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The *Kino-Khudozhnik* and the Material Environment in Early Russian and Soviet Fiction Cinema, c. 1907-1930.

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I, Eleanor Rees confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the figure of the *kino-khudozhnik* [set designer] in late-Imperial and early-Soviet fiction cinema in the silent era. In comparison to other members of the film-making team, such as the camera operator, the director and the script-writer, the *kino-khudozhnik* is a relatively under-researched subject. Drawing on film-makers’ memoirs, the contemporary cinema press and archival documents, this thesis examines the *kino-khudozhnik*’s contribution to the technical and creative sides of film-making in the period when cinema developed both as a new national industry and as a new art form in Russia. It thus considers cinema as a collaborative endeavour, an idea that held ideological significance in the early-Soviet era. It also provides an insight into the dynamics of studio film-making during the period, emphasising the role that available technology, the studio environment and professional partnerships, as much as the creative visions of individuals, played in shaping the evolution of film aesthetics. Many of the first *kino-khudozhniki*, who started their careers in Russian cinema in the 1910s, continued to work in the industry after its nationalisation in 1919. In examining the role of *kino-khudozhniki* across the late-Imperial and early-Soviet periods, this thesis highlights changes between these two eras, but it also emphasises continuities. In so doing, it questions traditional historical periodisations.

In addition to examining the working practices of *kino-khudozhniki*, this thesis explores the sets they designed for films. Combining close visual analysis of a wide range of films and discussion of socio-cultural discourses of the period, it considers how representations of certain spaces – the rural provinces, the domestic interior, the workplace, and artistic and performative arenas – related to contemporary concerns about the material environment. In considering how film-makers harnessed cinema’s ideological potential and used set design to promote certain ideas about the material environment, this thesis situates cinema as a key driver in shaping discourses about the built and object world in late-Imperial and early-Soviet Russia.
Impact Statement

In its examination of the *kino-khudozhnik*’s role in late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema, this thesis contributes to existing scholarship in the field of Russian Film Studies. In comparison to other members of the film-making team, such as the director, the camera operator and the scenarist, the *kino-khudozhnik* is a relatively under-researched figure. Drawing on primary and archival sources, this thesis provides a typology of the *kino-khudozhnik* in order to reveal how the profession contributed to the creative and technical decisions involved in film-making. It considers how available technology, the studio environment and professional partnerships, as much as the creative visions of individuals, shaped the evolution of silent film aesthetics in Russia. In so doing, this thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship in Russian Film Studies that examines the influence of technological innovations on cinema.

In its analysis of the figure of the *kino-khudozhnik*, this thesis brings to light information on individuals such as Vladimir Balliuzek and Sergei Kozlovskii, who played a key role in film production but who have received little attention in scholarship on Russian cinema. Additionally, it draws attention to the involvement of such well-known figures as Lev Kuleshov and Aleksandr Rodchenko in the field of cinema design, which remains an under-researched aspect of their artistic oeuvre. Many of the first *kino-khudozhniki*, who started their careers in Russian cinema in the 1910s, continued to work in the industry after its nationalisation in 1919. Thus, unlike the majority of scholarship on Russian cinema, which considers the late-Imperial and early-Soviet eras separately, taking the 1917 Revolution as a historical divide, this thesis highlights the importance of the *kino-khudozhnik* as a point of continuity between the two periods. In so doing, it questions traditional historical periodisations, thus deepening our understanding of the complex relationship between late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema.

During this era, cinema developed not only as a new national industry, however; it also emerged as a new art form. The way in which the *kino-khudozhnik*’s role was theorised at the time reveals film-makers’ evolving understandings of cinema’s expressive potential and its relation to other artistic media. By situating debates about the *kino-khudozhnik*’s practice in the context of broader artistic developments during this period, this thesis provides a greater understanding of the close dialogue that developed between cinema and other artistic fields, including theatre, architecture, design and the graphic and pictorial arts. It thus contributes to histories of Russian art that examine artistic exchange between different media.

