Slovakia.

*The Catholic Church as an Instrument of Oppression*

*Zapomenuté světlo* (*Forgotten Light*; 1996), directed by Vladimír Michálek, features a Catholic priest as the main character, who like in other films is depicted with sympathy. But, as Jaromír Blažejovský confirms, *Zapomenuté*
světlo is not a film dealing with spirituality; the film is primarily a “criticism of the Communist regime.”

It is also a work, in fact, which is critical of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. In line with the long tradition of the Czech national mythology, this film is primarily libertarian. It is distantly inspired by motifs from a 1934 book by Jakub Deml, a maverick Catholic priest, who constantly squabbled with the church hierarchy but was regarded as an important artist by writers and poets of his time. Deml’s inspiration was passed along to the film makers in the second half of the 1980s, the period shortly before the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia. Communist oppression functions in these films as a metaphor for dehumanization which renders every human being helpless. The film also deals with the insoluble problems of disease and death. The main hero of Michálek’s film, Catholic priest Jan Holý, tries to solve these problems by the application of love. In an environment of overall disintegration (the camera dwells on various derelict landscapes), the priest Holý wages an unequal battle with the Communist authorities in a futile attempt to save his dilapidated two hundred-year-old church. He also tries to help a parishioner, a woman ill with cancer who eventually dies and Holý stands helpless over her corpse. The priest tries to conduct himself as a free man, but there are constraints imposed on his life. These come not only from the Communist regime, but paradoxically also from the dignitaries of his own church. Not for the first time in Czech film is organised religion seen as an oppressive, stultifying power.

In Řád (The Order; 1994) directed by Petr Hvižď, the Catholic Church also plays the role of a political rather than religious organization. What matters to the church in Řád is power, wealth, and influence, not spirituality, religion or humanity. The story of the film is set in the 1780s, before the reforms of the Emperor Joseph II were in place. This is one of the early post-Communist films dealing with the still recent trauma of life in a totalitarian society. Most of these films feature a powerless individual, or the struggle from a position of powerlessness in the face of absolute power. Hvižď’s hero, a cultured aristocrat and a lieutenant in the imperial army, tries to act humanely and save the life of a young deserter, whom his superior officer was going to have executed without trial.

In the film, two comparable, despotic, authoritarian organizations—the imperial army and the Catholic Church—distrust each other. The

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church is represented by a convent of nuns from the order of St Claire. The lieutenant is sent to find and arrest the deserter in the convent and two officers sent with him watch him to ensure that this really happens. The lieutenant has resolved to save the life of the deserter and help him escape but fails to do so. After the arrival of the military escort at the convent, the situation is complicated by the contradictory and timid actions of the church dignitaries. The convent’s priest fears that the imperial army is preparing an offensive against the convent. So he convinces the Mother Superior that the only way to save the convent is to sacrifice the life of the deserter and hand him over to the soldiers. The priest and the Mother Superior decide to sacrifice a human life to save their institution. The lieutenant, whose duty it is to arrest the deserter, vainly appeals to the compassion of the priest and the Mother Superior. The priest in particular resorts to clichés. The deserter is killed. Because of the church dignitaries’ behaviour, this film again associates the church with ideology, inflexibility, inhumanity, and death.

Religion’s Association with Death

Jiří Křižan continued his work in defense of Protestants by writing the script for Vladimír Michálek’s film Je třeba zabít Sekala (Sekal Has to Die; 1998). The action takes place in bright summer sunshine in the Moravian village of Lakotice during the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia during the Second World War. The film features a closed Catholic village as an example of extreme bigotry, criminality, and intolerance. The film analyzes evil, how it comes into being, and under what circumstances.

Blacksmith Jura Baran, a Protestant “from another world,” arrives in the Catholic village. He presents the local mayor with a letter from his brother, who is obviously with the partisans. Baran also had connections with the resistance movement; the Gestapo is looking for him and the brother’s letter requests the mayor to hide Baran in the village. The film highlights the relation between ethics and ideology. What is more important—that Baran is a Protestant or that he is a decent man? He is condemned by the Catholic farmers for being a Protestant. Paradoxically, the only friend he has in the village is the local Catholic priest. Baran and the priest become friends on the basis of their common humanity—something the Catholic villagers lack. The Catholic parson’s housekeeper is horrified that the priest allows the Protestant blacksmith, the “devil incarnate,” to enter the parsonage. The farmers of Lakotice need to defend themselves against
the “bastard” Sekal, the embodiment of evil in the village. Sekal, a forty-year-old farmer, who had been born out of wedlock and thus has been ostracized by the villagers, terrorizes the farmers by threatening to inform on them to the Nazi authorities if they do not hand over their farms to him. The Protestant blacksmith is a gift from heaven for the villagers. The farmers tell Baran that if he kills Sekal, they will not betray him away to the Germans who are looking for him. It is a paradox that in the end Baran is willing to kill Sekal for spreading evil. Baran does indeed kill Sekal but is seriously wounded in the process. Ultimately, the village’s self-interest prevails over their humanity: When the injured Baran staggers back and tells the farmers that Sekal is dead, they do not take him to a doctor. Instead, they decide to take him back to the cross where he will bleed to death. The Catholic community in the village is thus depicted as cruel, criminal and utterly hypocritical.

In some Czech films, the idealistic adherence to religiosity is described as lunacy. There is an echo in this in Milenci a vrazi (Lovers and Murderers; 2004), a film adaptation of a well-known novel by Czech writer Vladimír Páral, directed by Viktor Polesný. All the characters here are hooked on self-gratification, mainly in the form of sex. With a religious enthusiast as the singular exception, all the characters in Polesný’s film behave egotistically, the young of course with least restraint. Everything becomes a commodity; everything can be bought and sold. In this atmosphere of utter self-indulgence, there is one exception—an angelic character and religious believer Julda Serafín. Julda does good. He attempts to help the people around him. Because he does it utterly selflessly, everybody regards him as a lunatic. Religion and do-goodery are lunatic preoccupations. They do not have a place in contemporary Czech society, this film seems to argue.

The Rise of Esoteric Faiths

As Libor Prudký has shown, many Czechs distrust organized religion or consider it irrelevant. Nevertheless, many people in the Czech Republic are now interested in various pseudo-religious and quasi-esoteric cults. This is also reflected in Czech cinema. The influence of esoteric faith in Czech cinema under Communism was relatively limited. Its first instances

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26 Prudký et al., Inventura hodnot.
occurred in the liberal 1960s. Vojtěch Jasný was the most important film
director influenced by esoteric teachings. Jasný was seriously affected by
the death of his first wife and child when he was in his thirties, and under
the influence of this personal tragedy, he developed an interest in esoteric
teachings. Elements of esoteric influences can be found in Jasný’s films
*Touha* (*Desire*; 1958) and *Všichni dobří rodáci* (*All Good Countrymen*; 1968).
His film *Až přijde kocour* (*When the Cat Comes*; 1963) is based on teachings
about the radiation of *chakras*, as Jasný himself repeatedly testified.

In post-Communist films, esoteric faiths are interpreted in both a posi-
tive and negative way. In several post-Communist films, involvement in
esoteric cults leads to death. *Výchova dívek v Čechách* (*Bringing up Girls
in Bohemia*; 1997), directed by Petr Koliha, is an adaptation of the novel
of the same name by the well-known Czech “commercial author” Michal
Viewegh. The novel tells an everyday story of marital infidelity. Million-
aire Karel Král (*král* means “king” in English) is worried about his twenty-
year-old daughter Beáta, who has lost her boyfriend after he became
entangled in Král’s shady business dealings. He therefore arranges for
her to have lessons in “creative writing” with Oskar, a secondary school
teacher of Czech language and literature and a budding writer. A short
love affair follows with the married Oskar, who has a ten-year-old daugh-
ter himself. Then Beáta takes several other lovers, begins to support good
causes (animal rights for example), becomes a member of a religious sect,
and ultimately commits suicide. The film’s message is clear: The moment
you get involved with religion, be it mainstream religion or esoteric prac-
tice, you become a lunatic and it leads to death. Getting involved with
religious ideas or religious organizations is seen as something alien to a
normal human being.

*Hrubeš a Mareš jsou kamarádi do deště* (*Hrubeš and Mareš Are Friends
in Need*; 2005, dir.: Vladimír Morávek), is a study of two ordinary human
beings who become the subjects of ruthless media manipulation, resulting
in the death of one of them. Exotic religious practice again plays a destruc-
tive role here. The film is primarily a portrait of a limited, aggressive ticket
inspector working on the Prague underground who lives with his male
childhood friend in relative squalor in a cottage which he inherited from
his grandmother. The protagonist becomes a victim of a “famous Slovak

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27 See the extended interview with Vojtěch Jasný: Čulík, “Dítě, dobrodruh a filmy.”
28 For further information on Michael Viewegh and his highly successful “commercial
novels,” see Čulík’s entry on Viewegh in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography.*
film director” and his reality TV project. The director organizes a sustained media campaign, the purpose of which is to persuade the hapless ticket inspector that he is in fact an incarnation of the fourteenth Tibetan Dalai Lama Ringpuchimidal Sandat.

The relentless media pressure eventually persuades the ticket inspector to accept the idea. He starts studying Tibetan religion, begins wearing Tibetan gowns and starts behaving like a prophet. He prepares for a journey to Tibet, but when he leaves the cottage, his flat mate commits suicide. The transformation of the ticket inspector into a would-be Dalai Lama is secretly filmed the whole time, until at Prague Airport, under the gaze of the cameras, it is gleefully announced to the ticket inspector that the whole project was a fantasy, his air-ticket to Tibet a fake and he is not travelling anywhere. The film primarily criticizes unethical and manipulative media practices. Nevertheless, religious practice again plays an important and negative role as a dangerous fallacy. Adherence to religion is destructive, as religion negates natural reality and human relationships, and it can lead to death.

Religion seems so alien to many people in the contemporary Czech Republic that in Cesta z města (Out of the City; 2000, dir.: Tomáš Vorel), a teenage boy asks, when he hears the word “priest” in the conversation of the adults: “What is a priest?” Yet Cesta z města is one of those post-Communist films which assumes a positive attitude towards esoteric, semi-religious practice. This is one of several films made since the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, where the countryside functions as a magic palliative against all the wrongs brought about by life in an urban environment. While in the city, everyone is a victim of the rat-race, in the countryside it is still possible to live normally. This enclave of “natural reality” with Catholic religion and a country parson can only exist in the countryside, whereas cities are devoid of churches and religiosity. Or so goes the argument of the film. A village sorceress Jiřinka, surrounded by her potions, tinctures, herbs and the fruits she has harvested becomes the synecdoche of the magic and esoteric powers of the countryside.

Esoteric spirituality is consistently conveyed in the films of the Slovak film director29 Juraj Jakubisko, in particularly by his Nejasná zpráva o

29 After the division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, the Slovak film industry practically collapsed. Some Slovak film directors managed to make films in the Czech Republic (Juraj Jakubisko) or under Czech-Slovak co-production (Martin Šulík). Although Jakubisko is Slovak, Nejasná zpráva o konci světa cannot be really
konci světa (The Unclear Message About the End of the World; 1997), a wild, hymn-like, romantic, and powerful vision of human existence, inspired by the prophecies of Nostradamus. Esoteric motifs also consistently appear in Kamenný most (The Stone Bridge; 1996), a loosely constructed fantasy by Tomáš Vorel. It deals with “the fate of a creative intellectual” at a time when destructive commercialism was beginning to establish itself in post-Communist society. In Vorel’s grotesque and whimsical film Skřítek (The Sprite; 2005), the debased, consumerist existence of a Prague family that eats large quantities of sausages and meat is enlivened by the irrational presence of a magical creature that enters the lives of the children in the family.

Ecological and esoteric influences merge in some of the films by Jan Svěrák, in particular in Akumulátor 1 (Accumulator 1; 1994), which is a diatribe against the pernicious influence of television culture as a medium that enfeebles human beings. Akumulátor 1 features a shadowy virtual TV world which sucks the energy out of people whenever they find themselves within range of a television set that is switched on. In Svěrák’s most recent film Kuky se vrací (Kuky; 2010), an animated feature about miniscule puppet-like creatures living in the forest, wood has healing powers, invisible deities live in the forest, and streaming water radiates energy. Esoteric influences were already present in Jan Svěrák’s debut, the ecological student film Ropáci (The Oil Gobblers; 1988), a mock documentary about fictitious animal-like organisms which have arisen from the ecological devastation in the industrial areas of Communist Czechoslovakia. Another instance of interest in ecological themes with esoteric overtones from the early 1990s was Freonový duch (The Chlorofluorocarbon Ghost; 1990), directed by Zdeněk Zelenka, a lively children’s film where rebellious ghost Leopold Lorenc emerges from industrial pollution, joins children in their fight against environmental devastation, and transports them into an unpolluted environment as it existed almost a hundred years ago.

regarded as a culturally purely “Slovak” film, the intercultural Czechoslovak context is too strong. Martin Šulík’s films, Záhrada in particular, was hailed as a major cultural landmark in the Czech Republic, although its “Slovak” characteristics are much stronger than those of Nejasná zpráva. Since the division of Czechoslovakia, Slovak film-makers have always closely collaborated with their Czech colleagues. This applies also to Vladimír Balko’s film Pokojo v duši, which was written by the Czech script-writer Jiří Křížan. While we feel it is proper, for the above reasons, to include the above-mentioned films in the debate about the Czech context, it must be borne in mind that the cultural environment in Slovakia is quite different from that in the Czech Republic. Unlike in the Czech Republic, religion does play an important role in Slovakia.
The heroes of Jan Švankmajer’s films Lekce Faust (The Faust Lesson; 1994) and Spiklenci slasti (The Conspirators of Pleasure; 1996) are obsessed with esoteric teachings, as are the characters of almost all films by Petr Zelenka. Martin Šulík’s cult film Záhrada (The Garden; 1995), a dream-like, visually original film, features a heroine who is capable of performing miracles. At the end of the film, the girl levitates above a table, at which her partner comments: “Finally everything is as it should be.”

**Jewish Themes**

Under Communism, it was basically impossible to include Jewish themes in Czech films. Alfréd Radok did this in his film Daleká cesta (A Long Journey; 1950) by creating a story about the predicament of a mixed Jewish/non-Jewish family under the Nazi occupation, the then-Communist head of the Prague film studios Otakar Vávra destroyed him for it. Jewish motifs did not re-appear in Czech cinema until the liberal 1960s, and they did so in the film adaptations of the literary works by Arnošt Lustig, a Czech author specializing in the Holocaust.

It was not until after the fall of Communism that two feature films fully devoted to Jewish themes were made. Even here, religion is again interpreted as a metaphor for ideological inflexibility, impracticability and closed-mindness. In the first of these, Golet v údolí (The Settlement in the Valley; 1995), directed by Zeno Dostál, the Jewish community is depicted in a positive light. Religion, however, is depicted as cumbersome and inflexible. Natural reality always prevails over ideology, even if in this film this is done in the form of a joke. As in many other Czech post-Communist films, the theme of male inadequacy appears in this film. And theology is used for personal gain. Pinches Jakubovič, the tailor, is a weakling in the habit of spouting quotations from the Bible for protection. He cannot cope with his wife’s sexual demands, and for that reason, he points out that the water in the purifying ritual bath “mikve” does not reach the required level and is therefore unclean. It takes ten days to clean the bath thoroughly and because women who have not had a ritual bath may not have sex, Pinches has a few days respite. Women in Czech films are more practical and pragmatic then men—and this is also true of the Jewish

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30 This is based on several personal testimonies, in particular the testimony of cinematographer Stanislav Milota, famous for his cinematography for Juraj Herz’s classic film Spalovač mrtvol (The Cremator; 1968).
community. For women, the most important things are looking after the family and peace in the community, even if achieved at the expense of the truth. They are pragmatic and do not take theology seriously: “Couldn’t someone have stepped into the bath so quickly that no one noticed the water was not deep enough?”

*Hanele* (1999), directed by Karel Kachyňa, a film adaptation of Ivan Olbracht’s classic novella set in Ruthenia “O smutných očích Hany Karadžičově” (“The Sad Eyes of Hana Karadžičová”)\(^\text{31}\) raises the subject of “otherness” and the ability of a community to interact with the outside world. Kachyňa sensitively portrays the oppressive atmosphere of a society closed to the outside world, a patriarchal community of Hasidic Jews who lived in Transcarpathian Ruthenia in the turbulent years after the First World War. Young Hana Šafarová decides to go off to Ostrava with other young Jews to earn her living and to prepare for a journey to Palestine, the land of her dreams. In Ostrava, however, she meets her future husband, Ivo Karadžič, who is of Jewish origin but a rationalist and an atheist. When Hana brings this Jewish unbeliever to her orthodox village to introduce him to her parents, a bitter quarrel ensues—after all he is taken to a place where even the fact that the Earth is round and that it revolves on its own axis is doubted. The closed community of the Hasidic Jews cannot tolerate nonconformist views and opinions for that would signify the destruction of all its values, the justification for its existence. Here they suffer uncomplainingly in poverty simply because there is a God who will compensate them for their suffering. It is therefore not possible that God does not exist, the elder statesman of the village explains to Karadžič. For the devout individuals of the community, religious quotations and ideological slogans are a defence against an inclement world. Again, religion is here a metaphor for the closed mind.

**In Conclusion**

It seems clear from this overview of religious and spiritual motifs in Czech cinema that the attitude of Czech film makers towards religion and spirituality has been deeply influenced by the Czech national narrative, a constructed mythology which defines Czech national identity. For historical reasons, a distrustful attitude towards organised religion, in particular

\(^{31}\) Included in Olbracht’s book *Golet v údolí.*
the Catholic Church, is an important part of the Czech national narrative. Czech cinema seems to reflect the Czech national mythology rather faithfully. In periods of liberalization, such as the 1960s or the post-1989 era, some films have been made whose attitude toward religion seems to counter mainstream, anti-religious interpretation. However, the overall attitude of Czech cinema towards religion seems to be critical. Few Czech films deal with genuine spirituality. Most of them regard religious organizations as metaphors of oppression, inflexibility and a closed mind. Although there are a handful of films which have depicted Catholic priests with sympathy, in many films, religious attitudes are associated with bigotry, destruction and death. This narrative seems to be fully in line with the prevailing attitudes in contemporary Czech society, which is remarkably atheistic.

Filmography

Akumulátor 1 (Accumulator 1; Czech Republic 1994, dir.: Jan Svěrák)
Andrey Rublyov (USSR 1966, dir.: Andrey Tarkovsky)
Až přijde kocour (When the Cat Comes; Czechoslovakia 1963, dir.: Vojtěch Jasný)
Bílá paní (The White Lady; Czechoslovakia 1965, dir.: Zdeněk Podskalský)
Bumerang (Boomerang; Czech Republic 1997, dir.: Hynek Bočan)
Cesta z města (Out of the City; Czech Republic 2000, dir.: Tomáš Vorel)
Čest a sláva ( Honour and Glory; Czechoslovakia 1968, dir.: Hynek Bočan)
Černí baroni (The Black Barons; Czechoslovakia 1992, dir.: Zdeněk Sirový)
Daleká cesta (A Long Journey; Czechoslovakia 1950, dir.: Alfred Radok)
Dobří holubi se vracejí (The Good Pigeons Come Back; Czechoslovakia 1988, dir.: Dušan Klein)
Dobrý voják Švejk (The Good Soldier Švejk; Czechoslovakia 1957, dir.: Karel Steklý)
Dům pro dvě (House For Two; Czechoslovakia 1987, dir.: Miloš Zábranský)
Farářův konec ( The End of a Priest; Czechoslovakia 1969, dir.: Evald Schorm)
Freonový duch (The Chlorofluorocarbon Ghost; Czechoslovakia 1990, dir.: Zdeněk Zelenka)
Florán (Czechoslovakia 1961, dir.: Josef Mach)
Golet v údolí (The Exile in the Valley; Czech Republic 1995, dir.: Zeno Dostál)
Hanele (Czech Republic 1999, dir.: Karel Kachyňa)
Hrátky s čertem (Playing with the Devil; Czechoslovakia 1956, dir.: Josef Mach)
Hrubeš a Mareš jsou kamarádi do deště (Hrubeš and Mareš Are Friends in Need; Czech Republic 2005, dir.: Vladimír Morávek)
Jan Hus (Czechoslovakia 1954, dir.: Otakar Vávra)
Jan Žižka (Czechoslovakia 1955, dir.: Otakar Vávra)
Je třeba zabít Sekala (Sekal Has to Die; Czech Republic 1998, dir.: Vladimír Michálek)
Kamený most (The Stone Bridge; Czech Republic 1996, dir.: Tomáš Vorel)
Kladivo na čarodějnice (Witches’ Hammer; Czechoslovakia 1970, dir.: Otakar Vávra)
Kuky se vrací (Kuky; Czech Republic 2010, dir.: Jan Svěrák)
Lekce Faust (The Faust Lesson; Czech Republic 1994, dir.: Jan Svankmajer)
Marketa Lazarová (Czechoslovakia 1967, dir.: František Vláčil)
Milenci a vrazi (Lovers And Murderers; Czech Republic 2004, dir.: Viktor Polesný)
Nejasná zpráva o konci světa (The Unclear Message About the End of the World; Czech Republic 1997, dir.: Juraj Jakubisko)
Paleta lásky (Palette of Love; Czechoslovakia 1976, dir.: Josef Mach)
Poklad hraběte Chamaré (Count Chamaré’s Treasure; Czechoslovakia 1984, dir.: Zdeněk Troška)
Pokoj v duši (Soul at Peace; Czech Republic 2009, dir.: Vladimír Balko)
Procesi k Paience (The Pilgrimage to the Holy Virgin; Czechoslovakia 1961, dir.: Vojtěch Jasný)
Proti všem (Against All; Czechoslovakia 1958, dir.: Otakar Vávra)
Putování Jana Ámose (The Wanderings of Jan Ámos; Czechoslovakia 1983, dir.: Otakar Vávra)
Řád (The Order; Czech Republic 1994, dir.: Petr Hvižď)
Ropáci (The Oil Gobblers; Czechoslovakia 1988, dir.: Jan Svěrák)
Rozmarné léto (Capricious Summer; Czechoslovakia 1968, dir.: Jiří Menzel)
Shichinin no samurai (Seven Samurai; Japan 1954, dir.: Akira Kurosawa)
Signum laudis (The Medal; Czechoslovakia 1983, dir.: Martin Hollý)
Škřítek (The Sprite; Czech Republic 2005, dir.: Tomáš Vorel)
Slunce, seno a pár facek (The Sun, Hay and a Few Slaps; Czechoslovakia 1989, dir.: Zdeněk Troška)
Slunce, seno, erotika (The Sun, Hay, Sex; Czechoslovakia 1991, dir.: Zdeněk Troška)
Slunce, seno, jahody (The Sun, Hay, Strawberries; Czechoslovakia 1983, dir.: Zdeněk Troška)
Smradi (The Brats; Czech Republic 2007, dir.: Zdeněk Tyc)
Špalíček (A Treasury of Fairy-Tales; Czechoslovakia 1947, dir.: Jiří Trnka)
Špalovač mrtvol (The Cremator; Czechoslovakia 1968; dir.: Juraj Herz)
Spiklenci slasti (The Conspirators of Pleasure; Czech Republic 1996, dir.: Jan Švankmajer)
Svatej z krejcárku (Saint From Krejcárek; Czechoslovakia 1970, dir.: Petr Tuček)
Tichá bolest (Quiet Pain; Czechoslovakia 1990, dir.: Martin Hollý)
Touha (Desire; Czechoslovakia 1938, dir.: Vojtěch Jasný)
Údolí včel (The Valley of the Bees; Czechoslovakia 1968, dir.: František Vláčil)
V erbu lvice (A Lioness in Her Coat of Arms; Czech Republic 1995, dir.: Ludvík Ráža)
Vojtěch, řečený sirotek (Vojtěch, Called the Orphan; Czechoslovakia 1990, dir.: Zdeněk Tyc)
Všichni dobří rodáci (All Good Countrymen; Czechoslovakia, 1969, dir.: Vojtěch Jasný)
Výchova dívek v Čechách (Bringing Up Girls in Bohemia; Czech Republic 1997, dir.: Petr Kolíha)
Zahrada (The Garden; Slovak Republic 1995, dir.: Martin Šulík)
Zánik samoty Berhof (End of the Lonely Farm Berghof; Czechoslovakia 1985, dir.: Jiří Svoboda)
Zapomenuté světlo (Forgotten Light; Czech Republic/Slovak Republic 1996, dir.: Vladimír Michálek)
Zločin v santánu (Crime in a Music Hall; Czechoslovakia 1968, dir.: Jiří Menzel)
Žiletky (Razor Blades; Czech Republic 1994, dir.: Zdeněk Tyc)