Lastly, by combining close visual analysis of a wide range of films and discussion of socio-cultural discourses of the period, this thesis examines how *kino-khudozhniki* exploited cinema’s
ideological potential and used set design to explore contemporary concerns about the material environment. This thesis therefore contributes to existing scholarship on Russian culture that highlights the role that visual representations played in shaping discourses about the material environment in the late-Imperial and early-Soviet eras. In its focus on cinema set design, it draws attention to features of canonical films not considered in existing studies; it also reveals how less well-known films are remarkable from a design perspective, thus broadening the corpus of films usually discussed in scholarship on Russian cinema.
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Note on Transliteration and Translation

This thesis follows the Library of Congress system of transliteration from the Cyrillic to the Latin Alphabet. The titles of articles, books, films, plays and works of art and literature are given in Russian and English on first mention, and thereafter in Russian only. Russian newspaper, magazine and journal titles are given in the original without translation. All translations from Russian to English are my own, unless otherwise specified.
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Introduction

In 1927, the year in which he worked on the set designs for Lev Kuleshov's film *Vasha znakomaiia* (*Your Acquaintance*), the prominent Russian Constructivist artist Aleksandr Rodchenko wrote an article entitled ‘Khudozhnik i material’naia sreda v igrovom fil’m’ (*The Artist and the Material Environment in Fiction Film*), in which he attempted to define the role of the *kino-khudozhnik* in cinema.¹ In this article, Rodchenko declared that the *kino-khudozhnik* should not be reduced to a mere ‘dekorator’, a technical craftsman who assembles ornamental scenery following the orders of the director.² Rather, he claimed, the *kino-khudozhnik* is responsible for devising the different material environments in which the characters of the film will live; consequently, he must be involved in all aspects of film production, including framing and lighting scenes, positioning actors, as well as overseeing costumes, props and artificial scenery.³ Rodchenko was not alone in his awareness of the *kino-khudozhnik’s* importance. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s in Russia, a number of film-makers, artists and critics addressed questions about the nature and the scope of the *kino-khudozhnik’s* role. This debate was not concerned only with the division of professional responsibilities in film production. It also related to differing conceptions of film’s nature as an art form and to broader questions about the role of artists within society.

This thesis takes Rodchenko’s article as a starting point, and sets out to explore the figure of the *kino-khudozhnik* in early Russian and Soviet cinema from the birth of the national fiction-film industry in 1907 to the end of the silent era at the beginning of the 1930s.⁴ From as early as 1908, the year in which Aleksandr Drankov produced *Sten’ka Razin*, which is conventionally considered the ‘first’ Russian fiction film, the term *kino-khudozhnik* was used in Russian cinema as the title for the position referred to in English as either the set designer, the artistic director or the production artist.³ Directly translatable as ‘cinema-artist’, it carries connotations of individual self-expression, creative autonomy and artistic excellence. As Rodchenko suggests in

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¹ Aleksandr Rodchenko, ‘Khudozhnik i material’naia sreda v igrovom fil’m’, *Sovetskoe kino*, 5-6, 1927, pp. 14-15. Although the term *khudozhnik* [artist], which appears in the title of this article, was that used most frequently to designate the set designer in Russian and Soviet cinema, for clarity, and to avoid confusion with other types of artists working in other spheres, I use the term *kino-khudozhnik* [cinema artist] throughout this thesis. The plural of the term is *kino-khudozhniki*.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Although several sources, including Rodchenko’s article ‘Khudozhnik i material’naia sreda v igrovom fil’m’, suggest that *kino-khudozhniki* did on occasion advise on the production of non-fiction films, for the most part their input in this sphere is not documented in detail. See, ibid., p. 13.
⁵ For the Khanzhonkov studio’s *Russkaia svad’ba XVI stoletiia* (*A Sixteenth-Century Russian Wedding*, 1908), V. Fester was credited as the *khudozhnik*. This is the first film for which an individual is credited as having taken on this role. See V. Ivanova, V. Myl’nikova, S. Skovorodnikova, Iu. Tsiv’ian and R. Iangirov (eds), *Velikii kinemoc Katalog sokhranivshikhsia igrovykh fil’mov Rossii 1908-1919*, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obrazrenie, 2002, p. 16.
his article, the use of the title *khudozhnik* as opposed to others, such as *arkhitektor* [architect], *dekorator* [decorator], *oformitel’* [scenery dresser] and *remeslenik* [craftsman], is significant; it is for this reason that I choose not to use an English variant but to keep the original Russian. The employment of individuals under the title reflected both their backgrounds as trained artists and the ambitions of film-makers to establish cinema as a legitimate art form independent of its origins as a technological novelty, a commercial enterprise and a subsidiary of the theatre. It also related to the fact that, as Rodchenko insists, the *kino-khudozhnik’s* artistic influence was not confined solely to creating artificial scenery, but extended to other aspects of the film-making process.