Bibliography


BEYOND THE SURFACE, BENEATH THE SKIN: IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE IN GYÖRGI PÁLFI’S FILMS

Christian Schmitt

What is a “religious film?” This somewhat vague umbrella term has been used to designate movies depicting religious matters of different sorts, for example movies that tell a canonical religious story (like Cecil B. DeMille’s The Ten Commandments, 1956); movies that depict religious leaders (like Bernardo Bertolucci’s Little Buddha, 1993); or movies that reflect on the role of faith in a more general way (like Xavier Beauvois’ Des hommes et des dieux / Of Gods and Men, 2010).¹ In this sense, the internationally acclaimed movies of young Hungarian director Györgi Pálfi would probably not qualify as religious. His first film, Hukkle (2002), which meticulously observes the everyday course of events in a small Hungarian village, only casually depicts religious rituals like funerals or a wedding. Pálfi’s second movie Taxidermia (2006) that explores three episodes of Hungarian history does so without referring to religion at all.²

On closer examination, however, there seem to be some not-so-obvious references to religion in both movies. On the one hand, these references are to be found in motifs and iconographies that both movies’ first sequences evoke. Hukkle starts with close-ups of a dark, flaked surface which turns out to be the skin of a snake. The fact that the movie forces its viewers to share this snake’s perspective can be read as a first hint that not everything is paradisiacal in the small village explored by the movie. In the biblical story it is Eve who hands over the calamitous apple to Adam; in Hukkle the women deal out evil food to their men, poisoning them with lilies-of-the-valley. The first sequence of Taxidermia depicts skin as well. This human skin appears lit by a candle—an image that evokes Baroque chiaroscuro paintings depicting Christian scenes (e.g. George de La Tour). Iconographical references like these—references that both movies will

¹ See the articles in Lyden, Religion and Film; especially the overview in Anker, “Narrative.”
² Both movies received international prizes. Taxidermia was premiered at the Cannes film festival, in the Un certain regard section. Two of Taxidermia’s three episodes are based upon short stories by Lajos Parti Nagy (included in the collection A hullámzó Balaton, 1994).
subsequently also deconstruct—remain an exception though. More important for the movies is another dimension, which has been introduced into film studies by Paul Schrader as “transcendental style.” This dimension does not manifest itself in religious motifs but in a medial form and in the relation that this form establishes to the Holy.

In the following I will refer to Schrader’s ideas to discuss the ways in which Pálfi’s movies relate to this spiritual dimension; how they make use of cinematic possibilities to relate immanence and transcendence, to represent the Holy. If this examination, in Pálfi’s movies, is part of a surrealist aesthetic, this also raises the question of how surrealism in general is indebted to religion: What happens if elements of transcendental style become part of a surrealist aesthetic? To answer these questions it might be useful to make use of a metaphor that we have already encountered in the first sequences: the metaphor of skin. The skin is always a surface and it can be construed in two ways, one of them strictly immanent, the other transcendental. Skin, as a surface, can be perceived as something that hides something else: a deeper meaning, the interior of the body. But is there really such a thing? To be sure, we never really know, for all we see is just this, the surface. It is this ambivalence with which Pálfi’s movies self-reflexively play: By depicting surfaces or skins, they always reflect on themselves, on the nature of cinematic images as a surface possibly hiding something else.

Film and Religion: Immanence and Transcendence

There is more than one way to skin a cat and to think of the relations between film and religion. Depending on the academic framework—as proposed for example by theology, sociology, or film studies—different questions will necessarily arise. The field of film studies itself offers a couple of theoretical ways to conceive of this relation, too. The perspective that turns out to be most useful for my purposes is a perspective that

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3 The snake will not remain the only animal whose perspective the movie *Hukkle* forces its viewers to share; the candle flame is, as I will discuss later, used by *Taxidermia*’s first protagonist Vendel as a tool of autosexual stimulation.

4 On the history of Eastern European surrealism see Schlegel, *Subversionen des Surrealen*.

5 On the cultural history of skin and the theoretical issues that it has brought forward, see Connor, *The Book of Skin*.

6 See Lyden, *Religion and Film*; Anker, “Narrative.”
understands movies as a medium and religion as a social (sub-)system that processes information according to the difference between the immanent and the transcendental. While immanence is a quality that belongs to the material world, to the perceivable “here and now,” the transcendental is conceived as something beyond vision. It is a quality pertaining to the Holy. This raises questions of how movies relate to this difference: In which ways can movies enable an experience of transcendence? How do they relate to the Holy—or rather which cinematic codes have been used to account for such an experience? And how are film’s medial features parts of this?

These are, as is well known amongst film scholars, exactly the questions that Paul Schrader explored in his book on *Transcendental Style in Film*. Examining movies by three directors from different cultural and confessional backgrounds (Yasujirō Ozu, Robert Bresson, and Carl Theodor Dreyer), Schrader described a film form, or, as he calls it, “a style which has been used by various artists in diverse cultures to express the Holy.”8 By stressing form instead of content Schrader was also able to replace the vague, content-oriented category of religious movie (which still haunts film studies) with something more precise that is not exclusively used for religious topics. Transcendental style can be used to tell the story of Jesus’ life as well as to tell something banal. That does not mean, however, that what is told in this way remains banal, for it is the style’s most crucial feature, says Schrader, “to maximize the mystery of existence; it eschews all conventional interpretations of reality.”9

There is an intriguing paradox to be found here: While religion deals with things that are actually un-depictable, movies are always very much indebted to reality. Religion always aims at the transcendental; movies are always founded in the material, visual world, because of their “unique ability to reproduce the immanent.”10 Thus, films are always realistic in a way, reproducing reality by photographic means.11 This is also the reason why identification and empathy with characters are such an easy thing for films. But how can films represent the beyond? They can do this, says Schrader, by employing a form that he describes as “sparse”—in opposition to conventional religious movies which use “a style of identification

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7 See Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*.
8 Schrader, *Transcendental Style*, 3.
9 Ibid., 10.
10 Ibid., 166.
11 See Bazin, “Ontology of the Photographic Image.”
rather than confrontation." In his analysis of Bresson, Schrader differentiates between four elements of this form. (1) First of these is the filmic evocation of the everyday which is then disturbed with help of alienating means and turns out to be deceptive. (2) The result is what Schrader calls “disparity” and, for the viewer, a sense of “something Wholly Other.” In a third step he or she is (3) forced to accept this disparity—for example a miracle that is not rationally explained by the movie. This culminates then in a last image, (4) a “stasis” or “frozen form which expresses the Transcendent.” Schrader points out that this stasis structurally corresponds to the semiotics of the Orthodox icon.

Hukkle—Beyond the Surface of the Everyday

The story that Hukkle tells relies very much on narrative means that Schrader describes as part of transcendental style. This is particularly obvious in the case of his first step, the “evocation of the everyday.” Quite randomly, Hukkle seems to document everyday events in a small Hungarian village: A man is suffering from a hick-up. He fills a milk can and sits down on a bench in front of his house. Another man fetches water from a well. A boar is chased through the village. A bowling pin falls down. A ladybug crawls on the cables of a headset. “Cinematic attention to the surface creates a documentary or quasi-documentary approach,” this is how Schrader characterizes Bresson’s way of doing this. This includes the frequent close-ups that Hukkle’s director Pálfi uses. As Bresson himself put it: “The supernatural in film is only the real rendered more precise. Real things seen close up.”

What is the result of this? It is for sure, as Bresson’s quote indicates, not a direct and immanent experience of reality. This experience does not so much account for a “Redemption of Physical Reality” as Siegfried Kracauer would have hoped, but it rather allows to perceive the “face of things” proclaimed by Hungarian film theorist Béla Balázs. By meticulously

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12 Schrader, Transcendental Style, 164.
13 Ibid., 72.
14 Ibid., 86.
15 Schrader relates Bresson to the icon: “Bresson uses methods of representation very similar to those employed by Byzantine painters and mosaicists, and for some of the same reasons.” (Ibid., 99).
16 Ibid., 62.
17 Quoted in Schrader, Transcendental Style, 62.
18 Kracauer, Theory of Film.
taking things into view—by making use of the “cinematic magnifier”—these things gain extra meanings that they did not have in themselves.\(^{19}\) This is why Balázs defines the close-up (\textit{Grosaufnahme}) as the “art of emphasis” which “silently indicates the important and meaningful, thereby interpreting the depicted life.”\(^{20}\) This is what results from the close-ups in \textit{Hukkle}, too, whereas it remains unclear, how to interpret them (they are, for example, surely not meant to render emotions visible).

It is this uncertainty which corresponds to transcendental style. As the movie proceeds, the impression that something is not quite right is more and more reinforced, the impression that the surface of things might hide “something else”: transcendental style’s second element. The principle of disparity contributes to the viewers’ sensing “of something Wholly Other within the cold environment”\(^{21}\) which then can be ascribed to a supernatural, holy sphere in the next step. Not only the close-ups of things and textures are responsible for this disparity—the very same close-ups that Balázs aligns with dreams and visions\(^{22}\)—but also the narrative structure of the movie. Seldom do the ways in which separate sequences in \textit{Hukkle} are related to each other rely on a causal pattern or on genre typical conventions. Instead they are committed to what we might call a “logic of dreams.” According to Freud, dreams are structured by two principles: condensation (\textit{Verdichtung}) and displacement (\textit{Verschiebung}).\(^{23}\) The very same mechanisms are, according to Roman Jakobson, basic features of how language works.\(^{24}\) They manifest themselves very clearly in the rhetorical figures of metaphor (condensation) and metonymy (displacement).\(^{25}\)

The movie makes use of both, as a sequence close to its beginning shows: The camera follows a leaderless horse carriage driving through a narrow pass in the woods. The camera pans sideways and captures the

\(^{19}\) Balázs, \textit{Der sichtbare Mensch}, 49 (my translation).

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 50 (my translation).

\(^{21}\) Schrader, \textit{Transcendental Style}, 72.

\(^{22}\) Balázs, \textit{Der sichtbare Mensch}, 60–61.

\(^{23}\) Both principles are part of dream work (\textit{Traumarbeit}), a process that mediates between latent dream thoughts (\textit{Traumgedanken}) and manifest dream content (\textit{Trauminhalt}). Freud, \textit{Traumdeutung}, 284ff.

\(^{24}\) Jakobson, “Two Aspects of Language.”

\(^{25}\) It is a bit tricky to make use of the concepts metonymy and metaphor for film analysis. Film scholars like James Monaco (in his \textit{How to Read a Film}) have caused extra confusion. To my mind, a filmic metaphor cannot be limited to, for example, a “rose” connoting “love.” If the definition of metaphor, as used by Jakobson, relies on similarity, this similarity can also be produced by the film, e.g. by juxtaposing images that reveal their commonality. Metonymy, on the other hand, is of course the effect of juxtaposing anything (in montage, by cutting; but also with help of camera movement), since metonymy relies on proximity.
soil next to the road. We see lilies-of-the-valley emerge from this soil—a first (spatial) displacement. These flowers are collected by an old woman who is then walking through the fields. In the foreground, a stork enters the picture; it is his perspective that we have shared in this shot. By a new metonymical displacement, we now share the stork’s aerial bird eye view on the village. The very same images are then shown to be part of real filmstrips (metaphorical similarity) that are used as a curtain in the local pub. Next to this pub we see men engaged in a bowling game (metonymy). The camera focuses on the bowling balls which are cross-faded with different balls, namely the balls of a boar strutting along the street to carry out his duty on a nearby farm (a filmic metaphor: similarity of form). On this farm, we encounter the woman who collected flowers again when the camera takes a look through the fence. She is the farmer’s neighbor.

If we read Hukkle with the elements of transcendental style in mind, we might expect that the mysterious references established by the movie with such techniques ought to culminate in a peculiar scene—a scene that confronts the viewer with a sort of miracle and forces a decision upon him; the decision to accept the mysterious as representing something “Wholly Other,” the Holy. And indeed, there is such a scene to be found in Hukkle, close to the end of the film. Suddenly, a buzzing and booming noise is heard on the (important) soundtrack, cracks appear in the houses’ walls, confused sheep run in a circle, and even the old man’s notorious hick-up—which gives the movie its onomatopoetic name—is interrupted for a while. This event, however, that suddenly occurs in the world of the village turns out to be nothing supernatural at all: Very profanely and as a test of courage, a jet fighter pilot has chosen to fly though a very base bridge, causing noise and chaos. In a way, the “miracle” is caused by a boasting action.

It is at this point at the latest that the elements of transcendental style used by Hukkle become readable as part of an ironic game, for there is really no necessity to accept any miracle as supernatural. The miraculous moments of the whole movie can be dealt with very differently: Seen from the end, the movie can also be read as a detective story—which is a genre that relies on causality. There have been a couple of clues in most of the images that the movie so seemingly casually shows, including the sequence described earlier. This sequence shows the source of the poison as well as its producer, the old lady. The viewer is constantly invited to read these signs as part of another, meaningful story. This story is the detective plot and it includes small, seemingly unimportant details like the cat that doesn’t show up for lunch (it has accidentally been poisoned, too). The riddle seems solved in the end, although the film doesn’t show
this explicitly. Or is it solved? One thing remains unclear: What about the mysterious hick-up that irritated some critics and can be heard and seen again, after the end credits of the movie?

It is tempting to read this scene after the closing credits—a single shot showing the old man in his everyday environment again—as a reference to Schrader’s fourth element of transcendental style: as an “icon” and a “frozen form which expresses the Transcendent.” This icon, however, expresses a very profane, bodily event: a hick-up which does not make sense and has never made sense in the movie, not even as part of the detective genre scheme. The function of this hick-up becomes clear some moments earlier: The end credits are accompanied by a rhythmical, onomatopoetic song that includes a hick-up. Thus, the hick-up is nothing more than a pure form, a coincidental element of reality which becomes a (singular) structuring element in this movie. It does not really hide a deeper meaning—and this is true for the images as well. Transcendental style in Hukkle is self-referential, pointing back to form itself.

Hukkle can be read as a sort of picture puzzle: It is possible to read the movie as a detective story, including a rational, causal logic. But if we neglect the marketing campaign—in an obvious attempt to make it more accessible, the movie was promoted as a strange thriller—the movie’s structure also allows for a reading of very loose connections between events, people and things; connections that only the movies’ form (the hick-ups’ rhythm, the metaphorical similarities) legitimates. In this precise sense, the movie is committed to surrealist aesthetics, a dream-like logic that has been put into words by Pálfi himself as follows: “Just as the body is overcome with desire, so naturalism is overcome by surrealism, which organizes the variation of physicality into a single aesthetic system.” The secret that art (the movie) helps to perceive would exactly be these variations of physical reality and the never ending ways to form and confront them. This secret, however, does not hide under the surface of the images, but in their possible combinations: It is a secular miracle which relies on form in order to appear.

Taxidermia—Beneath the Body’s Skin

While in Hukkle, the border between the immanent and the transcendental is explored rather spatially by piercing through the surface of daily
routines, Pálfi’s second feature film takes a closer look at history. *Taxidermia* explores three lives in three different settings that can be read as representing three episodes of Hungarian history in the twentieth century. Again, the movie follows a peculiar aesthetic path, employing the already discussed techniques of metaphorical and metonymical montage. And again, we can read these elements as mirroring the alienating part of transcendental style. What is new is that this movie confronts its viewers with disturbing images of bodies and their functions. The body of the first generation’s protagonist, Vendel, is not only disfigured by a hare-lip, but is also engaged in various forms of auto-sexual frenzy. This first part of the movie, set during World War II, confronts its viewers with masturbation, fucking, pissing, and butchered bodies. An even more spectacular dimension of corporeality is foregrounded by the second part that continues with the story of Vendel’s son, Kálmán. Living in Communist Hungary, Kálmán earns his living as a “speed eater”—and the film does not refrain from spectacular displays of the two bodily functions that go with the sport: guzzling and vomiting. His son Lajos, the protagonist of the third episode, more or less inhabits our present time. His body will (like his father’s) ultimately end up in an exhibition that recalls the famous *Body Worlds* exhibition: as a stuffed work of art, produced by a taxidermist who is none other than himself.

*Taxidermia* is not as much indebted to a documentary sort of style as *Hukkle* is. Nevertheless, the film also confronts its viewers with everyday routines, closely connected to the bodies of its protagonists. What we see is rather depressing: All three men are subjected to powers beyond their control, and these powers have an impact on their bodies. In the movie’s first episode, power is enacted directly: Vendel’s body is shown to be completely at the service of his superior. One sequence shows him smashing ice in a fountain in order to wash himself. When he is completely undressed the officer appears out of the fog and makes Vendel recount the duties of the day—routines that the movie will subsequently show. In this way, Vendel is subjected to the officer’s gaze as well as to the audiences’. At the end, he will even lose his life at the hands of this officer by being shot in the head without comment.28 In the movie’s

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28 The power that manifests itself here is exactly what Michel Foucault has called an old form of sovereignty; a “right of seizure: of things, time, bodies, and ultimately life itself.” Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 137. This power also manifests itself in privileged gazes—as is the case in the scene at the fountain. These gazes are structured to a model that Foucault has described as the *Panopticon*-mode. The *Panopticon* was a kind of building,
second episode, the body-controlling powers manifest themselves quite differently. While Kálmán is subjected to an audience’s gaze, too, this gaze is fueled by desire, since he (as a successful sportsman) is an idol. His body is subjected to power in a more unobtrusive way which becomes clear when he is transferred to a hospital. Like the sick body—and the body of the pregnant woman, in the same episode—this athlete’s body is controlled by what Michel Foucault has termed modern biopolitics: his well-being is of utmost interest for a governmental power using his victories for purposes of its own glorification. *Taxidermia’s* final episode adds yet another constellation of body and power, a constellation that the advertisement campaign for the movie foreshadowed by showing a classical torso: Lajos’ body is modeled according to concepts of (in this case: male) beauty. There are two more posters, shown in the film itself, that hint at the nature of this last power regime, one showing the “King of Pop,” Michael Jackson, the other depicting a bodybuilder. Both posters may be read as announcing unique possibilities at the end of the twentieth century: Jackson does not only represent the artificial (phantasmagoric) body of the star persona, but also the ability to actually change one’s physical appearance by means of surgery; bodybuilders represent crossing the borders of man and machine with help of excessive practice—and, possibly, doping. Both pictures reach their audiences (here: Lajos) by floating through consumer culture and both contain a new imperative: the imperative to model our own bodies to their likeness. This is another, even more contemporary dimension of power that the last part of *Taxidermia* reflects upon.

**Reality and Fantasy**

This depressing historical “reality” of power and powerlessness gets even more depressing if we take a look at how *Taxidermia* stages its protagonists’ bodies. From the very start, the movie does this in a very similar

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29 In this perspective, the body is no longer threatened directly, but is situated in a space where the ancient right “to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.” Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 138.