Despite the wide-ranging responsibilities accorded to the *kino-khudozhnik* and their artistic credentials, the contribution of this figure to Russian cinema is a relatively under-researched subject. Indeed, Emma Widdis in her recent monograph *Socialist Senses: Film, Feeling, and the Soviet Subject, 1917-1940* identifies the *kino-khudozhnik* as ‘the forgotten figure in film scholarship’, noting that ‘early Soviet cinematic set design has received particularly scant attention’. This thesis sets out to address some of the gaps in our knowledge about the *kino-khudozhnik* in late-Imperial Russian and early-Soviet cinema. Specifically, it considers the following questions: in what ways did *kino-khudozniki* contribute to the aesthetic and technical decisions involved in film production? How did developments in set design relate to film-makers’ evolving understandings of cinema’s expressive potential? What role did set design play in establishing a distinctive national cinema, in both the late-Imperial and early-Soviet eras? Lastly, how did *kino-khudozniki* harness cinema’s ideological potential and use set design to promote certain ideas about the material environment?

**I. Aims**

Drawing on primary and archival sources, this thesis examines how the working practices of *kino-khudozniki* evolved during the first decades of Russian fiction cinema against the context of the increasing professionalisation of the film industry and its nationalisation from a private to a state enterprise in 1919. It is not intended to provide a comprehensive study of the work of

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6 In contemporary cinema discourses of the 1910s and 1920s, critics and film-makers referred to *kino-khudozniki* by these different titles in order to promote certain ideas about their role and about cinema set design as an artistic practice. In-depth analysis of these debates and the significance of shifts in terminology are beyond the scope of this thesis, which is concerned with analysing the real working practices of *kino-khudozniki*. For discussion of these debates, see Eleanor Rees, ‘From the *Kino-dekorator* to the *Kino-arkhitektor* in Early Russian and Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era’, unpublished conference paper, *Building-Object/Design-Architecture: Exploring Interconnections*, Design History Society, the European Architectural History Network and the Architecture Space and Society Centre, London, 6-8 June 2019.

particular individuals. Rather, it seeks to establish a typology of "kino-khudozhniki" in order to show how the profession influenced the aesthetic and technical decisions involved in film-making. Nonetheless, I also bring to light information on individuals such as Vladimir Balliuzeck and Sergei Kozlovskii, who played a key role in film production but who have received little attention in scholarship on Russian cinema. Additionally, I draw greater attention to the involvement of such well-known figures as Kuleshov and Rodchenko in the field of cinema design, which remains an under-researched aspect of their artistic oeuvre. The emphasis on "kino-khudozhniki" in this thesis does not seek to undermine the significance of other film-makers; instead, my intention is to locate the contribution of "kino-khudozhniki" within a matrix of influences on film production and to understand the collaborative process through which a film was made.

In the context of Russian cinema, the idea of creative collaboration was initially important as a union among film-makers around the shared goal of developing a new art form. After the 1917 Revolution, however, it acquired ideological significance as a renunciation of the perceived bourgeois concept of individual authorship. As mediators between the technical and creative sides of studio film-making, "kino-khudozhniki" played a key role in shaping how collaboration worked in practice, and also contributed to determining the ways in which visual ideas were realised cinematically. A further aim of this thesis, therefore, is to consider how available technology, the studio environment and professional partnerships, as much as the creative visions of individuals, shaped the evolution of film style. In so doing, this thesis intends to contribute to a growing body of scholarship in Russian Film Studies that examines the influence of technological innovations on cinema aesthetics. In contrast to studies that analyse the development of Russian and Soviet cinema in terms of shifts in official cultural policy and the pressures these placed on the industry, scholars such as Philip Cavendish, Lilya Kaganovsky, Masha Salazkina and Widdis have explored how technological advances relating to lighting, colour film, sound and set design also affected film-makers’ evolving understandings of cinema’s artistic and ideological potential.8

In addition to bridging the technical and creative sides of film production, the "kino-khudozhnik" provides a link between the late-Imperial and early-Soviet eras of Russian cinema. While a new generation of directors and camera operators came to work in Soviet cinema after the

nationalisation of the film industry in 1919, many of the *kino-khudozhniki* who had started their careers in the 1910s continued to work in the industry after that date: Balliuzez, Vladimir Egorov, Kozlovskii, Kuleshov and Vasilii Rakhal’s, for example, all had careers that stretched over several decades. Exploring the *kino-khudozhnik* as a professional figure therefore enables us to trace not only changes between late-Imperial Russian and early-Soviet cinemas, but also continuities. Thus it also permits us to question traditional historical periodisations that emphasise the ruptures between these two eras of film-making.

During this period, cinema emerged not only as a new national industry, however. It was also born as a new art form. Many film-makers and critics debated the extent to which set design, as an expressive element of film that had its origins in the theatre and drew upon the methods of painting and architecture, could contribute to the development of a new cinematic, artistic language. While some considered film primarily a photographic phenomenon that should use the real world as its material and, accordingly, renounced constructed scenery for its artificiality, others employed set design to exploit cinema’s expressive potential. This thesis therefore also considers how developments in the *kino-khudozhnik*’s practice related to different understandings about the nature of cinema as an artistic medium and contributed to the evolution of silent cinema aesthetics in Russia. In so doing, it attempts to chart the main developments in set-design aesthetics in late-Imperial Russian and early-Soviet cinema.

Cinema’s development as an art form took place during a period of intense experimentation in the arts. During the first decades of the twentieth century in Russia, the rejection of art academies, the modernist thirst for experimentation and the emergence of new technologies encouraged artists to pursue new trends in interdisciplinary practice and to become involved with previously marginalised art forms, such as photography, book art and poster, fashion, furniture and theatre design. In particular, the sphere of theatre design witnessed notable reform. While up to the late-nineteenth century, the theatre existed primarily to serve the playwright, as a living illustration of a text, from the 1890s it became a legitimate artistic realm.\(^9\) Lighting, scenery and costumes were no longer considered ancillary, but were vital to a performance’s meaning. Eminent artists such as Konstantin Korovin and Aleksandr Benua [Benois] collaborated with the theatre, perceiving their designs as valuable creative outputs. The involvement of artists in spheres outside of the fine arts was closely associated with shifting conceptions of their role within society. During the 1910s and 1920s, a number of artists’ manifestos claimed that in the modern era the artist should no longer be a solitary creative

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figure confined to the studio, but must work to integrate art into social life. Following the Revolution, the idea of fusing art and life had potent appeal. Artists acquired a new social responsibility: through transforming the material environment and offering new models of living that corresponded to socialist ideals, they were to be active participants in the building of a new Soviet state. This thesis therefore situates the evolution of the kino-khudozhnik’s practice in the context of broader artistic developments during this period. In so doing, it aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the close dialogue that developed between cinema and other artistic fields, including theatre, architecture, design and the graphic and pictorial arts.

Recognising artists’ social responsibility, a number of critics writing in the contemporary cinema press in the mid- to late 1920s claimed that the kino-khudozhnik had an obligation not only to represent the material environment, but also to promote certain ideas about it, and thus alter audiences’ perceptions. The critic K. Gazdenko, for example, argued that ‘Задача художника кино – выявить свое отношение к окружающему, заразить им нашего зрителя, направить его по пути нового быта, заставить пересмотреть под углом этой установки устои своей жизни’ [The task of the kino-khudozhnik is to express his attitude to the environment, to inspire the viewer, to direct him along the path to a new life, and to make him reconsider the foundations of his own life from the viewpoint of its setting]. This thesis therefore examines how kino-khudozhniki exploited cinema’s ideological potential and used set design in films to express contemporary concerns about the material environment. Specifically, I explore how representations of different material environments in films related to changing ideas about technological advancement, domesticity, material intelligence, class divisions and artistic culture against a shifting socio-political climate.