30 For a classical analysis of how concepts of beauty are part of power structures see Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*.

31 See Yuan, “The Celebrity Freak.” Lindsay, “Bodybuilding.”
way as *Hukkle*: by zooming in on the bodies with help of extreme close-ups. The result of this is quite disturbing; it seems as if the bodies that the movie depicts are shown too closely, thus constantly crossing borders that we are normally used to—the most obvious of these borders being the skin. The result is disgust. As a consequence, corporeal reality in *Taxidermia* becomes something quite nasty; and we might read this as a first element of what Schrader calls “disparity.” In a certain way, again, this opens up the idea of “something else” going on; something which is located beyond the everyday world, the body, the skin. The body becomes a mysterious thing—like in the first sequence, when its contours take shape in candlelight.

But what exactly is hidden beneath the skin? As the film proceeds, it seems to become clear that this dimension—which seems to be beyond the powers that *Taxidermia*’s protagonists (and their bodies) are subjected to in “real” life—is a dimension of desire and fantasy. The first episode does not only show a helpless Vendel, subjugated to forces and gazes that he cannot control. Rather, his fantasies seem to open up a space beyond control, an intangible space at his disposal alone. Again, culturally defined borders are shown to collapse, borders that are normally defined as sexual perversions: man/animal (bestiality), old/young (pedophilia), and living/dead (necrophilia). What is more: On the level of the narration, the movie itself seems to participate in these transgressions, since “reality” and fantasy become indiscernible. This is most obvious in a sequence that introduces the pedophilia theme and opens up an intertextual link to Hans Christian Andersen’s fairy tale *The Little Match Girl*: Vendel opens up a book and then he is “really” in the book. His fantasy, for us, has become “real.”

André Bazin has pointed out that such a crossing of the boundaries between reality and fantasy—the disappearance of “the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real”—is a salient feature of surrealist aesthetics in general. The same montage techniques that we have encountered in *Hukkle* contribute to this, for example, when Vendel’s cry of pain is cross-faded with a woman calling out for her daughters. The most stunning example is surely to be found in the sequence that shows how Kálmán is begot. The pictures never distinctly show this, but combine the desires of several protagonists in a stunning montage that leaves open who exactly is having sex with whom (or what). Maybe, Vendel has

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copulated with the remains of a butchered hog, which in his fantasy metamorphoses to the wife and the daughters of his superior respectively. This poetical logic would explain the pig tail that the infant bears—and which is cut off immediately by his new father, the officer, whereas his piggy nature remains intact and will make him a perfect speed eater. Another example is a sequence that combines human activities like dying, butchering, bathing, sleeping, and screwing in an unusual way, namely linking them in a metonymic montage that shows the tub that all these activities take place in. In this way, the strange links of history itself become visible (via the tub). By examining the ordinary world in such a way, a different kind of history shows up: one that is not so much interested in causalities but in the multiple ways that things can be transferred into each other—ways that do not respect the neatly installed cultural boundaries between them.

We might refer to the writings of Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek at this point and ask, if these fantasies present a better world. Is the fantastic in any way better than (diegetic) “reality?” And, does it relate to a transcendental “beyond?” Surprisingly, in the first episode Vendel’s seemingly private fantasies are structured by the very same mechanisms of power that govern “reality.” Take for example the way Vendel watches the girls: By acting as a peeping tom, he recreates the same powerful gaze in his own little realm that he himself is subjected to in reality. This means that even the “perversions” bear the trace of the power structures that they constantly seek to escape. The situation is somewhat more complex in the movie’s second episode. The movie does not show alternative fantasies here, for in this part, what would be fantastical in a “realistic” setting (i.e.: speed-eating and its bodies) has become filmic reality all along—a rather terrifying reality. Even more complex is the movie’s third episode. It shows how fantasy is realized, while Lajos’ fantasy of the ideal body ultimately stems from the real claims of society itself. This is maybe not obvious since Lajos chooses neither the ideal that his father proposes nor that of the athletic bodybuilder. Instead, when he realizes his own fantasy, he crosses yet another border, the border of man/animal/machine. The irony of the movie, however, is that his fantasy’s ultimate goal is a body that is very similar to prevalent cultural ideals; ideals that encompass what might seem grotesque from another point of view. The bodybuilding fantasies, for example, have already crossed the border man/machine. We might say

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33 See Žižek, The Plague of Fantasies.
that Lajos takes the underlying premise too seriously, too literally—and that is where a grotesque dimension returns as Lajos embalms himself. What can be read as an act of self-empowerment at first is really only the fulfillment of society’s claims *ad absurdum*.

In all three episodes, reality and fantasy are closely interdependent. Fantasy can never surpass the real world, for it is shaped according to this world’s norms, claims, and ideals. By depicting this, the movie delivers a critical commentary on the powers that relate to bodies in fantasy and (socio-political) reality alike. In the first episode, it is not the sexual desires of fantasies that are perverted, but the mechanisms of real power structures that they reproduce. In the second episode, the grotesque, fantastic speed eating competitions are a comment on all kinds of sports enacted in service of state powers. And in the third episode, the premises of bodily ideals themselves are shown to be perverted. Again, it is society that is perverted in its claims to obtain an ideal body. In the last sequence, set in a Viennese museum (maybe also a critical commentary on historical Austrian hegemony), this body is re-inscribed into a logical discourse. Lajos’ body has become an object of art in the end which is open to powerful inscriptions. These interpretations, like the filmic voice over, are yet another way of gaining power over the body. Thus, art itself is part of the game, since it is art that decides what is beautiful and what is not. If fantasy opens up a desolate everyday world in *Taxidermia*, this fantasy is by no means related to something transcendent and “Wholly Other” but to very secular mechanisms of control.

Very telling for the movie’s way of playing with a transcendental sphere is the already discussed fairy tale-sequence. If we understand it as a commentary on its literary pretext, it becomes very obvious, that this dimension of fantasy is not related to a transcendental sphere. In Andersen’s fairy tale, the lighted matches open up a spiritual dimension, an ideal world where everything is better than in reality. On the other hand, in *Taxidermia* the same story is used as erotic material only; it is presented as a sexual fantasy. In exactly the same way the candle flame from the beginning of the movie is not a religious metaphor—one might think of Tarkovsky’s *Nostalgia* (1983)—but just a sensual tool at the service of Vendel’s erotic fantasies. In this way, the movie discourages “sacred” readings by relating fantasy back to the “real” dimensions of bodies and their strange desires. This means that the difference between transcendental and immanent sphere is made to collapse in *Taxidermia* as well. There is no hope to be found in any Beyond.
It seems promising to relate the movie’s last sequence once more to Schrader’s model. Again (as in *Hukkle*), the movie is staging what seems to be a “miracle” here: Lajos’ wondrous act of self-conservation. His torso will linger as a static, filmic “icon” in the end. This miracle does not include a credo though, since it is very clear that we are dealing with something staged, something which becomes part of an art discourse that declares the body a secret which is allegedly solved and explained by the discourse itself. The miraculous corpse is actually a very profane thing, being the result of worldly drives and desires. Beneath the skin of this miraculous body there is nothing Holy but carnal desires that are proclaimed a sacred mystery by a “high priest” of art. This declaration itself is part of another discourse of power that disciplines the body by making it a meaningful sign of history.

*Taxidermia* as a whole, thus, seems to persist that such meaningful histories are ultimately the result of form. This becomes very clear if we briefly compare the movie to another cinematic way of dealing with history—István Szabó’s international production *A napfény íze* (*Sunshine*, 1999). Szabó’s movie is actually a quite close intertext of *Taxidermia* for it, too, tells the story of three men who form a *tableau vivant* of Hungarian history in the eventful and violent twentieth century.³⁴ As a result of its epic form that invites identification and empathy, *Sunshine* makes history meaningful—or rather, the movie claims to detect a transcendent principle that gives hope in the turmoil of historical events.³⁵ Put differently, Szabó’s version of history contains grace. While the movie’s protagonists are also subjected to historical powers they cannot control, grace is to be found in the ideal of female (and artistic) sensibility, represented by the film’s female protagonist, Valerie. There is even an “icon” to be found in the movie, a photograph of Valerie that embodies this artistic sensibility, a beauty which will remain, because it is always beyond historical events. On the other hand, a liquor recipe—the one that gives the movie its name—is shown to be a false guarantor of historical sense and

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³⁴ On *Sunshine* see Suleiman, “Jewish Assimilation in Hungary.”
³⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this “epic” film form (which relies heavily on empathy, emotion, and identification) see my book on *Kinopathos*. 
continuity. This is *Sunshine*’s way of adding a spiritual dimension to history and its protagonists.

*Taxidermia*, on the other hand, must be read as a critical commentary on notions like this. Or, put differently: There is no hope in Pálfi’s version of Hungarian history; the chain of causes and effects is always the result of forms. This is already obvious in the movie’s very first pictures (and sounds) when the voice-over of a narrator—who will turn out to be a pretty dubious, maybe unreliable character—raises questions that pertain to the historical dimension of (communal) identity: How have we become what we are today? What are our roots? These questions—they are raised in the exhibition that shows the stuffed bodies of the movie’s protagonist—are never really answered by the movie, even though this is announced by the voice over. Instead, the film will deconstruct notions like historical meaning with help of its surrealist aesthetics. *Taxidermia*’s version of history also sheds a critical light on the principle of historical causality by using its narrative means to confuse genealogy. In this way, genealogy becomes the result of strange desires, captured with filmic means, as I have pointed out before: We will never know who Kálmán’s real parents are (and his own paternity might be in question, too, since his wife is having an affair). The metaphorical and metonymical logic that the movie follows in passages like this has results for the “real” story, for history. In the end, history, as a chain of events, is shown to rely on the contingencies of form which are mirroring the logic of desire itself. If there is any mystery to be found in history and its bodies—a mystery that can be enforced with help of transcendental style—it is the carnal fact of bodily desires. These desires, in *Taxidermia*, are aptly represented by what Mikhail Bakhtin and others have called a “grotesque” corporeality. According to Bakhtin, this notion stresses the openness of bodily borders (including the skin) as well as the body’s ability to change: “While the classical insists that the borders of the body be closed, the grotesque claims their openness and fragility.”\(^{36}\) To my mind, in *Taxidermia* this “open” body becomes an allegory of narration itself, of a way of narrating that insists on the openness of historical meaning. The grotesque bodies depicted in *Taxidermia* are a model for history as something open and changeable: a porous history whose definitions and limits rely on (for example: filmic) form and are open to revisions.

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\(^{36}\) Fuß, *Das Groteske*, 75 (my translation). See also Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 315ff.
The world that Pálfi’s movies explore in visual and aural terms is a world without the Holy. With help of filmic means—i.e. elements of transcendental style—both movies enforce the notion that “something else” is going on beyond the everyday, beyond the visible. Yet in both movies, this something else is not something “Wholly Other.” Neither of them forces its viewers to take refuge to a spiritual solution. Or, more generally: There is no deeper meaning in surrealism. In Hukkle, the hidden story beyond the images turns out to be a profane crime-plot, but to decipher this other meaning we as the movie’s audience rely on the movie’s form. In Taxi-dermia, the mysterious world of desire and fantasy is not really beyond the “real” world and its powers. Desire can change the course of history; yet, at the same time, it is shaped by historical powers. If there is any miracle to be found in both films, it is the miracle of how form produces meaning, how meaning is constructed and dispersed with help of images. These films play with film form itself, including transcendental style. As the movies’ director has stated: “Yet the juxtaposition of two disparate elements produces something new, magical.”

Such a surrealistic aesthetic seems to be a very appropriate way to deal with a form that has very often been used for goals not so noble—for example for nationalistic goals. If we can deduce a nation’s story from Hukkle (as a story in space) and Taxi-dermia (as a story in time), it is a story that is an antidote to all kinds of sacred representations. These two movies do not invite identification and empathy with help of an epic Hollywood style to reclaim a spiritual sense (as does Sunshine); nor do they employ transcendental style to enforce a notion of the Holy—as Bresson, Tarkovsky, or to name a more recent, Hungarian example Béla Tarr. One might wonder if such a cinematic antidote has not become more important in Eastern Europe than ever after the historical turn of 1989 and the new nationalisms in its wake.

**Filmography**

* A napfény íze (Sunshine; Hungary/Germany/Austria/Canada 1999, dir.: István Szabó)
* Des hommes et des dieux (Of Gods and Men; France 2010, dir.: Xavier Beauvois)
* Hukkle (Hungary 2002, dir.: György Pálfi)
* Little Buddha (Italy/France/Liechtenstein/UK 1993, dir.: Bernardo Bertolucci)
* Nostalghia (Nostalghia; Italy/USSR 1983, dir.: Andrey Tarkovsky)

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37 Pálfi, Director’s Statement.
Taxidermia (Hungary/Austria/France 2006, dir.: György Pálfi)
The Ten Commandments (USA 1956, dir.: Cecil B. DeMille)

Bibliography


PART THREE

CONFLICT, TRAUMA, AND MEMORY
In the widely discussed final scene of Andrzej Wajda’s film *Korczak* (1990), the first Polish movie after the political and cinematic watershed of 1989 that dealt with the Holocaust, the main character, Janusz Korczak, a well-known Polish pedagogue of Jewish origin, walks into a bright and diffuse white light together with the Jewish orphans from his orphanage in Warsaw. In the film their wagon is decoupled from the rest of the train on its way to the extermination camp Treblinka (where they had been murdered in reality), so they can escape murder and walk towards a literally nebulous—and arguably heavenly—freedom. The title character of another film, *Joanna* (2010, dir.: Feliks Falk), appears as a Polish woman who hides a Jewish child during the German occupation. In the final scene, she walks up a mountain and into a wall of clouds which might be interpreted as if she walks (in)to heaven too.

While *Korczak* is based on a true story, with a manipulated ending that is related to philosophical and cultural debates about the difficulties of representing the Holocaust, *Joanna* is a truly fictional story. Yet, both protagonists sacrifice themselves in order to help (or stand by) Jewish children. Both characters—Jewish and Catholic Poles—are so selfless that they can be equated with saints. Obviously, an apotheotic interpretation was provided by two the directors from different generations and separated by twenty years between both films. Although one can assume a filmic reference, the films differ in their aesthetics and content and were produced in very different settings of memory culture and historical-political debates about the Holocaust in Poland.

Polish-Jewish relations before, during and after World War II were the issues of intensive debates in the last decades in Poland. This article

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1 For helpful suggestions and critical comments I would like to thank Maria Munzert and Eva Maria Gajek, and, Christian Behrendt, who made very helpful suggestions about *Po-Lin*, as well as Elisa-Maria Hiemer, who did the same with *Sprawiedliwi*.

2 Polish-Jewish relations are, simply put, those between Polish citizens of Catholic and Jewish confession (or of Jewish origin).
describes and analyzes cinematic representations of the Holocaust in Polish films after 1989 against this background. After a short overview about historical representations in Polish film since 1989, I will present films about the lost Polish-Jewish cultural co-existence in Poland before the Holocaust, including the documentary Po-Lin (2008) by Jolanta Dylewska and Historia Kowalskich (The Story of the Kowalski Family; 2008) by Maciej Pawlicki and Arkadiusz Gołębiewski, a semi-fictional TV-production. In the next step, I will present and interpret the most important Polish feature films about the Holocaust produced after 1989.3 These are two films by Andrzej Wajda, Korczak (1990) and Wielki Tydzień (Holy Week; 1995), and The Pianist (2002) by émigré Roman Polański. Finally, the article provides an overview about TV serials since 2002 and some more recent cinematic interpretations, such as the already mentioned Joanna by Feliks Falk.

**Cinematic Concepts of History after 1989**

The year 1989 marks a double turning point concerning historical representations in Polish films. On the one hand, the system for financing films broke down with the end of the socialist regime in the People's Republic of Poland (Polska Republika Ludowa, PRL), though many also internationally acknowledged masterpieces were produced. 1989 brought an end to both the production system and the demand, since the Polish audience widely took advantage its new freedom and preferred Western films. Hollywood cinema dominated the Polish market throughout the 1990s. On the other hand, censorship broke down too. Before, it was obviously impossible to produce movies about the historical and political realities, unless in a prescribed way. Hence, the Soviet murder of Polish officers during World War II or Stalinist terror were only dealt with in an ideologically correct manner—if at all. In addition to these topics, Polish relation with its neighboring countries and its minorities could not be discussed openly. Many blind spots in Polish collective memory awaited discussion, while at the same time the Polish society was undergoing dramatic political, economic and cultural transformations. As literary theorist Przemysław

3 For Polish films about the Holocaust before 1989, see Mazierska, “Double memory” and Skibińska, “Film polski o zagładzie.” For the Polish film before 1989 in general, see Coates, The Red and the White.

4 See Röger, “Zwischen Sinnstiftung.”
Czapliński has put it, “After 1989 we had more important problems than World War II.”⁵ Concerning the master narratives in literature and poetry, Czapliński stated that treatments and discussions of historical topics were only a question of time. “Sooner or later, World War II had to be narrated a second time, to take its place in Polish modernity after the main transformation.”⁶ Despite the thematic persistence of the German occupation in Polish cinema prior to 1989, it wasn’t until the late 1990s and early 2000s that new historical narratives about World War II appeared in fiction and film.⁷ And Wajda’s Korczak in the early 1990s was particularly important as the first film since the 1970s to reincorporate the Shoah into feature films and expand the cinematic discourse beyond German occupation.⁸

A Lost Idyll? Polish-Jewish Relations before the Shoah

Current population statistics show that Poland is ethnically still very homogeneous, although immigration figures continue to rise since Poland is economically prospering. Before World War II, Poland was a very heterogeneous country with about one-third being non-Polish (mainly Jews, Ukrainians, Germans and Belarusians).⁹ This lost multi-ethnicity received more and more attention in Polish cinema after 1989. The German population lost to resettlement however has not yet been a topic of filmic interpretations. Only a few documentaries have been made.¹⁰ Central for Polish-Ukrainian relations was Jerzy Hoffman’s Ogniem i Mieczem (With Fire and Sword; 1999), which is also highly important for the Polish film

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⁵ Czapliński, Polska do wymiany, 63 (my translation).
⁶ Ibid. The concept of master narratives contains societal interpretations of a historical period that provide a meaningful (national) narrative. An example would be the master narrative of the Federal Republic of Germany as an economic and democratic post-war success story. See Jarausch and Sabrow, “Meistererzählung.”
⁷ See Röger, “Zwischen Sinnstiftung.”
⁸ See Zok, “Die Erinnerung an die Judenvernichtung” who claims that a wide silence dominated the 1970s and 1980s.
⁹ Officially, the Polish state attempted to implement a policy of assimilation.
¹⁰ One exception is the feature film adaptation of Günter Grass’ novel The Call of the Toad, Robert Gliński’s Wróżby kumaka (2005). See Röger, “Flucht, Vertreibung und Heimatverlust.”
market, since it reached a large audience and broke the hegemony of Hollywood production. The Polish-Jewish relations were especially ideologically charged before 1989. Only during the first years of the PRL did an open discussion take place about the systematic mass murder of European Jews on Polish territory. In later years, the Polish politicians monopolized the murder of Polish Jews into an image of millions of murdered Poles—not differentiating between the ethnic and religious groups. Furthermore, in the late 1960s the state expelled the (mainly assimilated) Jews in anti-Semitic campaigns. After 1989 several groups started to (re-)discuss the Polish-Jewish relations and former cultural co-existence that constituted a significant portion of the cultural topography of Poland until the Holocaust. The rediscovery of this common heritage can be observed in Kazimierz, the former Jewish quarter of Cracow, and in the construction of the Jewish Historical Museum in Warsaw. Protagonists of this rediscovery were and are professional and non-professional historians, local associations, persons engaged in the cultural sector, journalists, Jewish organisations, and the Jewish religious communities.

Representatives of the film industry also contributed to the recent discussion of Polish-Jewish relations. Several films since 1989 have either criticized the interwar period for its political radicalization and its public anti-Semitism or wrongly sugar-coated this period as a multicultural idyll. A turning point for the filmic interpretations was the debate in Polish society about Jedwabne, a village where otherwise ethical Poles were accused of being perpetrators of a pogrom. Despite its academic shortcomings, the study by the Polish-American historian Jan Tomasz Gross opened a debate about Polish anti-Semitism and their responsibility and

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11 The filmic adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s canonical first part of his trilogy still comes in first in the ranking list of most-watched Polish film after 1989. Over seven million Poles attended the film. See the online database Lumiere, a database concerning attendance figures in Europe. Ogniem i Mieczem is the first part of the trilogy, yet it was filmed last. While parts II and III were already filmed in the PRL, the censorship did not approve Ogniem i Mieczem since it could be interpreted as a (critical) comment on the Polish-Soviet relations. See Nahlik, “Katyń w czasach popkultury,” 321.

12 See Jopkiewicz, “Kino lektur szkolnych,” 251. Around the same time, another filmic adaptation achieved great success, Pan Tadeusz (1999) by Andrzej Wajda, the story of the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz. In contrast to Hoffmann’s film, Wajda’s film will remain memorable because of its aesthetic values, argues Jopkiewicz.

13 For a German overview of the current state of affairs, see for example Ruchniewicz, “Zeitgeschichte in Polen nach 1989.” For the Polish instrumentalization of the Jewish victim figures during the PRL, see Friedrich, “Erinnerungspolitische Legitimierungen des Opferstatus.”

14 See Gross, Sąsiedzi; Gross, Neighbors.
participation in the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{15} Gross’ study was inspired largely by two documentary films by Agnieszka Arnold, “… Gdzie mój starszy syn Kain” (“… Where is my older brother Kain”; 1999) and Sąsiedzi (Neighbours; 2001). Jedwabne, standing \textit{pars pro toto} for Polish perpetration, was a shock for many Poles, since it destroyed the myth of Poles as victims throughout history.\textsuperscript{16}

In contrast to the Jedwabne debate, some films in the late 2000s showed a conflict-free idyll of Polish-Jewish relations before the Holocaust. The “fictionalized documentary”\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Historia Kowalskich} by Maciej Pawlicki and Arkadiusz Gołębiewski was produced in 2009 by the public broadcasting station.\textsuperscript{18} On the homepage of TVP2, the second Polish public broadcasting station, the movie is described as follows: “The film wants to reconstruct the life of the village Ciepielów next to Radom, mainly the life of the two communities, Polish and Jewish, living together symbiotically.”\textsuperscript{19} And in fact, the film shows the history of a peaceful multicultural village—until the German invasion: The surviving Poles speak mainly about a conflict-free cohabitation. At the beginning of the film, in a mixture of documentary and feature film, the inhabitants remember games common to the Jewish and Gentile kids and the pictures show a beautiful village during summer. The background music is cheerful fiddle music. One of the film’s scenes can be read as a key example of an idealized cinematic interpretation of Polish-Jewish relations: After approximately one-third of the movie, the inhabitants of Ciepielów learn about the invasion of the Germans and gather in the synagogue. The rabbi speaks in front of Jews and Gentiles, praising the century-long Polish hospitality for Jews and stressing the Jewish inhabitants’ Polishness. “We are all Poles but of

\textsuperscript{15} Already before 1989, questions about the responsibility and guilt of the Poles regarding the Shoah were raised. The most important contribution is Jan Błoński’s essay of 1987. After the essay by Błoński, Polish society discussed the question, whether and how the Poles could have helped the Jews, besides for example the relief organization Żegota. Hence, it was also discussed to what extent the Polish passivity in the face of Jewish extermination illustrated the implicit approbation of many Poles.

\textsuperscript{16} See Borodziej, “Abschied von der Martyrologie in Polen?”

\textsuperscript{17} In the original: Film dokumentalny fabularyzowany.

\textsuperscript{18} There have been a lot of discussions about the possible political influence of the public broadcasters since 1989. The long and fiercely controversy cannot be reproduced here. See for example Open Society Institute, Telewizja w Europie. Regulacje, polityka i niezależność.

\textsuperscript{19} In the original: “Film jest próbą fabularnej rekonstrukcji życia miasteczka Ciepielów koło Radomia, a zwłaszcza żyjących w symbiozie dwóch społeczności: polskiej i żydowskiej.” See “Historia Kowalskich—premiera w TVP2.”
Jewish confession,” he says. Furthermore, he stresses, “We are with you in good and bad times,” which also serves as an explanation for their staying in occupied Poland. Then the Polish national anthem is played. Into this symbiosis of Jewish and Polish patriotism, the brutal German invaders arrive and destroy the peaceful cohabitation, bringing interethnic hatred also into the village. Subsequently, the film shows the deportation of Ciepielów’s Jewish residents with the exception of a few fellow citizens who were hidden by Kowalski family. The Germans eventually notice or were informed about the fact (this remains unclear) and murder the Polish helpers along with the hidden Jews. 34 Poles and several Jews, according to the credits at the end, were burned alive in 1942 by the Germans. It is no coincidence that the filmmakers picked this true story to illustrate the dangers for Gentiles in helping Jews and that the Gentile victims outnumbered the Jewish ones. Furthermore, they stressed the positive deeds of the average Pole in picking out the Kowalski family for the title from among the several families that helped: Kowalski has a similar function to the English family names Doe or Smith. Obviously, there remains a gap between the “symbiotic” co-existence of the average Pole—as presented in this film—and anti-Jewish politics and anti-Jewish opinions in parts of the population in the 1930s.

Po-Lin by Jolanta Dylewska also emphasizes this idealized, symbiotic relationship. The documentary shows amateur footage by Polish Jews who immigrated to the United States and visited their relatives in Poland in the 1930s. The director combines this extraordinary, interesting, historical footage with current footage she made on her visits to the villages. Both the interviewees and the narrator create a harmonious representation of the Polish-Jewish pre-war community, without any—or at least no serious—conflicts. The rural population interviewed stresses how well Jews and Gentiles got along—quite similar to Historia Kowalskich. Only one man points out conflicts as he complains that he felt discriminated against as non-Jew when he was a small boy. His wife “corrects” this statement immediately, since this was after the Jedwabne-debate and she feared societal condemnation for statements that might be interpreted as anti-Semitic. According to the documentary, the portrayed villages were also free of majority-minority-conflicts, although different habits, languages, etc. marked the traditional Polish Jewry from their Polish neighbors. Po-Lin might be interpreted as a filmic memorial for the lost shtetls, analogous to the reconstruction of shtetl life in the project of the Museum of Polish Jewry in Warsaw called “Virtual Shtetl,” which gathers pictures
and information of former inhabitants. In the film, this means a simultaneous exclusion of negative aspects of shtetl life. Partly, Po-Lin can also be interpreted as an educational film for contemporary Poles, since the main Jewish holidays are explained. Therefore it can be seen as part of newer developments in Poland that committed itself to a remembrance of Jewish heritage in Poland.

It has to be stressed that in Historia Kowalskich as well as in Po-Lin, Orthodox Jews are the central focus. Their religious practices on Sabbath, their praying and their traditional appearance with payots (sidelocks) for men and headscarves for married women are portrayed. This is because both filmmakers deal with villages inhabited mainly by Orthodox Jews. In contrast, the feature films presented in the following section represent their Jewish protagonists mostly as assimilated Jews without any external markers of their Jewish identity, such as clothing or hair-dos.

Narrating the Shoah

Besides these attempts to create an idyll, most documentaries and fictional films show a more differentiated picture and do not eliminate the dark sides of Polish-Jewish relations before the German invasion and the mass murder of Polish Jewry. Regarding the zagłada (annihilation), the often used name for the Holocaust in Polish, several attempts have been made since 1989 to narrate the complex events of Polish-Jewish relations under German occupation, but until now no single filmic master narrative has emerged. In contrast, the Soviet murder of Polish officers during World War II, a tabooed issue before 1989, was accepted widely by audiences as the crucial narrative in representing the Polish wartime experience: The 2007 screened movie Katyń by Andrzej Wajda. Wajda, who has provided Poles with master narratives of their national history for the last decades, shot also two films which attempted to interpret the Holocaust, Korczak (1990) and Wielki Tydzień (Holy Week; 1995). In addition, The Pianist (2002) by Roman Polański is an important example, too. Though Polański immigrated early and is thus hardly a “Polish” director,

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21 See Röger, “Zwischen Sinnstiftung.”
22 Ewa Mazierska and Tadeusz Lubelski emphasize, however, the “Polish aspects” of the film, like film location, film crew and notably the story, which is based on the life of the Polish Jew Szpilman. Polański himself was affected by the Holocaust, since he is a Polish
1.2 million Poles saw his movie and a poll revealed that Polish pupils rank *The Pianist* as the 8th most important Polish film. In addition, many motifs and shots are similar to ones in Wajda’s *Wielki Tydzień*.

*Korczak* was already planned as early as the 1980s. Wajda tells the story of the Polish-Jewish doctor and pedagogue Janusz Korczak, who continued to run his orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. His unconditional love for the children manifests itself ultimately in his decision to accompany the children to their deportation and murder in Treblinka—although he was given the opportunity to flee. Wajda uses his artistic freedom to alter the real story for the last scene, in which Korczak and the children can flee together. But he clarifies in the credits that they were murdered in reality. Especially because of this last scene, the film was heavily criticized in France. *Le Monde* accused Wajda of anti-Semitism by concealing historical truth, and Claude Lanzmann whose *Shoa* (1985) was shown in Poland and heavily criticized at that time supported *Le Monde* in this accusation. He argued that Wajda missed an opportunity to show Polish anti-Semitism. Though the French accusations of anti-Semitism were strongly rejected by journalists and film directors in Poland, the film was continuously associated with this aspect, making an aesthetic reception impossible.

Wajda’s film of 1995, *Wielki Tydzień*, has also a prehistory. According to the historian Michael Zok, Wajda had already made plans to shoot the film in the 1960s. Yet, the anti-Semitic campaign by the Polish state inhibited this. Based on the story of the same name by the Polish writer Jerzy Andrzejewski (1948), the film centers around Irena, a Polish assimilated Jew, who avoids the resettlement to the ghetto and who is rescued by her early love, an ethnic Pole. Though the film is situated in the *Wielki Tydzień* (*Easter Week*) of 1943, the time of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, it covers the whole range of World War II and Polish-Jewish relations therein. *Wielki Tydzień* shows the different attitudes Gentile Poles had towards

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23 See Zabłocka-Skorek, “Polski kino narodowe oczami licealistów.” See the Lumiere database.
26 Zok, “Die Erinnerung an die Judenvernichtung,” 536. *Wielki Tydzień* is shot in black and white and imitates aesthetically documentaries of the time. Further, the film also has intermedial references: in one scene there appears a German film crew shooting a propaganda film in the Warsaw ghetto.
27 Zok, “Die Erinnerung an die Judenvernichtung,” 537.
the murder of the Jewish neighbors: anti-Semites, profiteers, opportunists, and sacrificial helpers appeared. Moreover, the film shows the differing material and psychological conditions of Poles and Jews under German occupation. An important scene in this respect is the journey from the Warsaw city center to the outlying district of Bielany, where Irena’s early love and later helper Jan lives with his wife Anna. Both Bielany and Warsaw, besides the ghetto, are portrayed as cities in which heavy combat does not take place (Poles stroll along the streets eating ice cream). A scene in Polański’s *The Pianist* functions analogously. The film itself tells the (true) story of the Polish Jew Władysław Szpilman, a popular radio pianist and also assimilated Jew, who survived the Holocaust, in the end with the help of German officer Wilm Hosenfeld. In one scene, where Szpilman visits an old friend and his sister, signs of war and combat are conspicuously absent. The apartment is beautifully decorated with flowers on the table, and the sister plays piano as a symbol for enduring normality for the Gentiles. The intention of both directors to compare the situation of Poles and Jews is revealed by even more details: both Polish women are blond, while Szpilman and Irena resemble stereotypes of Jews at the time. Both Polish women are pregnant, symbolizing the propagation of non-Jewish Poles while the Jews are facing their annihilation. Finally, both Polish women have brothers who were murdered by the Germans, a clear sign of the suffering of the non-Jewish Poles under German repression.

The academic literature analyzing Polish Holocaust films until now has focused on Wajda. Many criticize that he not only compares the fate of Poles and (Polish) Jews, but attempts to emphasize the suffering of the Poles. As British film scholar Ewa Mazierska has formulated: “In many of his films Wajda indicates that, in an important sense, Polish people were more tragic victims of the war than Jews.” The Poles have not only suffered physical harm, but also moral. Furthermore, the anti-Semites in the films are always criminals and poorly educated underclass. Bartosz Kwieciński, film scholar at the University of Cracow, argues that Wajda reinforces popular stereotypes of Jews, for example in *Wielki Tydzień* with the figure of Irena as the image of the sexually active Jewess. This resembles the accusations of anti-Semitism made against Korczak. Some scenes of the latter were criticized because they showed wealthy Jews in a café.

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28 See Mazierska, “Non-Jewish Jews”; Kwieciński, “‘Iść po słonecznej stronie’.”
29 See Mazierska, “Non-Jewish Jews,” 221.
30 See ibid., 220.
31 See Kwieciński, “‘Iść po słonecznej stronie’,” 327.
in the ghettos and how they indulge in pleasure in the middle of terror and starvation.

From a historical perspective, two aspects are important here. First, historical research has demonstrated that a class society existed in the ghettos and camps. Hence, accusing Wajda of anti-Semitic stereotypes is too simplistic regarding the complex historical situation. Second, ethnic Poles willing to help were in a morally difficult situation because the German occupational authorities prosecuted Poles helping Jews harshly. This is an important difference to the day-to-day realities in most Western European countries under German occupation: In France, Netherlands and even in the German Reich, hiding Jews meant “only” an imprisonment in the concentration camps, but in Poland, helpers were directly sentenced to death. Additionally, the food supply of the ethnic Poles was insufficient, too. Hence, to organize extra food to share with the Jewish people was a difficult task. Current research has shown that some helpers demanded payment from the Jews—surely in part to improve their financial condition, but also because the Poles had to buy the additional food based on the restricted food resources available. Hence, I would argue that Wielki Tydzień shows not only the dilemma for—potentially—helpful Poles, but also the dark sides of Polish behavior under occupation, like Jews being blackmailed financially and sexually by Poles. On the other hand, I argue for a problematization of Wajda’s film. The always meaningful death of the protagonists on the altar of the Polish homeland, as Kwieciński put it aptly, is in fact an attempt to heroize the Polish people. Even more problematic is the so-called carousel scene: Here Wajda inverts a symbol of passivity on the part of ethnic Poles into one of resistance—a strategy of exculpation. Under the German occupation, there was a carousel at Krasiński Square right beside the ghetto. The carousel was part of a fair which was meant to amuse the Poles and divert attention from the processes in the ghetto. In the literature after 1945, the carousel was used as a symbol of the Poles’ indifference. Yet, in Wielki Tydzień, Wajda inverts the symbol: The young protagonist and resistance fighter Julek Malecki uses the carousel to look behind the ghetto wall and to figure out how one could help those fighting in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

32 See Pingel “Social Life in an Unsocial Environment.”
33 See Grabowski, *Judenjagd*, for example 135–36.
34 Concerning this criticism, I agree with Kwieciński, “Iść po słonecznej stronie,” 324.
35 Cf. the poem *Campo di Fiori*, which Czesław Miłosz wrote under occupation in Warsaw, and to which Jan Józef Błoński refers in his essential essay.
The Pianist tells the story of a Polish Jew under the German terror regime, of the musician Władysław Szpilman. Born in 1911, Szpilman was a pianist working as the Polish broadcaster and part of the artistic scene of interwar Poland, as an assimilated Polish Jew well-integrated with Gentile Poles (as the films suggests e.g. by beginning a love affair with the sister of a Gentile colleague). In his film, Polański shows persecution, ghettoization and the deportation of Warsaw Jewry to the death camps. Szpilman’s whole family was murdered there but he escaped and survived in hiding on the so-called Aryan side, helped by the Polish underground and at the very end of the occupation by the German Wilm Hosenfeld. The Pianist concentrates clearly on the German terror against Jews. While the German perpetrators remain peculiar schematic in Wajda’s film Wielki Tydzień, Polański describes their brutality in all detail. Szpilman observes their strategies of humiliation by forcing Jews to dance in the ghetto or shaving their beards and sidelocks, their murders by throwing a handicapped Jew in his wheelchair out of the window, and finally their laughing and chatting next to the burning corpses during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. The brutality of the Germans is especially contrasted with the sensitivity shown by Szpilman as an artist. In the portrayal of the latter, Polański risks stereotyped images.

Polish-Jewish relations take a secondary position in this feature film. Among the portrayed Poles there are, as well as in Wajda’s Wielki Tydzień, anti-Semites who expel him from hiding, profiteers, opportunists, and sacrificial helpers who provide Szpilman with food. But in general, being a melodrama, the film concentrates on Szpilman as an individual persecuted by an inhuman, occupying regime rather than launching a criticism of Gentile Poles. This explains also why The Pianist was a great success and reached a significantly larger audience in Poland than did Wajda’s Wielki Tydzień though reviews were critical. Obviously, another reason might be that The Pianist is a traditional, technically perfect Hollywood production, while Wajda is strongly situated in the aesthetical tradition of European art cinema. But mainly, The Pianist did not criticize the behavior of the Poles under occupation too intensively. After the Jedwabne debate, The Pianist was not yet another historical film that irritated and criticized the national self-image, especially regarding the fact that Szpilman survived and lived in Warsaw until his natural death in 2000, in the face of

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36 See Lubelski, “Roman Polański znajduje formę,” 260. For the critique see also Thompson, “The Pianist.”
all the waves of postwar anti-Semitism in Poland. The Polish audience could see Szpilman as one of their own, as being strongly integrated in Polish cultural life before and after the war. Also, as an integrated Jew, he did not differ in its appearance. Maybe it is not going too far to interpret Szpilman as a figure of identification for Gentile Poles too, who could see him as a symbol for persecuted Poland.

Two developments regarding films about the Shoah following The Pianist can be observed. Firstly, one can state that filmmakers increasingly integrated results of historical research: The szmalcownik, the Pole who blackmailed Jews, was a standard figure in the most recent films about the Holocaust. At the time Wielki Tydzień was released, the phenomenon was not widely known in public and still under-researched, but blackmailing is now present in many films. In Joanna, a blackmailer appears in the first scene and is the trigger for the whole following story (taking care of a Jewish child). Szmalcownicy are also part of films made by public broadcasters in Poland, although their political-historical statements often differ. The common denominator in all Polish films about the Shoah is the need for a positive Polish protagonist. They are classical heroes helping Jews: Joanna hides a Jewish child and even prostitutes herself to save it. When a German occupier discovers the child in her flat, she offers her body as hush-money. Her family, neighbors and friends accuse her of a love affair with an occupier and so she first dies socially and then in reality. Movies without a heroic protagonist, perhaps narrated from the perspective of a blackmailer or a desperate Jew, or movies dealing with very painful events, like the pogrom in Jedwabne, have not been produced until now. Regarding Jedwabne, the Polish journalist Adam Krzemiński wrote an open letter to Andrzej Wajda in 2001 and asked him to make a Polish feature film about the events.

Secondly, a group of mainly television films was produced that can be interpreted as a reaction to the Jedwabne debate. One of these is Historia Kowalskich, screened in 2009 on TV Polska. Additionally, the television series Czas Honoru (Time of Honour; since 2008) and Sprawiedliwi (The Just; since 2010, dir.: Waldemar Krzystek) should also be named. Sprawiedliwi describes the story of “heroism of men on the street, risking their lives

37 Concerning The Pianist as a “comfortable” Holocaust film for the Poles, especially in relation to Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah, see also Mazierska, “Double memory,” 232–33.
38 See for survival prostitution in occupied Poland, Röger, “Sexual Contact.”
39 Krzeminski, “Inna zemsta, inne wesele.”
to rescue Jews.\footnote{See the homepage of the serial (Sprawiedliwi Website).} The protagonist Basia is a member of Żegota, the Catholic relief organization, and saves the lives of numerous Jewish children. The plot was loosely inspired by the story of Irena Sendlerowa, who was recognized as a Righteous among the Nations by the State of Israel in 1965. The homepage of the widely seen serial illustrates the political ambitions clearly: Visitors are asked whether the heroes of the occupation are sufficiently valued in contemporary Poland.\footnote{See the poll ibid.: “Czy uważasz, że bohaterowie II wojny światowej są wystarczająco doceniani przez współczesnych Polaków?”} The story of Sprawiedliwi is in accordance with politicians doing history politics. They demand a focus on courageous Polish aid during occupation in contrast to the painful identity debates about Polish delinquency in Jedwabne.\footnote{The debate was followed by an also painful debate about Polish delinquency during the forced migration of the Germans.}

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Intense debates about Polish-Jewish relations before, during and after World War II were held in the two decades after the political changes in 1989. Filmmakers contributed to societal debates and historical images by providing documentary and feature films about the Shoah. Jewish-Polish relations before the mass murder of Polish Jewry by the Germans were portrayed in some films as a lost multicultural idyll, omitting the dark sides of Polish-Jewish relations like the growing anti-Semitism in the 1930s. Other films, e.g. the documentaries of Agnieszka Arnold, inspired intense debates about the behavior of parts of the Polish society under German occupation, facing the extermination of the Jews. The so-called Jedwabne-debate was a watershed also for cinematic representations of Polish-Jewish relations. Especially the later screened television series focused on “Kowalskis” and other every-day men on the street helping Jews—and thereby focused on only one aspect of the occupational truth.

The big feature films, Korczak, Wielki Tydzień, The Pianist, and Joanna, stressed different and partly contradictory aspects of Polish-Jewish relations during the German occupation: Self-sacrificing Polish, Jewish (and German) helpers as well as mean Polish blackmailers. It is worth underlining, that none of the films omit the category of Gentile Poles who help Jews. But their different focal points reflect firstly the complex historical situation (and its ongoing academic and public debate) with groups
of helpers, as well as anti-Semites and the whole range of individual behavior against the Polish Jews. Polish-Jewish relations during World War II is still an open and painful issue for Polish society, mirrored in ongoing artistic attempts to narrate it in literature and films.

**Filmography**

*Czas Honoru* (*Time of honour*; TV-series, Poland 2008, dir.: Michal Kwieciński)

“...Gdzie mój starszy syn Kain” (“...Where is my older brother Kain?”; Poland 1999, dir.: Agnieszka Arnold)

*Historia Kowalskich* (*History of the Kowalski-family*; Poland 2009, dir.: Maciej Pawlicki, and Arkadiusz Gołębiewski)

*Joanna* (Poland 2010, dir.: Feliks Falk)

*Katyn* (Poland 2007, dir.: Andrzej Wajda)

*Korczak* (Poland/Germany/UK 1990, dir.: Andrzej Wajda)

*Ogniem i Mieczem* (*With Fire and Sword*; Poland 1999, dir.: Jerzy Hoffman)

*Pan Tadeusz* (Poland/France 1999, dir.: Andrzej Wajda)


*Sąsiedzi* (*Neighbours*; Poland 2001, dir.: Agnieszka Arnold)

*Shoah* (France 1985, dir.: Claude Lanzmann)

*Sprawiedliwi* (*The Just*; Poland 2009, dir.: Waldemar Krzystek)

*The Pianist* (Poland/France/Germany/UK 2002, dir.: Roman Polański)

*Wielki Tydzień* (*Holy Week*; Poland/Germany/France 1995, dir.: Andrzej Wajda)

**Bibliography**


On 10 April 2010 a plane with a Polish delegation on board crashed in Smolensk on its way to the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Katyń massacre. The event was endowed with a multitude of dimensions, encompassing practical everyday life and current politics, but was also of tremendous symbolic potential, the import and scope of which we are still unable to comprehend today. The Smolensk event has contributed to the crystallization of a number of phenomena pertaining to collective identity and consciousness, and has brought to the surface a great deal of phantasms, visions, fears, prejudices and ideas which, even if somewhat familiar and recognized, or at least presaged, have now materialized and taken on a tangible shape and form.