II. Literature Review

A. Critical Approaches to Set Design

In considering the figure of the kino-khudozhnik, this thesis engages with an emerging body of scholarship on cinema set design. Although there is a wealth of practical manuals on cinema scenery, academic literature on the subject is sparse. There exist few detailed historical and

critical studies of cinema set design and it is only since the mid-1990s that methodological and theoretical approaches to the subject have begun to develop. In one of the first critical studies to address cinema set design, Charles Affron and Mirella Jona Affron focus on the relationship of sets to the narrative of films. In their *Sets in Motion: Art Direction and Film Narrative* (1995), the Affrons provide a taxonomy consisting of five categories – ‘denotation’, ‘punctuation’, ‘embellishment’, ‘artifice’ and ‘narrative’ – to analyse the extent to which a set serves, enhances or occasionally overwhelms a film’s narrative. The Affrons’ approach raises questions about the extent to which sets can function independently from a film’s narrative. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Russian cinema in the 1900s and 1910s, when *kino-khudozniki* at times created sets without prior knowledge of a film’s narrative and were, on occasion, responsible for writing the scenario. The Affrons’ narrative approach is useful for taking into account how meaning in films unfolds sequentially across a succession of frames, locales and events. However, the meaning it derives relates exclusively to narrative content and overlooks the potential dramatic function of sets, as well as how they might be used to elicit an emotional response from viewers.

Writing in response to the Affrons, Charles Tashiro has argued that sets exert an impact beyond their narrative function, emphasising their cultural and symbolic associations. Drawing on Tashiro, Sarah Street also asserts that sets carry pre-existing associations that provide additional meaning not contained within the film’s narrative. In contrast to the Affrons’ model, which privileges the narrative meaning pre-ascribed by film-makers, the approaches of Tashiro and Street take into account the interpretation of viewers, acknowledging that films are open to multiple, and fluctuating, historically specific readings. Both Tashiro and Street adopt an expansive definition of set design to include, in Tashiro’s words, ‘all those elements which comprise the total cinematic image’, such as lighting, camera work and the positioning of actors. This recalls Rodchenko’s definition of the *kino-khudoznik*’s wide-ranging responsibilities. Thus, like Tashiro and Street, I consider how sets acquire meaning through the way they are processed cinematically and how they work in conjunction with other cinematic techniques. In particular, Street considers the relationship between actors and sets, claiming that sets often function as ‘performative arenas’, in which the actor’s body becomes an essential element of the mise-en-scène. She argues that actors’ movements work to display the set, drawing the viewer’s attention to particular elements, while also encouraging them to consider a space beyond the

frame and to make intertextual associations with contemporary preoccupations and themes.

While Street is concerned with how movement within sets encourages new readings of film frames, a number of scholars have analysed how such movement activates kinaesthetic and haptic models of spectatorship. In *Atlas of Emotions: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (2002), Giuliana Bruno examines how architectural structures in cinema convey a sense of travelling, as both a spatial and an emotional experience. 18 Adopting a phenomenologically oriented approach, in *The Architecture of the Image* (2001), Juhani Pallasmaa explores how architecture in films works to imply a kinaesthetic way of experiencing space that encourages viewers to ‘construct spaces in the mind’ and ‘a sense of being in the world’. 19 Although Bruno and Pallasmaa recognise that the historical and cultural conditions of a film’s making inform its representation of space and a spectator’s engagement with an image, they do not ground their study in a particular context, instead using diverse examples from different historical and national cinemas. By contrast, Antonia Lant and Peter Wollen draw on the writings of early cinema theorists in Europe to examine how design and architecture in cinema were associated with the problems of spatial representation and audience engagement, in particular haptic and kinaesthetic models of spectatorship. 20

While Bruno, Pallasmaa and Wollen consider the relationship between cinema and architecture in terms of the similar effects they have on viewers, a number of scholars have analysed how the two media are engaged in a close dialogue from a stylistic viewpoint. Donald Albrecht, Sabine Hake and Lucy Fischer all recognise cinema as a platform on which to promote new architectural and design movements and as a training ground to shape public tastes and generate consumer demands. 21 Although these scholars examine the cultural context of a film’s production, they do not, however, take into account how the commercial and production pressures of the cinema industry might inform the choice of designs in films.

Another branch of scholarship analyses set design as a practice, taking into account industrial pressures and production contexts. Mark Lamster’s edited book *Architecture and Film* (2000) includes chapters by Bob Eisenhardt, Christina Wilson and Bob Craft which examine the practices of individual set designers and location managers and their influence on the process of

creating on-screen architecture. The authors acknowledge that practical concerns, such as budgets, studio space and technological developments, have a considerable impact on the environments that film-makers are able to represent. Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street’s 2007 book on British, French and German set design in the 1930s and Lucy Fischer’s 2015 edited book on set design in American cinema focus similarly on the working practices of set designers. These authors view cinema as an economic and cultural institution, taking into account not only films themselves, but also media discourses, production documents and film-makers’ memoirs. In so doing, they show that the evolution of set aesthetics is closely associated with commercial demands and socio-political imperatives, including ambitions to dominate domestic markets and strategies to promote national cinemas abroad. These studies act as a point of departure for my analysis of the working practices of kino-khudozhniki in early Russian and Soviet cinemas. Like these authors, I examine historically and culturally specific production practices and contexts in order to understand industrial developments and to shed light on the dynamics of film-making.

Although Bergfelder, Harris and Street recognise the significance of Russian émigré set designers, such as Lazare Meerson and Andrei Andreiev, they do not consider how their initial training in Russia or connections with the Russian film industry might have shaped their practices. Léon Barsacq’s Caligari’s Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions: A History of Film Design (1976), originally published in French as Le Décor de film 1895-1969 (1970), is one of the few comparative studies on European set design to consider Russian cinema. Barsacq’s analysis of Russian set design covers the period from 1914 up to the end of the silent era in the early 1930s, claiming that before 1914 Russian films ‘never rose above the level of honest mediocrity; the revelation of Russian cinema did not occur until after the 1917 Revolution’. The limited attention given to Russian kino-khudozhniki and set design in historical surveys of national cinemas is in part due to the inaccessibility of primary sources for non-Russian speakers. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse Russian and Soviet set design in a comparative context, I hope to encourage further research on its relation to other national forms of cinema design by making more primary source information available in English.

25 Ibid., p. 47.
Another reason for the limited attention given to Russian set design in historical surveys of film is the fact that very few secondary studies on set design in Russian and Soviet cinema exist.

B. The Place of Set Design in Studies on Russian and Soviet Cinema

The first studies to address the role of set design in early Russian and Soviet cinema focused on the stylistic approaches of individual kino-khudozhniki. In her 1947 article ‘Scenic Design in the Soviet Cinema’, Catherine de la Roche considered how the design styles of Vladimir Egorov, Vladimir Kaplunovskii, Sergei Kozlovskii and Nikolai Suvorov evolved from the 1920s up to the late 1940s, thereby overlooking Egorov and Kozlovskii’s work in late-Imperial cinema. Although de la Roche recognises that in Soviet cinema, in comparison to other national cinemas, kino-khudozhniki collaborated particularly closely with other film-makers, in the book she co-authors with Thorold Dickinson on Soviet cinema, published just one year later, the contribution of kino-khudozhniki to film production remains unexplored.