The event and its aftermath have so far seen the production of at least 17 Polish documentaries. The first of these, entitled *Solidarni 2010* (*In Solidarity 2010*), which, as a matter of fact, attracted a great deal of controversy and a veritable media storm, was created shortly after the catastrophe and broadcast on public television as early as 26 April 2010. But the main crop of films occurred approximately a year after the catastrophe, when most appeared either on television or distributed via DVD.²

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1. I am grateful to Professor Andrzej Żurowski for his in-depth reading of this text and his many valuable comments.

Four of these films were compiled by a duo of the well-known right-wing publicist Jan Pospieszalski and the film director Ewa Stankiewicz, whose political views had not previously been widely recognized, but who after the making of the films subsequently became deeply committed to the political activity of the Polish Right. The film 10.04.10 was also made by a well-known right-wing journalist, Anita Gargas. A similar outlook can be clearly observed in List z Polski (A Letter from Poland, 2011) by Mariusz Pilis and Mgła (Fog, 2011) by Joanna Lichocka and Maria Dłużewska. All in all, then, out of the 17 films, as many as ten are dominated by a similar outlook on life, defined here as right-wing, a notion which needs to be clarified, as more than one political party in Poland claims the affiliation. To put it bluntly, the political orientation in question has been expressed through the line of the party called Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice), the party led by President Lech Kaczyński, the tragic victim of the catastrophe, and his brother, Jarosław Kaczyński. The views predominant in the films can also be easily found in numerous comments by the latter party leader. The Smolensk catastrophe dealt a massive blow to this party and this orientation, taking with it as it did many of its top politicians. At the same time, however, it provided extremely efficient fuel and material for public, political and journalistic activity. The great profusion of documentary films was one manifestation of this phenomenon. The films serve a significant political function, in that they propagate the party line, fostering the consolidation of its supporters and uncompromisingly, or even brutally, attacking the current government.

It is not my intention, however, to write about party politics, but rather about something much deeper. The films contain a certain, very distinct vision of national identity and define what it means to be a Pole. This article sets out to describe precisely how this manner of self-identification works. I am going to devote particular attention to the films Solidarni 2010 and Krzyż (The Cross; 2010), occasionally calling upon examples from others, since these films all clearly have the ambition to transcend the label of an isolated case.

Solidarni 2010: We Are All Here

The question of national identity is of particular concern for the film Solidarni 2010. Although at first glance, it seems to be simply a 90-minute
street survey, registering the spontaneous comments of the people gathered in front of the presidential palace in the first few days after the catastrophe, a more discerning look reveals that great effort has been taken to give the film the form of a generalization, where the people do not just speak for themselves or in their own name but are representatives of a larger community. The names and surnames of those who express their views are not given; the film was shot not only outside the palace but also in Cracow during the funeral of the presidential couple and occasionally in other places as well. It does not keep to a chronology nor retain temporal or spatial continuity, juggling freely instead with a collection of comments in order to maintain a consistent train of thought.

Thus, some individuals’ opinions are split into many fragments, while, on the other hand, comments gathered in different places, at different times of day and night are collated, if they concern a certain issue and can be assembled into a coherent argument. Although there are a great number of people, the film creates the impression of a connection among a collective consciousness of sorts, so coherent and homogeneous that the train of thought interrupted by one person is immediately picked up and continued by another. And because patriotism is often discussed, with the words “Poland,” “the Poles,” and “Polishness” dropped in at every instant, the film expresses a monolithic view of the speakers identifying with their patriotism and Polishness. This, in turn, has been intensified by a great number of national symbols such as miniature national flags adorned with a black ribbon and pinned to the lapels of jackets or coats, or the Polska Walcząca (The Fighting Poland) symbol against a white and red background. Quite a number of full-size standards or national flags can also be spotted. In one shot in particular, that of the Cracow Market Square during the funeral ceremony, we see crowds of people and an enormous amount of white and red. People often talk about (clearly in answer to the film-makers’ question) where they have come from, and it seems that everyone is there, the old and the young, people from Cracow, Highlanders and Kashubians, from villages, towns and cities, farmers, intelligentsia and workmen, even one Muslim and a person with mixed heritage. This unity of the entire nation is stressed by a number of comments such as: “This is the nation unified, the nation has awoken, this nation, the real

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3 The Ethics Committee of Polish Television concluded that “The program Solidarni 2010 deals with the collective hero.” (Statement by the Ethics Committee of Polish Television). The street poll frequently serves to present the mood prevalent in a given society. The first film of this type is Chronique d’un été (Chronicle of a Summer; 1961, dir.: Jean Rouch/Edgar Morin). In fact, Solidarni 2010 could be called a Polish Chronicle of a Spring.

4 Some individuals do appear more than once.
nation which is not ashamed to say ‘Yes, I am a Pole. I am a patriot.’" Solidarni 2010 therefore gives the impression that it does in fact depict all Poles. With the comments presenting a very monolithic view of the world, one cannot escape the impression that all Poles think that way, or that only those who do are real Poles, or finally, that Polishness and patriotism are inseparably connected with this same political outlook.

The Revival of Romanticism

At the beginning of the 1990s a leading scholar on Polish Romanticism, Maria Janion, announced publicly the end of the Romantic paradigm, declaring that it does not correspond to a new, multicultural and pluralistic reality.\(^5\) It seems though that the Smolensk catastrophe has caused the revival of a certain variant of Polish Romanticism, rooted in a nineteenth-century idea of messianic sacrifice, which had seemingly passed into oblivion. As Dariusz Kosiński, a Polish Romantic theater expert says,

> the effect of the Smolensk drama is the demonstration of the immensity of the power which rests in Romanticism. [...] Over the past year Polish Romanticism [...] has manifested itself suddenly as an imminent and, at the same time, a ghastly reality. In Krakowskie Przedmieście,\(^6\) we were indeed witness to a pure Romantic discourse.\(^7\)

I consider this an apt observation, especially bearing in mind that 19th century Polish Romanticism (as opposed to other European Romantic movements) was, amongst other things, a reaction to the loss of Polish statehood and the threat of denationalization.\(^8\) And as this lack of sovereignty, or limited sovereignty, lasted for nearly 200 years with only a short break, the model of identity developed in Romanticism and supplemented in the course of history by a few additional elements, seemed like a valid response to the challenges posed by the surrounding world. After 1989 it seemed that this model was a thing of the past. The reactions from a section of Polish society recorded in the films in question

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\(^5\) Janion, “Koniec paradygmatu romantycznego.” Janion’s first text on the theme was the article “The Demise of the Paradigm,” which led to intense debate.

\(^6\) The street in which the presidential palace is situated and where the action described in these films takes place.

\(^7\) Kuźmiński and Wilczyński, “Dziady Smoleńskie,” 12.

\(^8\) This can be seen in many classic works of Polish Romanticism, particularly clearly in Kordian by Juliusz Słowacki (1834; for example, in the scene with the plotters in the vaults of the cathedral); or in Dziady (The Forefathers’ Eve) by Adam Mickiewicz (1823–60; for example, the “Great Improvisation” scene or the “Warsaw Salon”).
revealed that the model is still very much alive and thriving in the face of the catastrophe, in the All Souls’ Day landscape of thousands of votive candles in honor of the victims. When one man in the film says, “I hope that the people here are discovering that they are Polish, and for some time they’ve forgotten what it’s like to be a Pole,” then it is beyond doubt that disaster, death, catastrophe or threat, and also execution and atrocity as other motifs that appear in a number of comments, become keystones of national community, a source of pride, and a reason for the nation to hold its head high.9

The Aerial Struggle for Nationhood: Media as the Major Enemy

Since Polishness is an endangered value, a value under attack, it has to be fought for. This is all about, as one man particularly prominent in the film states, “getting out of people’s heads those values which are confined to the notion of “patriotism.” Then it is easier to manipulate people.” Another says: “There’s no president; there’s no hundred people. The nation is fragmented because the propaganda of certain stations was such that the nation got lost, with only those individuals left who were hard, with strong character, and the rest have got lost along the way.”

The last opinion refers to perhaps the strongest motif of the film, i.e. the media as set in opposition to the figure of the late president, Lech Kaczyński, who in this film and in all the opinions presented in it, is glorified, adored, and put on a pedestal as an unwavering patriot, and who was destroyed and attacked because of this. “The truth is,” says Dariusz Kosiński, referring to the events on Krakowskie Przedmieście as a national mythology,

that we are witnessing an aerial struggle for our nationhood. The victim of this struggle and the knight was the late Lech Kaczyński. He was murdered and you are perfectly aware of this. And he was murdered because he was dangerous. He was dangerous because he opposed the powers which rule this world.10

One of the two powers involved in this “aerial battle” and threatening the Polish nation is the media. It was by the media that Lech Kaczyński, as

9 An example of such an extreme attitude is the cult of the Warsaw Uprising, the graphic symbol of which became the Fighting Poland emblem, where the letter “W” (for “walka”—fight) becomes an anchor for the letter “P” (Polska—Poland). It is noteworthy that many of the people shown in Solidarni 2010 wear such a badge.
the mainstay of freedom, “a real Pole” and “the only Polish president” was vilified, abused, insulted and hounded.

A young man with a white and red flag, who clearly took the person asking his opinion as a representative of the hostile media, says: “I love Poland, I love the president, I liked him very much and I did not believe the lies which you presented, all the time, how you abused him, how you hounded him, and I hope that it will change after the tragedy, that you will stop lying.” Many people speak of the unfavorable way in which the Polish president had been presented before, and of how well he is presented now, after his death. As one of the men states in the film:

The president was finally hounded and had been hounded; someone must have been giving instructions. Someone must have agreed to this. It was not spontaneous in the way that the call of the nation is spontaneous here, but it was some kind of politics and someone was behind it. All we can do is unite in this loss. The way we were being cheated, the way in which the patriotism of a great man was being destroyed, but it is also in our hearts, isn’t it?

In this comment, apart from the conviction that “someone was giving instructions,” what is also symptomatic is the contrast between the nation and the state. The nation gathers spontaneously and “unites in their loss,” while the politics of the state is aimed at destroying patriotism.

_Distrust in the State and the “Muscovite Enemies”_ 11

This opposition of nation and state and the conviction that the state is hostile towards the spirit of the nation is voiced frequently. The country’s authorities are accused not only of defaming Lech Kaczyński and deprecating patriotism but also of plotting with the Russians and causing the plane crash. The aversion towards the ruling elite has, of course, a political dimension. Prime Minister Tusk and President Kaczyński belonged to opposing political camps, and the people appearing in Solidarni 2010 can be counted exclusively as followers of the tragically deceased president. Therefore, to put it mildly, they do not like the current ruling elite. The consequences of this antipathy reach far beyond the sphere of politics, though, as they concern the attitude of citizens towards their country. The dislike of the ruling elite results in the revival of an attitude towards

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11 The subtitle includes a reference to Adam Mickiewicz, namely to the famous poem _Do przyjaciół Moskali (To Muscovite Friends);_ from _Dziady (The Forefathers’ Eve)._ The word “Moskal” is an archaic, pejorative term for a Russian and seldom used today.
the state typical for the period of partitions, occupation or Communist domination, where the state was a structure imposed by foreign, hostile, enemy powers. Thus, the division into “us” and “them” returns, with “us” being the nation—and “them” the alien usurper, who lies, manipulates, enslaves and even kills and who should be feared. Such an attitude towards the state manifests itself, for example, in the following comment: “From their point of view, the mourning should last for two months now, to keep everyone quiet. We would wait until June 20th and it would turn out that there’s one candidate, like in Belarus, who we would duly vote for; this would be best for them.”

A vehement animosity towards Russia and an attitude of distrust, as well as fear of it, constitute another main thread of the film. In a mild form this is manifested through dissatisfaction with the fact that it is the Russians who are conducting the inquiry into the catastrophe. A majority of opinions expressed go much further, though, directly accusing the Russians of having deliberately caused the crash, such as those presented by the shining example of a man identified after the film’s release as Mariusz Bulski.¹² He states, among others, that “the experience to date points to the fact that it was completely different, that it had all been planned, all thought through, and everything was brought one hundred percent to a conclusion. That the KGB are really serious people.” It can be seen that these opinions are extremely far-reaching, and in fact are blatant accusations. Other interlocutors do not fall far behind.

Mistrust of Russia is also the main theme of two other films from the “Smolensk” series, i.e. List z Polski and 10.04.10. The first of these casts suspicion on Russia for deliberately having caused the catastrophe. The evidence concerning the catastrophe itself is very scant though and takes up marginal space throughout the entire argument. The main arguments instead are of a historical and geopolitical nature. The Russians were supposed to have staged the assassination of President Kaczyński because for several centuries they have been trying to subjugate Poland and to conduct imperial politics aimed at expanding their sphere of influence; they are a non-democratic country in which presumed political killings

¹² This man is the most-quoted in the entire film and his responses are the most acerbic. After the film was aired, it turned out that he is an actor by profession, which became the main criticism of the film-makers as to direction and staging of some responses. Mariusz Bulski strongly rejected the charge, saying that he was on Krakowskie Przedmieście and voiced his opinions in an individual capacity. The director, Ewa Stankiewicz, issued a statement declaring that “none of the dozens of people who appear in Solidarni 2010 received any money, nor were they hired to comment.”
(of Anna Politkovskaya, Galina Starovoytova, or Aleksandr Litvinenko, and the attempt to poison Victor Yushchenko) are an everyday occurrence, and, finally, that they nurtured animosity towards Lech Kaczyński for having been involved in the Georgian conflict. One of the speakers says:

Out of 1,000 top Russian officials no less than 70% come from the Special Forces, KGB, and GRU. This is not a normal ruling elite. These are people who have been trained to kill and mislead; it is simply their basic work tool. If one considers this fact, then it is a completely common-sense reaction to also consider the assassination hypothesis, and at least the hypothesis of Russia’s ill intentions towards President Kaczyński.

The 10.04.10 film could have been more aptly called *A World Apart*, or *The Inhuman Land*. It was shot almost entirely in Smolensk and is dominated by a murky portrayal of Russia, a deceptive country which is reluctant to reveal the truth and intimidates its own citizens. The tone of the entire film is already established in the first frame: gloomy, with leafless trees and great numbers of black, cawing birds. The association with Żeromski’s story *Rozdziobią nas kruki, wrony* (*Ravens and Crows Will Peck Us to Pieces*), devoted to the January Uprising 1831, is inescapable. Another association with the fate of insurgents is brought about by the recurring picture of a cross nailed together from birch logs, adorned with a black ribbon and a white and red flag, standing alone amidst a snow-covered wasteland. The mood is highlighted by comments woven through the course of the film from Jadwiga Kaczyńska, the mother of the tragically deceased president, who says, among other things: “I am afraid of this land. When it comes to Russia, it does not even enter my head to trust them. I am afraid.”

The distrust of Russia is at the same time accompanied by the fear of being left alone and abandoned by the West. It is in this vein that the general absence of Western leaders at Lech Kaczyński’s funeral is commented on in *List z Polski*. It is stated that “this confirms the fact that NATO and the EU do not treat their obligations towards Poland seriously.” By contrast, the arrival of President Medvedev for the funeral proves that the

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13 Both are the titles of two books by Gustaw Herling-Grudziński and Józef Czapski about a Gulag. For more on the subject of *A World Apart* and *The Inhuman Land* (which in contemporary Poland have already been afforded a symbolic dimension) and their shaping of national consciousness in relation to Polish compatriots’ Siberian misery, see Sucharski, *Polskie poszukiwania “innej” Rosji*.

14 This story by Stefan Żeromski—very hostile in its message towards Czarist Russia—was first published in 1895 in Cracow, i.e. under Austrian rule.
Russians “are dealing the cards, that they are not afraid” and is a reminder that Poland is “not a country which is dealing but one which is being dealt to.” A Russian dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky, has the final word: “The fact that the West is handing you over again is to me unquestionable.”

**Imponderabilia**

Finally, the last tangible trend recurring throughout *Solidarni 2010* is the reference to *imponderabilia*, a mentally intangible phenomenon which nevertheless has an overwhelming, if not decisive, influence over reality. It is worth remembering in this context that Adam Mickiewicz regarded belief in vampires, existing between the living and the dead and exerting influence upon the living, as a specific feature of Slavic religiosity.15 “Nowhere is this belief as strong as among the Slavs”16—asserted this professor of Slavonic literature at Collège de France and the most influential poet of Polish Romanticism. Maria Janion supplements this thesis in stating that the “fates of the Polish people merge with the fates of their ghosts, especially vampires” and that “through vampires Poles solved the problem of evil.”17

The film’s conviction that the Smolensk catastrophe was the result of accumulated evil seems to be of similar provenance. One man states: “When I discovered the terrible news I thought like this: a condensed, concentrated hatred killed those people. (…) sometimes, something that we carry in our hearts accumulates somewhere else.” Another man asks “Why did this happen?” and instantly provides his own answer “In Poland, Poles have created much too much evil against Poles. And this evil has triumphed, like, say, in the case of Father Jerzy. Good did not defend itself.” The allusion to Father Jerzy Popiełuszko18 points to another type of *imponderabilia*, namely history and tradition. It is perhaps not purely coincidental that according to Adam Mickiewicz, “[t]he Slavs seem to have a distinguished gift of memory, a vocation for the past.”19

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15 Mickiewicz, *Literatura Słowiańska* (especially Course I, Lessons XV and XX; Course III, Lesson XVI).
16 Ibid., 194.
17 Janion, *Wobec zła*, 33; 52. See also: Janion, *Wampir*; and Janion, *Niesamowita słowiańszczyzna*.
18 Jerzy Popiełuszko, a priest, was murdered in 1984 by members of the Polish secret service.
People from the film often evoke historical analogies. There’s talk of Katyn, of course, and there are recollections of Gabriel Narutowicz, General Władysław Sikorski, and, indeed, Father Jerzy.20 There are allusions to the Warsaw Uprising or hints at Poland having been “sold” or betrayed by Western powers. All these analogies are of the same nature in that they recall actual or attempted assassinations, unexplained deaths, national disasters, and catastrophes to boot. This is clearly the theme of a tradition of tragedy, on which the concept of national identity presented in the film rests and harks back to. This is an identity born of enslavement, based on a feeling of injustice, betrayal and bloody sacrifice made by the nation’s political and spiritual leaders, treacherously murdered by the force of evil. The Smolensk catastrophe is simply another such event in the sequence. The catastrophe might also have a hidden, benevolent sense. The conviction that the “blood sacrifice” made outside Smolensk has some deeper sense recurs in many comments throughout the film. “They closed their eyes so that we could open ours,” asserts one man. “This is a chance for Poles. This is a chance for Poland. This death cannot be in vain,” agrees another.

Solidarni 2010 caused great controversy: delight among proponents of this political orientation and signs of indignation among those who oppose it. One of the most serious objections expressed was that, through a biased selection of material and in its editing, the film creates a false picture of the community gathered in front of the palace,21 suggesting at the same time that this picture is representative of the whole of Polish society. As critics rightly claimed, Polish society is strongly divided as to questions of the future or politics, with people of many different points of view and attitudes participating in front of the palace, yet Stankiewicz and Pospieszalski managed to single out only those whose outlook they deemed most suitable, and thus created an impression that this outlook was dominant among the crowds outside the palace and that it dominates the entire society.

20 Gabriel Narutowicz, the first president of Poland, was treacherously murdered in 1922, shortly after being sworn in; Władysław Sikorski, leader of the Polish Government in Exile during World War Two died in an air catastrophe in 1943. Even today in many circles the conviction persists that his death was the result of an assassination.

21 This was one of the criticisms raised by the Ethics Committee of Polish Television. See the Statement by the Ethics Committee of Polish Television, “Orzeczenie Komisji Etyki TVP S.S w Sprawie filmu Solidarni 2010.”
Solidarni 2010 does not, of course, document either the multiple forms of Polish national identity or the entire spectrum of views on the Smolensk catastrophe. Nor does it document the real division of likes or dislikes towards President Kaczyński and the diversity of views or attitudes of the people coming to the presidential palace. In fact, it steers clear of any form of variety or diversity. It brings together people of similar views and it documents, let it be stressed once more, the national identity and political orientation professed by a minority of the Polish people—a minority that has been confirmed not only by public opinion polls but also by every election result since 1989. Admittedly, over the course of the last 20 years, it had become dormant, scattered or marginalized, but the Smolensk catastrophe became a catalyst which contributed to the consolidation of this orientation and to an outburst in its presence and visibility within the public sphere. Ewa Stankiewicz’s film has registered this phenomenon and for this reason it is exceptionally important.

Krzyż: The Struggle for the Cross

The model of national identity portrayed in Solidarni 2010 is missing one exceptionally important ingredient generally associated with this identity, i.e. religiosity. Certainly, some elements of this model stem from the Christian substratum, for instance the deep belief in the metaphysical redemptive sense of the sacrifice. But in a literal sense, religion is not presented in Solidarni 2010, nor are there any religious symbols in the film. This lack is compensated for in the film announced as “the second part of Solidarni 2010” (with such information appearing in the opening credits). This film bears the meaningful title Krzyż (The Cross). The film shows events connected with the cross on Krakowskie Przedmieście, in front of the presidential palace. The cross was brought there by scouts in the first few days after the Smolensk catastrophe. People wishing to pay tribute to the victims of the catastrophe gathered in front of it and it also became a meeting point for political demonstrations. The new president, only just appointed by means of early elections, suggested that the cross be moved to a nearby church, a suggestion which met with the approval of both the church and the scouts who had originally raised the cross. Some of the people who would gather in front of the cross did not, however, like the idea. Therefore, they decided not to allow the cross to be moved from outside the palace. This, in turn, caused a spontaneous counter-demonstration by those residents of Warsaw who, for a variety of reasons,
did not appreciate this manifestation of religion-cum-patriotism. The film records, as the credits state, the events which took place in that location between April and November 2010, with particular stress on August, when the “fight for the cross” reached its climax. This included, in particular, attempts by priests to take it to a church that were thwarted by cross-defenders, and then a huge demonstration by those opposed to the presence of the cross on that spot.

Krzyż incorporates elements of all the views dominant in Solidarni 2010. Therefore, one finds signs of animosity and distrust towards Russia, as well as accusations of assassination and a dislike of those currently in power. One final common trait is the conviction that everyone around, apart from “the real patriots,” is the object of manipulation. These elements occupy a marginal position though, making room for two other themes absent in the first part of the film. Firstly, the previously outlined model of Polish identity is supplemented with a religious component. The addition is contained within the very situation and the pictures which portray it. For here we have the cross, adorned with national colors and with the symbol of national authority, i.e. the presidential palace, in the background. What is more, beside the cross one can see a large white and red poster with pictures of the victims of the disaster on it and the slogan “Katyn continues.” Thus, the association between the inseparability and indivisibility of the Christian faith, between Polishness and Polish statehood, as well as the sacrifice, suffering and wrongdoing suffered at the hands of the outsiders (here—the Russians) is expressed here visually. Should pictures alone not suffice, the concept of the unity of the cross, the state and the nation is also expressed verbally and most emphatically during the following conversation, taking place at the cross:

Man: Poland has a very clear identity and this identity is connected with the cross and with the Catholic Church.
Woman 1: Why the cross in particular?
Woman 2: Because in this way we express our patriotism, our community. Our culture is based on the cross.
A voice off-frame: The cross liberated our forefathers.
Woman 1: Why can’t the crowned eagle, the national colors or the anthem, for example, serve as symbols of patriotism?
Woman 2: But we cannot help it, that’s just the way we are. The cross unites.
Woman 3: Nobody has had the notion of bringing the crowned eagle or just the flag here.
Woman 2: Well, you know, this cross is the symbol of our identity and our Polishness, our civilization.
Man: As long as religion has existed, so long has Poland stood. Partly, why Poland is free now is that we have had Stefan Wyszyński, John Paul II, and they maintained Polishness. It’s always been this way: the cross and Poland, and the white eagle have always been very much connected.

Similar views, although not necessarily in such a coherent and finished form, appear in other comments. All these words, pictures and sounds clearly prove that in the eyes of those supporting the orientation portrayed by Stankiewicz, the Catholic religion is an indispensable ingredient in Polish identity. As opposed to Solidarni 2010, however, Krzyż is not about a monolithic presentation of this view. On the contrary, this film shows that this position is in fact rare and an object of persecution. Thus a paradoxical situation is born: each of the two parts of the film presents a different portrait of society. Solidarni 2010 leaves one with the clear impression that everyone in Poland is so patriotic. The people shown in the film rejoice in their own numbers: let’s do a headcount, they say, look how many of us there are, like during John Paul II’s pilgrimage of 1979, like during the 1980 Solidarność strikes, the nation’s seen its own strength and the authorities are afraid once again. The Cross, by contrast, exposes the weakness, and at least the scarcity of this Christian position. It is dominated by shots which show a mere handful of modest people, not in anybody’s way, bravely defending their faith in a clash with the coercive apparatus of the state, surrounded by screaming hordes of barbarians. And thus another topos is activated, which as a matter of fact is also of 19th century provenance: that of a struggle against the forces of evil which imperil God and fatherland. The defenders of the cross are like the valiant soldiers from Mickiewicz’s poem Reduta Ordana (1833), flooded by the swarms of the Orthodox Russians; like the defenders of Częstochowa in Sienkiewicz’s Potop (1886), confronting the flood of Protestant Swedes; and finally, like the early Christians thrown to the lions in Sienkiewicz’s Quo Vadis (1896). Although she filmed for six months, director Stankiewicz highlights the effect of isolation on the one hand, and the national and religious, and not political, character of the defense of the cross on the other by not showing a single demonstration held by the Law and Justice party, which happened on the tenth of each month, where Jarosław Kaczyński would

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22 Primate of Poland between 1948 and 1981, who preserved the independence of the Polish Catholic Church from the Communist government.

23 Ordron’s Redoubt describes the heroic defense of Warsaw against the Russians in September 1831. The commander of the redoubt, unable to hold it in the face of an overwhelming foe, blows it up—along with himself.
usually deliver a speech.\textsuperscript{24} Neither did her camera register any of the aggressive speeches delivered by the defenders of the cross and their supporters, which are featured, among others, in \textit{Katastrofa (Catastrophe)} by Artur Żmijewski, a film devoted to the same events.

The change in the portrayal of the world between those two films also has a technical dimension. \textit{Solidarni 2010}, as previously mentioned, is a huge feature-length street survey, a series of comments to the camera, subsequently exposed to very intensive editing. In \textit{Krzyż} there are relatively few comments or interviews straight to camera. What dominates here, though, is the poetics of observation, organized around two main themes: division and siege.

The theme of division is rendered by the depiction of conversations and discussions between those in favor of the cross’s presence in Krakowskie Przedmieście and those against. As a matter of fact, the dialogue concerns not only the issue of the cross but also other matters connected with the catastrophe. The defenders of the cross win an absolute majority of those disputes and verbal encounters, but their opponents also have a chance to express their views.\textsuperscript{25} Simply put, they demand that the cross be moved to a church and that religion not be combined with politics. Those scenes, prominent in the first part of the film, show a deeply divided, torn and strife-ridden society.

This vision of a society split as to the position of religion in social life is superseded later on in the film by a series of pictures and situations showing the siege situation. At first, a handful of defenders are confronted with the apparatus of coercion. This is visible in two scenes: the attempt to move the cross to a church and a bomb scare, the latter of which is particularly impressive. A handful of cross-defenders become surrounded by at least several hundred police, informing them that they have had news of a bomb scare and that consequently, the defenders have to vacate

\textsuperscript{24} It appears that some shots of people with flaming torches come from this march. We do not, however, see the whole event, nor are we given any information on the subject, nor indeed any speeches.

\textsuperscript{25} An interesting tribute to Ewa Stankiewicz’s methods is seen in the scene from \textit{Katastrofa}, in which Artur Żmijewski records her conversation with a group of opponents regarding the presence of the cross on Krakowskie Przedmieście. This conversation also made it into Stankiewicz’s film. In Żmijewski’s film, several young men quietly and matter-of-factly state their views, which Ewa Stankiewicz counters with a lengthy argument. In Stankiewicz, the men’s views are left fragmentary and her argument is not heard, attention instead being steered to the t-shirts they are wearing with the slogan “K2” and a picture of both Kaczyński brothers (in Żmijewski this is not shown). The suggestion is made, by someone in the crowd, that this is contempt for the memory of the dead president.
their place by the cross for a while. Because they do not want to comply, they are led away and at times removed by force. The few people watching the incident are divided. Some clap their hands and shout “Thank you”; others protest, shouting “Gestapo.” The disparity of power between a handful of mostly elderly, vulnerable people and a police unit, compact and orderly and several hundred-strong, is striking. And indeed, this is highlighted by on-lookers’ comments. An elderly man says (ironically): “I didn’t really expect this, that a newly-elected president would treat us to such democracy.” A woman, judging by her previous behavior most certainly a right-wing journalist, sadly concludes, looking straight into the lens of the camera: “Helpless people. Hundreds of police against them. This is my country. I came here and I am shocked that a thing like this is possible. But at the same time it is possible for drunken hordes to insult them every night.”

The last sentence alludes to events which in the film directly preceded the “bomb scare,” with Ewa Stankiewicz’s camera showing how the small group of cross-defenders become an object of ridicule, derision and verbal aggression at the hands of numerous, mostly young people, frequently under the influence, who have clearly used the situation as a chance to poke fun.

We witness a variety of events or happenings with anti-religious, if not openly blasphemous, overtones. For instance, young people bring a cross fashioned out of Lech beer cans and want to exchange it for the one which is the subject of contention.26 A young girl waves a cross with a teddy bear nailed to it; near the cross, a disco-like dance is held; a group of young men perform a parody of a religious song, enjoying themselves immensely in the process; a woman displays a poster with “I did not cry for the pope” written on it, while another placard reads: “Tear down the presidential palace—it obscures the cross” and yet another: “Down with the cross. Burn the Mohairs”;27 a group of youth play volleyball, which is contrasted with the solitary cross; a man dressed up as Elvis has brought a “flower of peace”; a young man kneels down with a cross on his shoulder while his friend pretends to whip him and someone else prances about in a rabbit costume. The defenders of the cross are called religious fanatics with roots

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26 The name of the beer (“Lech”) is the same as President Kaczyński’s first name.
27 “Mohairs”: an ironic and pejorative term for elderly ladies who spend a lot of time in church. The term derives from the headwear they frequently don, a beret made from mohair.
going back to the Middle Ages, a sect of “mohair berets.” Some people openly admit that they have come to have a laugh at their expense.

These scenes appear all through the film and reach a climax on 9 August with a demonstration initiated by a cook, Dominik Taras. He appears in the film Krzyż when Ewa Stankiewicz asks him whether one can say “Burn the Mohairs” or “Gas the Jews,” to which he replies that people can say anything and then goes on to talk at length about some gun he found in army training grounds before taking a picture of himself with it. Generally, he doesn’t make a good impression and seems to fit this parade of nihilists, perverts, weirdoes, drunks and aggressors, who abuse and ridicule the defenders of the cross. The latter nearly disappear from the shot for a good long while. At times, the camera forces its way through the crowd to show single individuals standing at the cross, or contrasts the blasphemous and profane behavior with hands folded in prayer or religious chanting.

The attitude of the film-maker towards all this behavior is obvious. She highlights, emphasizes and shows everything that is degenerate, aggressive, disgusting or blasphemous. The opponents of the cross display no rationale, and the film-maker does not try to get at the cause of their behavior. Instead, she inserts assessments expressed by the defenders of the cross and their supporters. From those comments we learn that “the people who come here are totally devoid of humanity,” that we are witnessing “the revolution of nihilism,” that “the Poles’ confusion is a long-term process, mainly to do with people being manipulated, chiefly by the media and the culture around them” and, finally, that fascism was born in precisely this way, starting with caricatures at first and ending in Kristallnacht. And along the same vein: “First, those people were ridiculed and laughed at, and then it all leads to blows, and with the full approval of the capital’s authorities at that.”

Naturally, as was the case with the first film, Stankiewicz uses the material gathered to make a sedulous selection of those elements which suit her view of reality. She does not therefore include all aspects of the events which took place outside the Presidential Palace. Those which she does include, however, really did take place. A number of commentators have written about it, and the counter-manifestation organized by Taras was widely covered by every television station. A journalist from Gazeta Wyborcza, a daily which could hardly be suspected of sympathizing with the “defenders of the cross,” comments on the events of 9 August, writing that the sense of humor of the counter-protesters varied: “At times it was coarse and basically rude, and at times it took on various forms of
more or less refined pure nonsense." He also concluded that the defenders of the cross “as opposed to the majority of those gathered that night on Krakowskie Przedmieście, do, as a matter of fact, have every right to feel oppressed.” He also urged that “the other side be given a chance to back down without feeling humiliated.”

Describing the reasons people demonstrated against the presence of the cross on Krakowskie Przedmieście would go beyond the scope of this article. Let us recap the reasons most often stated by commentators. They wrote that the cross had been erected in the least appropriate place for the purpose, alongside pubs, restaurants, and a tourist route, so that its defenders were instantly confronted with people leaving the various locales in rather playful moods. Other reasons were that they had become a tourist attraction for foreigners from the secular West as well as for a number of Poles, and that a large part of Polish society had at that point become tired of the Smolensk mourning and reacted with resentment at those who were still trying to keep the tragedy in the center of attention. Additionally, there had been adverse reactions to the fact that the tragedy had been politicized and used as a basis for the party line led by the deceased president's brother. Finally, this protest against the cross was seen as a reaction to the forms in which the church was present in Poland's public life, and also to what Rafał Kalukin called “moral blackmail with the Catholic Pole.” One will not find reflection on all of these aspects in Ewa Stankiewicz’s film, as she simply does not understand those who protest the presence of the cross, considering them nihilists, perverts, drunks, and, at best, victims of media manipulation. What this sharpening of the picture does, however, despite raising doubts and reservations from the purists of the documentary form who expect the film-maker to display impartiality rather than involvement, is allow for a vivid depiction of the social situation. What took place on Krakowskie Przedmieście on 9th August 2010 was most probably the largest spontaneous anti-ecclesiastical demonstration in the history of Poland. By condensing the events registered over several months into a few dozen minutes and thereby endowing them with great force, Krzyż shows like no other film the potential of aversion towards not so much faith as the Catholic Church as it exists in Polish society.

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28 All quotations from Kalukin, “Krzyżowcy w sercu nowoczesności.”
29 Ibid.
The Smolensk catastrophe undoubtedly contributed to the enormous awakening and crystallization of an attitude which I have called national-
ist. The feud for the cross in turn awakened and crystallized anti-clerical feelings. Both phenomena are of tremendous importance for contempo-
rary Poland. Ewa Stankiewicz’s films demonstrate the force and dynamism of these sentiments. They also show that the two perspectives not only fail to understand each other but also that they genuinely and deeply detest each other and that there is no common ground between them. All this makes for the fact that both films by Ewa Stankiewicz have captured and depicted the fundamental traits of the psychosocial picture of contempo-
rary Poland.

Filmography

10.04.10 (Poland 2011, dir.: Anita Gargas)
7 dni (Seven Days; Poland 2010, dir.: Damian Żurawski)
Anatomia upadku (Anatomy of the Fall; Poland 2012, dir.: Anita Gargas)
Bądźmy razem (Let’s Be Together; Poland 2010, dir.: Alina Mrowińska)
Chronique d’un été (Chronicle of a Summer; France 1961, dir.: Jean Rouch/Edgar Morin)
Death of the President (episode 12/10 of the Air Crash Investigation series; USA 2013, dir.: Su Rynard)
Katastrofa (Catastrophe; Poland 2010, dir.: Artur Żmijewski)
Katynsky syndrom (Katyń Syndrome; Russia 2010, dir.: Mikhail Yelkin)
Krzyż (The Cross; Poland 2011, dir.: Ewa Stankiewicz)
List z Polski (A Letter from Poland; Netherlands 2010, dir.: Mariusz Pilis)
Lista pasażerów cz. 1 (Passenger List, Part 1; Poland 2011, dir.: Ewa Stankiewicz/Jan Pospieszalski)
Lista pasażerów cz. 2 (Passenger List, Part 2; Poland 2011, dir.: Ewa Stankiewicz/Jan Pospieszalski)
Mam prawo tu stać (I Have the Right to Stand Here; Poland 2010, dir.: Michał Brożonowicz)
Mgła (The Fog; Poland 2010, dir.: Joanna Lichocka/Maria Dłużewska)
Pogarda (The Contempt; Poland 2011, dir.: Joanna Lichocka/Maria Dłużewska)
Smolenski Lot (The Smolensk Flight; Poland 2011, dir.: Monika Sieradzka)
Solidarni 2010 (In Solidarity 2010; Poland 2010, dir.: Ewa Stankiewicz/Jan Pospieszalski)
Tragedia w Smoleńsku (Tragedy in Smolensk; Poland 2011, dir.: Ewa Ewart)
W milczeniu (In Silence; Poland 2011, dir.: Ewa Ewart)
Zobaczycielem zjednoczony naród (I’ve Seen the Nation United; Poland 2011, dir. Anna Ferens)

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Religion Visible and Invisible: The Case of Post-Yugoslav Anti-War Films

Maria Falina

From the variety of approaches to examine the wars of Yugoslav secession, the one that studies the role of religion has been quite popular in the last two decades. There are also a number of works that deal with media coverage of the conflict, domestic and international alike. Moreover, there are at least as many works on the general representation of the region, visual and textual— the most famous being Imagining the Balkans (1997) by Maria Todorova—but only few that deal specifically with the way religion was seen and imagined by the locals and outside observers. This article attempts to partially fill in this gap and looks at how religion and religious identities are imagined by taking as a case-study three anti-war films produced in the geographical space of former Socialist Yugoslavia after the disintegration of the single country. The three films brought to analysis are: Pred Dozdot (Before the Rain; 1994; dir.: Milcho Manchevski); Lepa sela lepo gore (Pretty Village, Pretty Flame; 1996; dir.: Srdjan Dragojevic), and Turneja (The Tour; 2008, dir.: Goran Markovic). All three have enjoyed domestic and international acclaim, and as such, remain on par with written texts in terms of their influence on how the region, the conflict, and religion are seen and imagined. The focus on anti-war films, which by and large call for a critical re-evaluation of nationalist politics of

1 Part of the research for this paper was conducted in the framework of the international research project “Negotiating Modernity: History of Modern Political Thought in East-Central Europe,” funded by the European Research Council and hosted by the Center for Advanced Study Sofia.

2 Milan Vukomanovic and Paul Mojzes come closest to the analysis of this issue using sociological and historical approaches, respectively. See Vukomanovic, “The Serbian Orthodox Church”; Mojzes, Yugoslavian Inferno.

3 Lepa sela lepo gore is the official international title of the film. However, it is not an accurate translation of the original Serbian title, which should read Pretty villages burn nicely and has a far more powerful feeling of absurdity to it. The official title is used throughout the text of the article.

4 Pred dozdot was nominated for an Oscar as the best foreign film; among other awards it won the Golden Lion in Venice (1994). Lepa sela lepo gore won awards at Angers European First Film Festival (1997), Stockholm and San Paolo Film festivals (1996). Turneja won awards at Montpellier Mediterranean, Montreal and Thessaloniki Film festivals (all 2008).
the 1990s and attempt to shift attention from national community as the main point of reference to the individual, allows us to analyze a number of issues related to the religious sphere as they were seen and understood by a non-nationalist (at the time minority) public opinion.

The study seeks to answer the question, whether it is possible to interpret the conflict’s religious dimension differently than the almost aggressive assertion of the nation-religion bond of the 1990s. And if so, what exactly could this alternative vision look like and how did it evolve over time? None of the films analyzed below deals specifically with the issue of religious identity; they pay attention to it, but do not scrutinize it in great detail. One could wonder why this is the case, and whether such an absence of critical cinematographic exploration of the religious field has something to do with the way religion and secularity have been perceived in the “liberal” political camp, which the directors belong to. One of the questions that guide this article is if and why the directors decided to visualize religion, whether or not their work is ultimately about religion or religious identities. I will argue that the main reason for the visual presence of religion, even if it does not serve a specific narrative function, is the fact that the nation-religion bond was generally accepted and not criticized even by those who politically opposed extreme nationalism and war actions. It may be interesting to look at these hidden, secondary modes of religious representation, as it is in these half-conscious realms that we can see which ideas and narratives are deeply embedded in the regional (and national) cultural codes. Such analysis will require uncovering and explaining the meaning of symbols present in film on the one hand and constructing an explanatory model that would unite the discourses found in the films, on the other.

This article is not so much an exercise in film criticism or film theory, but rather an attempt to grasp and analyze some political and cultural currents present in the more liberal, less nationalist section of the Serbian intellectual and creative elite via film analysis. Film here is taken as a product influenced by the broader political-ideological context in which it is produced and to which it is addressed. The analysis focuses on some of the symbols and meanings that are easily detected in the films, even if their presence was not a part of the director's artistic plan and

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5 Because of space restrictions, the current study is limited to the analysis of the representation of East Orthodox Christianity, which by no means is to imply that the “Orthodox story” is any more important or interesting than Catholic or Muslim ones.
was almost accidental. Cultural codes that enter the film irrespectively of the author’s intention are uncovered below. They are a testament to the historical time and context. Since anti-war films present a conscious effort to make a political and moral statement, the context here is meant as primarily political and ideological, and not aesthetic. This is not to say that the films are free of their director’s artistic touches but merely that their biographical, cultural and social contexts will play a larger role here. As Dina Iordanova argued in her book on Balkan cinema,

> where world cinema is concerned, textual analysis only makes sense if grounded in a good contextual study, which takes into account a whole range of socio-political and cultural specifics, one that gives as much weight to the background and implicit politics of the film as it does to its aesthetics and cinematic language.⁶

The most important component of the specifics for the current study is the ideological and political climate in the post-Yugoslav space, and in particular the commonly shared attitude towards the Serbian Orthodox Church as the most respected and representative national institution, protector of the nation, etc.⁷

**Pred dozdot—Peaceful Protection or Provoked Participation?**

Milcho Manchevski’s *Pred dozdot* tells a story, or rather several loosely connected stories, that are set somewhere in a beautiful rural area of Macedonia in the early 1990s. The war is already waging elsewhere in Yugoslavia, but it is present in the film only marginally, through photographic images shot by the main protagonist Aleksander—a London-based photographer and Pulitzer Prize winner of Macedonian origin. Manchevski, who was mostly interested in capturing the atmosphere of a coming storm and exploring the feeling of returning, brings his character back to his home village, where he witnesses a tragic story of ethnic conflict unfolding in front of his eyes and which eventually takes his own life as well.⁸

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⁷ For a more detailed analysis see e.g. Radić, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question’.”
⁸ The story of Aleksander is partially autobiographical. Manchevski, who spent his adult life in New York, first had the idea of filming in Macedonia and representing the country’s character after he visited his home-town after a six-year absence. See Manchevski, “Rainmaking and Personal Truth.”
Two out of the film’s three parts are set in a generic Orthodox Monastery and the surrounding villages, some Albanian, some Macedonian. The first part tells the story of a young monk named Kiril who has taken a vow of silence. He helps an Albanian Muslim girl (Zamira) hide in his monastery in order to avoid the revenge of local Macedonian villagers who accuse the girl of having killed one of “their own.” Kiril hides the girl from the local armed men, as well as from his own fellow monks and the abbot, as he fears they would let her be killed. When his actions are uncovered by the abbot, Kiril and Zamira (who cannot communicate with each other not only because of the vow of silence, but also due to the fact that they don’t speak each other’s language—a transparent allusion to the collapse of inter-cultural communication in Macedonia) are forced to leave the relatively safe refuge of the monastery. They successfully avoid the Macedonian men, only to be caught by the members of Zamira’s family. The girl is shot by her own brother, who cannot stand the idea of his sister being close with an Orthodox Macedonian. A parallel story explores the relation between Aleksandar and an Albanian woman from the village, who were in love while in school together but who are barely allowed to talk to each other because of the current ethnic and religious tension. It turns out that she is Zamira’s mother, and she asks Aleksandar to help her daughter. He dies trying to save her.

Victor Friedman, an international expert on Macedonian culture and history, correctly voiced the concern that the international non-specialist public could read the film as a documentary statement, not as a fable set in Macedonia. One concrete element he pointed out to demonstrate this possibility was that “the various churches and monasteries [...] were edited together to produce the effect of a single location.”9 Friedman continues his analysis by saying that “although the film has its inspiration in events that were (and were not) occurring at the time it was made, it is not a historical documentary, but, rather a historical document. In its own context it is a monitory fable inspired by what were at the time contemporary attitudes (whence the film’s historicity).”10 Let us pick up from here, and treat the film as a testament, a visual document that allows

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9 Friedman, “Fable as History,” 135. What in the film appears to be one location was in reality filmed in the church of St. Jovan Kaneo on the shores of Lake Ohrid and the Monastery of St. Jovan Bigorski in the northwestern part of the country. Both are recognized as important cultural spaces. Brown, “Macedonian Culture and Its Audiences,” 168.

10 Friedman, “Fable as History”, 143.
us to reconstruct some of subtleties of “imagining religion” in the 1990s Balkans.

It seems indicative that although none of the films in question here need religion strictly speaking to convey the message, it is still used to identify (critically and uncritically alike) the characters’ belonging to a national community. In fact, this is one of the main functions that religious symbols appearing on the screen have. Manchevski’s skillful work to create an image of Macedonia that would be at the same time generic and historical is astonishing, and the domestic and international success of the film is convincing proof of it. What is important for us here is his use of religious symbols in the creation of this imaginary but recognizable and distinctly Macedonian space. A Byzantine-style monastery, monks wearing black robes, crosses, icons and frescos—everything belongs to a traditional set of visual symbols that are easily attributed to East Orthodox Christianity in its Southern Balkan variation. These are religious symbols that bear cultural, one could even say civilizational value.

The first minutes of the film present to the audience an ordinary day in the monastery, with some work done in the garden, but most importantly—church service and collective prayer—a crucial part of monastic life. The images of saints painted in the traditional Byzantine style stand for the beauty and tranquility of life in a secluded monastery, for a concentrated work directed inwards (yet another meaning of the vow of silence taken by Kiril), and for centuries of history and culture on which the Macedonian national canon is based to a large extent. Lastly, the monks converse in Macedonian, thus leaving no doubt about their ethnic belonging—Orthodox Macedonian.

The meaning of one’s religious identity in its historical aspect is a recurrent theme in Manchevski’s film. One of the central issues in untangling the religion-nation bond is the problem of conflicting claims of belonging and the true meaning of one’s religious identity. This problem, obvious to any critical observer, is there in the very opening scenes of Pred dozdot. The intense but peaceful life in an Orthodox monastery is interrupted by the arrival of armed Macedonian men who are looking for an Albanian girl suspected of having killed one of “their own.” The confrontation between the abbot, who is reluctant to let the men search the monastery

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11 The generic character of East Orthodox imagery ironically is proven by the fact that some of the international reviewers misplaced the monastery in which a third of the film takes place in Northern Greece, or even Russia.
(but gives in after a while), and the armed men is a conflict between people belonging to the same “Orthodox camp.” In fact, the armed crowd underlines this common identity in support of their claim: “Father, you are one of us. Give us the Albanian girl!”

Manchevski, who is quite sympathetic towards his religious characters, lets the church representatives fulfill their mission—cater to their parishioners, maintain the community, and pray. He acknowledges these religious actions as meaningful and harmless. Far from being a naive optimist, he immediately qualifies his own position by showing a different type of religious belonging and interpretation of this belonging: that of the armed and aggressive men who seek blood and revenge instead of forgiveness. They take part in a number of religious ceremonies, including a funeral; they diligently cross themselves when entering a church, and try to kiss the abbot’s hand in a sign of respect. All of this, however, feels somewhat fake and morally questionable. The film raises a question that has not been fully answered yet: is the task of the church to observe, silently protect when possible and maintain its own life, or to partake in the conflict?

Lepa sela lepo gore—*Serbian Suffering and Sacrifice*

*Pred dozdot* does not shy away from the problems, complexity and violence of a society’s ethnic and religious divide, but the film still provides some hope (even if faint), that although harm has already been done, everything still can be fixed. *Lepa sela lepo gore* by Srdjan Dragojević—perhaps one of the most famous and hotly debated locally produced films about the recent war—presents a very different mood. The film was released in 1996, only two years after Manchevski’s film, and it stirred quite a heated discussion in Serbia and abroad as to whether it is anti-Serbian or, on the contrary, supports the Milošević regime.12 Dragojević’s film presents the ethnic and religious conflict as an all-encompassing and inevitable tragedy.

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12 In Croatia and especially among Muslim Bosnians, the film was perceived as pro-Serbian, as it downplayed the scale of the atrocities committed by the Serbs, while Bosnian crimes were explicated in full detail. Bosnian Muslim film director Danis Tanović called *Lepa sela lepo gore* “well made, but ethically problematic due to its shameful portrayal of the war in Bosnia.” At the same time, the film was severely criticized by the Serbs, especially from Republika Srpska where parts of the film were shot, who argued that the film depicted the Serbs unfairly.
Lepa sela lepo gore is constructed as a series of flash-backs from several wounded men lying in the ward of a Belgrade hospital. The flash-backs take the viewer back to different moments in the past: Socialist Yugoslavia, the turmoil just before the break-up of the country, and the war of the 1990s itself. In the center of the narrative is the story of a childhood friendship between Milan and Halil, a Serb and a Bosnian Muslim, who lived in the vicinity of the Višegrad tunnel. The tunnel, which opened in 1971 (as seen in the first scenes of the film), was meant to connect the two main Yugoslav cities of Belgrade and Zagreb, but that plan was quickly abandoned, and the tunnel became a symbol of fear for the two boys. It is in this very tunnel that a group of Serbian paramilitaries gets stuck surrounded by Bosnian Muslim fighters, and only a few of them manage to get out of it alive. The message of the inevitability of the tragedy, which Dragojević largely blames on the repression bred under Socialism, is strikingly different from Manchevski’s sad but nevertheless beautiful love-story. The same is true for their visions of religion as well.

In one of the opening scenes of Lepa sela lepo gore, a Serbian paramilitary approaches a black UNPROFOR soldier with an Easter egg in his hand and an Easter greeting while the rest of his men are burning and marauding the houses. That is as far as the meaningfulness of religion goes: a ridiculous custom and an absurd farce, but nevertheless with a dangerous destructive potential. A recurring symbol of national and religious belonging that is present in Dragojević’s film is a Greek (equal-sided) cross with four Cyrillic letters “C” painted on a helmet of one of the Serbian men. The letters stand for the motto “Samo sloga Srbina spasava”—“Only unity saves the Serbs.” The cross has been a part of Serbian national and religious symbolism since the Middle Ages, and according to the legend was based on the design of a Byzantine Imperial original by St. Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the highly popular national patron saint. The cross is still featured on the flag of the Serbian orthodox Church today, and in the 1990s it was widely used by Serbian nationalist forces and paramilitary groups. The contrast between the peaceful and spiritual Christianity of Manchevski and Dragojević’s vision of religion as an empty ritual taken out of its historical context and turned into a dangerous weapon is truly striking.

One has to admit that Dragojević does not present the Serbs as a homogeneous group. There are internal differences among them: some

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13 Radić, “The Church and the ‘Serbian Question’.” One of the most visible and active nationalist groups that extensively used Orthodox rhetoric and symbols is Obraz.
are Tito-nostalgic, others lean towards Serbian nationalism. Ultimately, the director pays more critical attention to the common Yugoslav heritage than the individual national identities and blames the ideology of “brotherhood and unity” for the current war and crisis. Nevertheless, distinctly religious symbolism is visible, particularly around the character named Fork. Mentally exhausted from being trapped in the tunnel, Fork takes his shoes off and goes outside. The camera follows him, barefoot with long, dark hair, arms wide open, thus creating a silhouette of a crucifix against the light at the end of the tunnel. The image of Fork being shot by Muslim soldiers who are invisible to the audience brings into the film the narrative of the Serbian suffering and sacrifice. This narrative of the national suffering, of “Serbian Golgotha” has a long and complex history, and can be traced back to the interwar era and the years immediately before WW I. It is not without import that this discourse of suffering was actively revived by the nationalist forces in the 1990s, and continues to be popular, even if challenged, today.

Both Manchevski and Dragojević introduce supporting characters whose main role is to articulate the humanist attitude “all people are equal.” This attitude is not widely shared either by the majority of the fictional characters, or, we may assume, by many of the film-viewers at the time of their release. Although these characters fulfill similar functions in these two films, their social status is quite different: an Orthodox priest in rural Macedonia and a Belgrade doctor. There is a visible if subtle difference in the directors’ perception and opinion of the Orthodox Church’s role in the conflict that we can deduce from this. Dragojević places the message of peace in the mouth of a doctor, who angrily tells the main character, Milan, that for him as a doctor, all patients are the same. And that after all, they are all foreigners here (i.e. coming to Belgrade from Bosnia regardless of their ethnic identity). The “professor”—Milan’s comrade in arms in the neighboring hospital bed—tries to explain the doctor’s position: “The doctor is not to blame. He might have been just like you if they’d butchered his mother. Instead she is walking around Belgrade now. And he was lucky enough to stay the same.” Thus, the doctor’s attitude is presented not so much as “love towards all” but rather as an attitude of an

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14 The story of national suffering and sacrifice is not uniquely Serbian, and many European nations share similar mythological motives, be it in the form of antemurale Christi- anitatis, or another foundational myth, that elevate the nation to the level of the sacred. See e.g. Schulze-Wessel, Nationalisierung der Religion.

15 For an example of the creation of the martyrdom myth, see Byford, Denial and Repression of Anti-Semitism.
indifferent bystander (Serbia) who is observing the fight. Or, maybe even more, as an attitude of Belgrade’s (quasi)liberal, anti-nationalist, upper-middle class who was “privileged” enough to avoid the fighting. However, the humanist discourse, despite coming from disparate sources and having somewhat diverging overtones, meets the same response: a strong historical narrative of the suffering of the Orthodox people (Serbs or Macedonian) under the Muslim (Ottoman) rule. Mitre, the leader of the armed Macedonian men in Pred dozdot, reminds the priest, who is unwilling to give the Muslim girl away: “And 500 hundred years of the Muslim rule?” The war of the 1990s is presented not only as just, but also in a way, as historically inevitable. It is time to collect “for the five centuries of our blood,” Mitre explains. The Belgrade doctor is given the icon of the Kosovo Mother of God to remind him of the same, of the long and sacred suffering of the Orthodox people. In the minds of these characters—but also in the eyes of the public and of politicians—this suffering fully justified contemporary violence.

Although the time lapse between the two films is minimal (only two years), these years were crucial in the course of the political conflict and actual military actions. The context of the directors’ work and their personal drive differed not only because of their geographical locations, but also due to changes in the times. The Srebrenica massacre of the 1995—the largest instance of genocidal killing of the civilian population in Europe since the end of World War II—can be seen as a symbolic watershed. Even though the filming of Lepa sela lepo gore was finished several months prior to this event, the heavily charged atmosphere has left traces in the movie and changed the conditions of its reception. If Manchevski’s story, shot in 1993, is more of a warning, a reflection on the ethnoreligious conflict that could happen in Macedonia, should the country follow Bosnia’s destiny, then Dragojević produced his films right after the most horrible fighting has already taken place. His is a reflection of what everybody knows, or guesses—religion can easily go hand-in-hand with the most brutal and pointless ethnic violence. When asked about the representation of religion in Lepa sela lepo gore, Dragojević answered that his “intention was to portray ironically the religious deviations that came out of the unity between the church and the state starting from the late 1980s, when the church came out from its ‘underground’ position and became ‘mainstream.’”  

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16 Radović, “Resisting the Ideology of Violence,” 175. See also Radović, “Representation of Religion.”
The close church-state tie to which Dragojević referred in the interview is not mentioned in the film in any way; it stays off screen. But to every local viewer (let us remember that the film was intended primarily for the local audience), it would have been unnecessary to explain the obvious. In the years immediately after the fall of Communism, the churches of Eastern Europe had a good reputation among the liberal intellectuals and in the public space in general. This was largely due to their role under Communism—they were often perceived as the bulwark against the ideological indoctrination of the party and the regime. In many countries, the church was also seen as the carrier of the national idea: this discourse was very strong in Poland, Lithuania, Croatia, and Serbia alike. In Macedonia, which was recognized as a nation only in Socialist Yugoslavia, the Orthodox Church was naturally seen as a part of the national structures. It had been separated from the Belgrade Patriarchate to form an independent autocephalous church as part of the socialist tactics of divide et impera. However, this symbiosis of individual national and religious institutions and identities, which was reinforced by the anti-Communist discourses in the 1980s, began to appear as dangerous and damaging in the circumstances of the wars of the 1990s. In the 1990s

the secular Serbian society under Serbian President Slobodan Milošević faced its own semi-literacy regarding religious matters, providing, thus, a secure refuge for an ecclesiastical nationalism and nationalist populism. Thus, in conditions of war and the long-lasting politicization of religion, one witnessed a consequent, secondary “sacralization” of politics and interethnic conflict.

And this is exactly the setting against which Dragojević worked, but Manchevski didn’t. The story of two childhood friends who now fight on different sides of the war is a story in which all parties and all religions are guilty. Dragojević’s perspective is distinctly Serbian, but a self-critical one. His work was criticized by some for its one-sidedness and almost propaganda-like character, and for the lack of compassion with the Serbian national cause by the others. The film is based on a story reported in 1992 in one of the Serbian nationalist-leaning newspapers about a Serbian soldier trapped in the tunnel. Unlike the article, which openly sided with the Serbian cause and focused on the heroic suffering of the Serbian fighters, the film offers a more complex and sober perspective. A summary of

17 Radić, Država i verske zajednice.
18 Vukomanović, “The Serbian Orthodox Church as a Political Actor,” 238.
the controversy is well formulated by Iordanova: “A Yugoslav-made film, which did not conceal its identity behind international financing; it was clearly trying to make the case for the Serbs by superimposing a human face over the demonized international image they had acquired by then.”

Thus, despite their obvious differences in the portrayal of the conflict and religion, both films can (and should) be regarded as an accepted and shared example of the collective imaginary, which inevitably links religious identity to the national one in a discourse of perpetual suffering. This is especially true in the setting of an ethnic conflict, in which religion served as one of the major identity markers.

**Turneja—An Alternative Vision of Religion?**

Quite naturally it took more than a decade after the end of the wars for a more reflexive vision on the matter to be presented to the general public in an artistic form. It is this more balanced and thought-through perspective on the conflict, which slowly but steadily reaches into the past, that we see in the 2008 Serbian film *Turneja*. *Turneja* was written and directed by Goran Marković, who based the film on his earlier play from 1996. Both are partially based on the real-life story of a group of Belgrade actors who toured across Bosnia in early 1992. Written at the time of the war, but filmed fifteen years after its end, the movie provides a refreshingly distant, yet engaging analysis of the war and human nature. *Turneja* tells the story of a Belgrade theater company, who after accepting an offer of “easy money,” boards a multi-purpose military van and goes on a short tour to Srpska Krajina to perform for the civilians and soldiers there. However, everything goes wrong and the actors end up crossing the front line several times. In order to save their lives they have to perform for all conflicting parties. They do not seem to care about their national or religious identities and are preoccupied by the internal theatrical petty-conflicts. Of all the characters of the film, it is only the anti-hero, an opportunistic Serbian nationalist poet named Ljubić, who brings up religion in his speech at the very end of the film. Even then, what seems at the beginning to be an all too well-known Serbian nationalist discourse of “Heavenly Serbia,” “Serbian Golgotha,” and “Serbs as the chosen nation,” very quickly

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19 Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames*, 146.
turns into a phantasmagoric narrative of the Serbs coming to this world from somewhere else, like UFOs:

We cannot lose this war [...] because God is with us. The entire world, America, Germany, France are conspiring against us, only God is not. He has been on our side all the time. [...] The Serbs are a holy nation. By the will of God they came into these lands. [...] The Serbs are not Slavs, let me explain. “Sora” in Sanskrit means “sky,” “the heavenly arch.” “Sorabi” is the ancient name of the Serbs; they have obviously come to our planet from some other place. I don’t know exactly from where. But it is clear that they were sent on a special mission.

Ljubić must eventually pay for his views and his arrogant manner of sharing them. One of the hostile military groups holds him captive, while all the actors are let free. The fact that religion is almost absolutely absent from both the narrative and the visual sequence of the film is indicative in itself. Sometimes, absence tells more than presence. By consciously stripping the war and ethnic conflict of its religious dimension, Marković is making a powerful statement. His is a reaction to many factors, among others—the abuse of religion by the nationalist forces, but also the constant emphasis on the civilizational character of the conflict by domestic and international media.²⁰

The interpretations put forward by Manchevski and Dragojević are conventional and challenge the common opinion at the same time. They challenge the public that supports the nationalist war and ethnic separation, i.e. their criticism belongs to the sphere of politics. However, their conventionality is grounded in the acceptance of the bond between one’s national and religious identity as a given. In this, they differ from Milošević-style propaganda only in the rather negative meaning that they attach to this bond. Manchevski had to send Aleksandar, his main character, away from Macedonia for more than a decade to make him break the bond with his religion. But the bond with his nationality also appears to be broken, or at least it is seen as such by the locals. The residents of his home-village tell Aleksandar, when he questions their desire for revenge, that he is “not from here,” hence he doesn’t understand the logic of their actions. There

²⁰ “Scenes of the Belgrade TV feature production Battle of Kosovo (1989), depicting the dramatic and violent clash between Ottoman and Slav forces at the famous battle-field, were used, for example, by British Channel Four news as a background image for their daily reports on the Kosovo crisis in 1998, providing a clash-of-civilizations-type visual reference, even though such an interpretation was not directly present in the commentary” (Iordanova, “Before the Rain in a Balkan Context,” 150).
is no doubt for Manchevski that being an Orthodox does not mean that one necessarily has to subscribe to violent nationalist ideology, although this possibility is there. The question however remains open, whether it is possible to be Macedonian and not to be Orthodox. We know that in ethnically and religiously mixed Macedonia, there is no clear-cut ethnic and religious divide: there are Muslim Macedonians and Orthodox Albanians alike. They are, however, absent from Manchevski’s fable country. Both directors seem to share the observation that religion is an important (and maybe even necessary) marker of one’s national identity.

It is Marković’s film which doesn’t mention or use religion in any visible way—i.e. makes it invisible to the audience—thereby offering a truly alternative vision of religion’s role in the wars of Yugoslav secession. By denying the importance of national identity (“I am not a Serb, I am an actor”), Marković and his characters put forwards a range of other identity options: profession, age, gender, etc. It seems that in order to tell a story of the war and societies involved, a story that would be distant and “objective” but human at the same time, the director had no other choice but to turn to the comedic farce, in which there is no place for the national assertion, or for that matter, religion.

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In the 1990s the position of the Church Militant came to the fore in political and intellectual discussions, regardless of the speaker’s position. While the Serbian nationalist forces actively engaged in forming a problematic alliance with the Serbian Orthodox Church, the country’s liberal camps reacted with an equally active and passionate position, opposing the war, religion, and nationalist discourses. Historically, the Orthodox Church and clergy were seen as obstacles to modernization and progress; politically, the church was strongly associated with extreme nationalism and obscurantism. It seems that up to date in the academic and political milieu of former Yugoslavia, there is no developed analytical apparatus to talk about the role and place of religion in the recent history. The part of the Serbian public which is tired of taking sides in the argument about “good” and “bad” religion has to resort to the means of comedy and farce. Marković offers one of the ways to do so, and hopefully others will emerge soon.

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21 See Radić, “Religion in a Multinational State.” Radić, Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima.
Filmography

Lepa sela lepo gore (Pretty Village, Pretty Flame; Serbia 1996, dir.: Srdjan Dragojević)
Pred dozdot (Before the Rain; Macedonia 1994, dir.: Milcho Manchevski)
Turneja (The Tour; Serbia 2008, dir.: Goran Marković)

Bibliography


INDEX

Abraham, biblical patriarch 39
Abuladze, Tengiz 47, 57
Afanasyev, Yury 114
Akunin, Boris 140
Aleksy I, patriarch of Moscow and all the Rus’ (1877–1879) 44
Aleksy II, patriarch of Moscow and all the Rus’ (1929–2008) 65, 73, 76–77, 93, 93n49, 93n51, 108, 153n36
Aleksy, metropolitan of Kiev and Moscow (1296–1378), saint 56, 95n61
Alexander III, tsar, emperor of Russia 103
Alexandra Fedorovna, tsarina, empress of Russia, saint (passion bearer) 108
Al-Khadad, Adel 117
Althusser, Louis Pierre 161
Andersen, Hans Christian 192, 194
Anderson, Benedict 11
Andreyeva, Tatyana 107–8, 117
Andrzejewski, Jerzy 208
Anemone, Anthony 93–94
Arabov, Yury 104, 142
Arkatov, Aleksandr 35, 58
Arnold, Agnieszka 205, 213–14
Assmann, Jan 101
Astafyev, Viktor 50n55
Avdeyev, Aleksandr 142
Bach, Johann Sebastian 50
Bakhtin, Mikhail 196
Balázs, Béla 186–87
Balko, Vladimir 175–76n29, 179
Bandera, Stepan 19, 19n69, 121–23, 134
Bazin, André 192
Bedny, Demyan 35, 41–42
Behrendt, Christian 201n1
Beissinger, Mark 100
Bekmambetov, Timur 52, 56–57, 140, 140n2, 150n36
Belov, Vasily 50n55
Benedit XIV, pope 143
Berezhnaya, Liliya 1, 18n67, 24, 99, 150n32
Berglund, Bruce B. 8
Bergstedt, Harald 35
Bertolucci, Bernardo 183, 197
Binder, Eva 25, 17n63, 139, 159
Blažejovský, Jaromír 165, 167–70
Bloński, Jan 205n15, 210n35
Bočan, Hynek 165, 169, 179
Boccaccio, Giovanni 46
Bogomolov, Yury 90
Bondarenko, Viktor 84
Bondarchuk, Fedor 109, 146n25
Bondarchuk, Sergey 146, 149–50, 150n31, 157
Bordwell, David 167
Bortko, Vladimir 1, 17, 19, 141, 156
Brandenberger, David 70
Bresson, Robert 18, 168, 185–86, 197
Brezhnev, Leonid 45, 47
Brożonowicz, Michal 217n2, 234
Bukovsky, Vladimir 225
Bulski, Mariusz 223, 223n12
Catherina II, also Catherina the Great, tsarina, empress of Russia 106
Chaplin, Vsevolod, Father 53
Chomiak, Chrystia 121n1
Christopher, saint 44
Christov, Christo 50, 57
Chubais, Anatoly 100
Chyaureli, Mikhail 42–43, 57
Condee, Nancy 102
Čulík, Jan 8n25, 18n68, 25, 159
Czapliński, Przemysław 203
Da Vinci, Leonardo 38, 154
Dalai Lama (Ringpuchimidal Sandat) 175
Danilov, Aleksandr 141n5
Davie, Grace 10
Degot, Yekaterina 84–85
DeMille, Cecil B. 183, 198
Deml, Jakub 171
Dinov, Todor 50, 57
Dłużewska, Maria 217n2, 218, 234
Dolidze, Siko 41, 57
Doller, Mikhail 42, 57, 95
Donskoy, Dmitry, grand prince 65–66, 70–71, 76, 93
Dostál, Zeno 177, 179
Dostoyevsky, Fedor 48, 50n55, 55
Dovzhenko, Aleksandr 40, 41, 58
Dragojević, Šrdjan 237, 242–246, 248, 250
Drda, Jan 163
Dreyer, Carl Theodor 185
Drubek, Natascha, see also Drubek-Meyer, Natascha 16n61, 23–24, 81
Drubek-Meyer, Natascha, see also Drubek, Natascha 16n61, 23–24, 81
Durkheim, Emile 10
Dyakov, Mikhail 68
Dylewska, Jolanta 26, 202, 206, 214
Dzerzhinsky, Felix 19, 19n69
Dzhanibek, Khan 95n61
Eckhart, Meister (Eckhart von Hochheim O.P. (c. 1260–c. 1327)) 48
Edison, Thomas Alva 37
Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. 13
Eisenstein, Sergei 22, 34, 36n5, 38–40, 42–43, 48, 55–58, 81, 95, 149n29, 150n31, 154, 156
El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos) 39
Engels, Friedrich 38, 38n16
Epiphanius, the Wise 70
Ewart, Ewa 217n2, 234
Faintsimmer, Aleksandr 43, 57
Falina, Maria 22n77, 27, 237
Falk, Felix 26, 201–2, 214
Favreau, Jon 95
Fayziyev, Dzhanik 140, 157
Fedorov, Georgy 144–5, 145n20, 153
Ferens, Anna 217n2, 234
Feuchtwanger, Lion 48
Filar, metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk (1935–1959) 87–88
Filipp, metropolitan of Moscow (1507–1569), saint 112–13, 140–41, 144, 151–53, 155
Filippov, Aleksandr 141, 141n5
Filofey (Pskovian monk) (1465–1542) 109, 114
Fiske, John 162
Florensky, Pavel 40, 66–68, 71
Fomin, Oleg 141, 156
Forman, Miloš 160n24
Foucault, Michel 161, 19n28, 191
Franz Joseph I, emperor of Austria 124, 126, 129
Freud, Sigmund 38, 187
Friedman, Victor 240
Gajek, Eva Maria 201n1
Galibin, Aleksandr 108
Gapon, Georgy 35, 35n3
Gardin, Vladimir 95
Gargas, Anita 217n2, 218, 234
Garrard, Carol 73–75, 78
Garrard, John 73
Gaudreault, André 149n30
Gerasimov, Ilia, see also Gerasimov, Ilya 103
Gerasimov, Ilya, see also Gerasimov, Ilia 103
Glinski, Robert 203n10
Gogol, Nikolai 1, 113, 141
Golbiewski, Arkadiusz 202, 205, 214
Golovnev, Ivan 54, 57
Gorbachev, Mikhail 3, 114
Govorukhin, Stanislav 102–3, 117
Goya, Francisco 48
Grass, Günter 203n10
Greene, Robert 73
Griffith, David W. 12
Gross, Tomasz Jan 204–5
Gunning, Tom 149n30
Habermas, Jürgen 75
Hager, Kurt 51
Halecki, Oskar 3
Hall, Stuart 160–61
Hanák, Dušan 49, 57
Hašek, Jaroslav 163–64
Hastings, Adrian 6–7
Havel, Václav 170
Hentosh, Liliana 121n1
Hers, Juraj 177n30, 180
Hiemer, Elisa-Maria 201n1
Himka, John-Paul 19n69, 24, 121
Hitler, Adolf 43, 87, 91, 130
Hobsbawm, Eric 7n21
Hoffman, Jerzy 203, 204n12, 214
Hofstede, Geert 160–61
Holloway, Ronald 168
Hollý, Martin 170, 180
Hornjatkevyč, Andrij 121n1
Hranitzky, Agnes 56
Hronsky, Mykhailo 132
Huntington, Samuel 5
Hus, Jan 159, 162, 179
Hutchings, Stephen 16
Huzar, Lyubomyr, cardinal, major archbishop of Kyiv-Galicia 125
Hvižd, Petr 171, 180
Ignatius of Loyola, saint 39
Ionov, Alexey 94
Iordanova, Dina 22n76, 239, 247
Iorga, Nicolae 114
Issac, biblical patriarch 39, 55
Ivan IV, the Terrible, tsar 56–57, 70, 112–13, 140, 144, 151–56
Ivanov, Anatoly 50n55
Ivanov, Vladimir 144

Jakobson, Roman 187, 187n25
Jakubisko, Juraj 175, 175n29, 180
Janion, Maria 220, 225
Janscó, Miklós 46, 57
Jasný, Vojtěch 163, 174, 179–80
John of Damascus (John Damascene), saint 48
John Paul II, pope 53, 229
John the Baptist, saint 84
Joseph II, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire 171
Jung, Carl Gustav 38
Justinian I, Byzantine emperor 110

Kabay, Barna 54, 56
Kaczyńska, Jadwiga 224
Kaczyński, Jarosław 218, 229, 26, 218, 221–24, 227, 231n26
Kalatozov, Mikhail 41, 43, 58
Kalenov, Igor 14, 156
Kalukin, Rafał 233
Kamenický, Štefan 66, 68, 70
Kamenický, Vasily 57
Kammerer, Paul 36
Karesky, Aleksandr 34
Kherkonsky, Khristian 36
Khodyakov, Konstantin 84–85
Kiešlovič, Krzysztof 54, 56
Kichín, Valery 87
Kirill, patriarch of Moscow and all the Rus’ 1946–1946 24, 78, 83n12, 85–88, 93, 95
Kivelson, Valerie 73
Klein, Dušan 164, 179
Klimov, Elem 59, 57
Klučevsky, Vasily 66, 68, 70
Knox, Zoe 74–75
Kohn, Hans 3
Kolchak, Aleksandr 139, 146–47, 147n26, 148–49
Koliha, Petr 174, 180
Koloc, Tomáš 162n13
Komandarev, Stephan 54, 56
Komenský, Jan Amos (Comenius) 164
Korczał, Janusz 201, 208
Kordyum, Arnold 41, 56
Korobkin, Dmitry 141, 157
Kosiński, Dariusz 220–21
Kostelnyk, Havril 128
Koterski, Marek 54, 58
Kozintsev, Grigory 37
Kracauer, Siegfried 186
Kral, Karel 174
Kravets, Sergey 94
Kravchuk, Andrey 103, 117, 139, 147, 150, 153, 156
Křižan, Jiří 170, 172, 175–76n29
Krylov, Yevgeny 107, 117
Krzemiński, Adam 212
Krzystek, Waldemar 212, 214
Kulakov, Yury 65, 72, 78
Kupchenko, Irina 109n47
Kurbatov, Valentin 109–10
Kurosawa, Akira 167, 180
Kustov, Boris 52, 57
Kwieciński, Bartosz 209–10
Kwiecieniński, Michał 214

Lacan, Jacques 14
Lanzmann, Claude 208, 212n37
Larina, Kseniya 90
Laruelle, Marlene 75
Lebedev, Artem 44
Lebedev, Nikolay 41, 58
Lenin, Vladimir 36, 42–43, 51
Leo XIII, pope 124
Lichocka, Joanna 217n2, 218, 234
Lieven, Dominic 99
Lioznova, Tatyana 65, 78
Litvinenko, Aleksandr 224
Lunacharsky, Anatoly 36
Lunin, Pavel 55–58, 65, 72–73, 78, 89n31, 95–96, 104, 112–13, 117, 139, 141, 150–56
Lustig, Arnošt 177
Luther, Martin 51
Lužica, René 50
Lyubshin, Stanislav 109n47

Mach, Josef 163–64, 179, 180
Makary, metropolitan of Moscow 1482–1563, saint 144
Makary, metropolitan of Moscow and Kolomna (1835–1924), saint 109
Malecki, Julek 210
Mamonov, Petr 151–52
Mánes, Josef 164
Manchevski, Milcho 237, 239, 239n8, 241–46, 248–50
Mantegna, Andrea 55
Marković, Goran 237, 247–50
Marsh, Clive 101
Marshall, George C. 43
Marx, Karl 38n16, 91n5
Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue 160, 165, 181
Maupassant, Guy de 35
Mazzierska, Ewa 209
McVay, Athanasius, Father 121n1
Medvedev, Dmitry 91, 92n46, 93, 224
Medvedkin, Aleksandr 36, 43, 57–58
Melnikov, Vitaly 107n44, 117
Menzel, Jiří 164–65, 180
Mickiewicz, Adam 204n12, 225, 229
Michálek, Vladimír 170–72, 179, 180
Michnik, Adam 45
Miller, Alexej, see also Miller, Alexey 4
Miller, Alexey, see also Miller, Alexej 4
Miller, David 70, 71
Miller, Jacques-Alain 150n4
Milošević, Slobodan 242, 246, 248
Milosz, Czesław 210n35
Milota, Stanislav 177n30
Miroshnichenko, Sergey 108–9, 117
Misztal, Barbara 21
Mitchell, William J.T. 13n44
Mojzes, Paul 237n2
Morávek, Vladimír 174, 179
Morin, Edgar 219n3, 234
Mozhukhin, Ivan 35
Mrowińska, Alina 217n2, 234
Munzert, Maria 201n1
Narutowicz, Gabriel 226, 226n20
Nejedlý, Zdeněk 165
Nesterov, Mikhail 68
Nicolas I, tsar, emperor of Russia 106
Nicolas II, tsar, emperor of Russia, saint (passion bearer) 106–8, 145
Norris, Stephen M. 23, 65, 86
Nostradamus (Michel de Nostredame) 176
Novikova, Tatyana 65–66, 78
Ogorodnikov, Valeri 44, 56
Okhlobystin, Ivan 153n36
Olbracht, Ivan 178
Olga, saint 44
Ozu, Yasujirō 169n24, 185
Palacký, František 160, 165
Pálfi, Györgi 26, 183–84, 186, 189–90, 196–98
Panfilov, Gleb 107n44, 117
Panteleyev, Aleksandr 35, 56
Papkova, Irina 75n25, 110
Paradzhyanov, Sergey 40, 45, 58
Páral, Vladimír 173
Parfenov, Leonid 103, 117
Party Nagy, Lajos 183n2
Paul I, tsar, emperor of Russia 107n44, 117
Pavlov, Ivan 36
Pavluk, Stefan 133
Pawlicki, Maciej 202, 205
Peirce, Charles S. 13
Petényi, Katalin 54, 56
Peter I, also Peter the Great, tsar, emperor of Russia 34, 43, 106, 108, 110, 145
Petrenko, Anatoly 112
Pils, Mariusz 217n2, 218, 234
Pilsudski, Joseph 126, 129
Piranesi, Giovanni Battista 39
Platt, Kevin 70
Podskalský, Zdeněk 164, 179
Poe, Edgar Allen 47
Polański, Roman 26, 202, 207, 207n22, 209, 211, 214
Polesny, Viktor 173, 179
Polianski, Igor J. 100–1
Politkovskaya, Anna 224
Popiełuszko, Jerzy, Father 225, 225n8
Porter-Šučs, Brian 8, 77, 79
Pospieszalski, Jan 214, 217n2, 226, 234
Preobraszhensky, Nikolay 35, 58
Prokop, saint 168
Proshkin, Aleksandr 117
Proshkin, Andrey 55, 57, 95, 143, 156
Protazanov, Yakov 34–35, 51, 57–58
Prudkov, Libor 160, 173
Przylipiak, Miroslaw 26–27, 217
Pudovkin, Vsevolod 36, 42, 57, 95
Pushkin, Alexander 106, 154
Putin, Vladimir 23, 44–45, 91, 93, 100–1, 110, 140–41
Radok, Alfréd 177, 179
Rasputin, Grigory Yefimovich 35, 35n3, 50
Rasputin, Valentin 50n55
Ráža, Ludvík 169, 180
Reshetnikov, Yevgeny, archbishop of Vereya (1957–) 68–70
Röger, Maren 26, 201
Romanovs, tsarist family 23, 107–8
Romanyuk, Serhy 124
Romm, Mikhail 35, 57
Rosenstone, Robert A. 125
Roshal, Grigory 36–37, 58
Ross, Slava 55, 58
Rouch, Jean 219n3, 234
Rozhko, Viktor 107, 117
Rublyov, Andrey 40, 50, 56, 66, 68, 71, 154, 156, 167, 179
Rudiger, Mikhail, Father 93n51
Ryabykh, Georgy, Father 107
Ryazanov, eduard 81n3, 95
Rydzy, Tadeusz 53
Rynard, Su 217n2, 234
Ryzhko, Viktor 53, 57
Safat, Ilgar 53, 58
Sava, saint 243
Savchenko, Igor 42, 56, 112, 117
Scherrer, Jutta 141
Schlegel, Hans-Joachim 9n29, 16n61, 22–23, 33
Schlögel, Karl 3
Schmit, Christian 1, 18n68, 25–26, 36n8, 183
Schönherr, Albrecht 51
Schorn, Evald 165, 179
Schrader, Paul 18, 106, 184–87, 189, 192, 195
Schulze-Wessel, Martin 244, 250
Schumatskys, Boris 40
Sedakova, Olga 53
Semenchuk, Vladimir 42, 45
Senderowka, Irena 213
Senyk, Sophia, Sister 121n1
Serafin of Sarov, saint 84
Serebrennikov, Kirill 117
Sergius of Radonezh (born Bartholomew, or Varfolomey), saint 23, 65–66, 66n1, 67–73, 75, 78, 81n4
Sergy, Metropolitan of Vilnius and Exarch of Latvia and Estonia (1897–1944) 92, 93, 94n56
Sergy, patriarch of Moscow and all the ‘Rus’ (1865–1944) 44
Shakhnazarov, Karen 107, 117
Shamil, imam 41, 42
Shayevych, Mykhaylo 123
Shepitko, Larisa 50, 58
Sheptytsky, Andrey see also Szeptycki, Roman, metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (1865–1944) 24, 121–26, 126n16, 127–35
Sheptytsky, Athanasius (Atanasy), bishop (1686–1729) 126
Shevchuk, Igor 109n47, 111
Shevkunov, Tikhon, Father 114–17
Shhtaden, Andrey 153
Shub, Esfir 149n29, 156
Shukhevych, Roman 122
Shusharin, Dmitry 90
Sienkiewicz, Henryk 204n11, 229, 235
Sieradzka, Monika 217n2, 234
Siokorski, Władysław 226, 226n20
Sirový, Zdenek 169, 179
Škvořecký, Josef 165
Slipio, Iosif, cardinal and patriarch 128
Slivka, Martin 50, 57
Snyder, Timothy 20
Sokurov, Aleksandr 18n67, 52, 57–58, 105–6, 108, 117
Spielberg, Steven 84, 84n14, 87, 95
Stankiewicz, Ewa 217, 217n2, 223n12, 226–27, 229, 230n25, 231–34
Starovoytova, Galina 224
Steékly, Karel 163, 179
Stuhr, Jerzy 54, 57
Suchánek, Vladimir 167
Šulík, Martin 175–76n29, 177, 180
Surkov, Vladislav 45
Švankmajer, Jan 46–47, 57, 177, 179, 180
Šverák, Jan 176, 179, 180
Svoboda, Jiří 164, 180
Szabó, István 195, 197
Šembek, Zosia 132
Szeptycka, Zofia Fredro 131
Szeptycki, Leon 130
Szeptycki, Roman see also Sheptytsky, Andrey, metropolitan of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (1865–1944) 24, 121–26, 126n16, 127–35
Szőts, István 33, 56
Szücs, Jenő 3
Szulkin, Piotr 45, 56–57
Talankin, Igor 51, 57
Tanović, Danis 242n12
Tarkovsky, Andrey 18, 22, 34, 40, 45, 48–50, 52, 56, 58, 85, 95, 154, 156, 166–67, 179, 194, 197
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tarouca Sylva, Friedrich</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarr, Béla</td>
<td>49, 56–57, 197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thompson, Ewa M.</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tikhonov, Vyacheslav</td>
<td>65–70, 77–78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tocqueville de, Alexis</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todorova, Maria</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolstoy, Leo</td>
<td>34, 51, 70, 146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomka, Miklós</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour, George de la</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauberg, Leonid</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trnka, Jiří</td>
<td>46, 56, 167, 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troebst, Stefan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trofimenkov, Mikhail</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troška, Zdeněk</td>
<td>163, 163n15, 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trotsky, Leon</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuček, Petr</td>
<td>165, 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turii, Oleh</td>
<td>121m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tusk, Donald</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyc, Zdeněk</td>
<td>168–69, 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uher, Štefan</td>
<td>50, 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vachek, Karel</td>
<td>45, 57–58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Várszegyi, Abbot</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vávra, Otakar</td>
<td>47, 57, 162, 164–65, 177, 179–80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertov, Dziga</td>
<td>22, 34, 37–38, 81, 96, 149n29, 156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewegh, Michal</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vigilyansky, Vladimir, Father</td>
<td>77, 77n29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villiers de L’Isle-Adams, Auguste</td>
<td>37, 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vláčil, František</td>
<td>164, 167, 179, 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volkoff, Alexandre</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volodikhin, Dmitry</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vorel, Tomáš</td>
<td>175–76, 179, 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vukomanović, Milan</td>
<td>237n2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vyatich-Bereznykh, Damir</td>
<td>45, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wächter, Otto von</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wajda, Andrzej</td>
<td>18, 26, 201–3, 204n12, 207–212, 214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanner, Catherine</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warneke, Lothar</td>
<td>51, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf, Konrad</td>
<td>47, 56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyszyński, Stefan</td>
<td>229, 229n22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanchuk, Oles</td>
<td>24, 121–35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanchuk, Viktoriya</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yankovsky, Oleg</td>
<td>151, 153n36, 154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelkin, Mikhail</td>
<td>217n2, 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yeltsin, Boris</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yushchenko, Viktor</td>
<td>122, 124–25, 224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zábranský, Miloš</td>
<td>168, 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zanussi, Krzysztof</td>
<td>49, 53, 56, 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zdislava of Lemberk, saint</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelenka, Petr</td>
<td>54, 57, 177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zelenka, Zdeněk</td>
<td>176, 179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Żeromski, Stefan</td>
<td>224, 224n14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhakov, Yevstafy, abbot</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žižek, Slavoj</td>
<td>16, 193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhemchuzhny, Vitaly</td>
<td>8in5, 95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žmijewski, Artur</td>
<td>217n2, 230, 230n25, 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zok, Michael</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zolotukhin, Valery</td>
<td>109n47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Žurawski, Damian</td>
<td>217n2, 234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zvyagintsev, Andrey</td>
<td>54–55, 58, 104, 117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>