During the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, a number of monographs on individual kino-khudozhniki analysed their stylistic approaches. Among them are: Elena Rakitina’s study of Anatolii Arapov; Valentina Kuznetsova’s study of Evgenii Enei; Evgenii Gromov’s study of Vladimir Egorov; and Tat’iana Tarasova-Krasina’s study of Iosif Shpinel’. Richly illustrated with set design sketches and documented with archival sources and memoirs, these monographs indicate the wealth of primary sources – aesthetic and discursive – that exist on set design and provide valuable biographical information about the individuals concerned. However, these authors, consider individuals within a hermetic framework of their own practice and do not explore the links that they had to other film-makers through shared training and affiliations with arts and theatre organisations; nor do they analyse their work in relation to broader developments in set design

26 Lilya Kaganovsky and Masha Salazkina note that Russian and Soviet cinema is frequently excluded from comparative histories of national cinemas. The authors suggest that this is partly due to the difficulty of locating the former Soviet Union in relation to geopolitical categories such as ‘Europe’. Kaganovsky and Salazkina (eds), Sound, Speech, Music, p. 3.


aesthetics and practices. Consequently, these studies offer limited information about the extent to which individuals contributed to the evolution of set design aesthetics in Russian cinema more generally.

With the publication in the 1970s of his multi-volume study of set design, Gennadii Miasnikov provides the most comprehensive account of developments in set practices in late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema from 1918 up to the end of the Second World War. Drawing extensively on archival documents, film-makers’ memoirs and the contemporary cinema press, Miasnikov describes in detail technical and aesthetic set developments, the working practices of kino-khudozhniki and the expansion and growing technological sophistication of studios. He does not, however, support his study of set design with visual analysis of films themselves due, as he himself notes, to restrictions on accessing films at the time of writing. Moreover, Miasnikov gives very little consideration either to the symbolic or ideological significance of sets or to the question of how scenery contributes to the overall meaning of a film.

After a hiatus of almost four decades, Emma Widdis was the next scholar to specifically address the role of set design in Russian cinema. In her chapter ‘Cinema and the Art of Being: Towards a History of Early Soviet Set Design’ (2016), Widdis draws on archival sources, the contemporary cinema press and Miasnikov’s study to establish the major preoccupations that shaped set design practices, aesthetics and theory in early-Soviet cinema in the 1920s and 1930s. As Widdis states, it is beyond the limits of her chapter to provide a comprehensive study of early-Soviet set design; rather, her aim is to draw attention to set design as an ‘overlooked part of Soviet film history’ and to encourage research in the field. The research of Miasnikov and Widdis thus provides a crucial starting point for this thesis’s examination of kino-khudozhniki. In contrast to Miasnikov and Widdis, however, who take the 1917 Revolution as a historical divide, this thesis examines how the working practices of kino-khudozhniki evolved across late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinemas in order to trace the continuities, as well as the changes, that cut across traditional historical periodisations.

Although very few studies address set design as their main focus, scenery is regularly commented on in scholarship on late-Imperial Russian and early-Soviet cinema. Scholars such as Ian Christie, Denise Youngblood, David Gillespie and Julia Sutton-Mattocks have considered set

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 332.
design in their analyses of how contemporary artistic movements influenced the aesthetics of certain films. Apart from Sutton-Mattocks, however, these scholars do not trace the roots of influence through film-makers’ training or their connections with artistic movements. Neia Zorkaia, Iurii Tsiv’ian and Valentina Kuznetsova have also explored how film-makers drew on certain representational strategies employed by artists and borrowed motifs from the visual arts. In her doctoral thesis, Oksana Chefranova examines how the early practice of Evgenii Bauer in the graphic arts, designing amusement gardens and creating theatre sets influenced his work as a film-maker. These scholars demonstrate how film-makers’ borrowing of techniques from the spheres of theatre and painting reveals their wider interests in exploring the nature of cinematic representation in relation to other art forms.

Tsiv’ian, Rachel Morley, Mikhail Iampol’skii, Alyssa DeBlasio and Widdis have all discussed how film-makers working across the period under consideration used sets in relation to their experiments with the expressive potential of cinema. While in their analyses of late-Imperial cinema Tsiv’ian, DeBlasio and Iampol’skii focus mainly on the films of Bauer – the acknowledged major Russian film-maker of this era – Morley, in her book *Performing Femininity: Woman as Performer in Early Russian Cinema* (2017), considers a number of different early Russian film-makers. Like Morley, this thesis explores the use of set design in late-Imperial cinema beyond the works of Bauer to show that many other early kino-khudozhniki experimented with cinematic space and representation in films. In her studies on early-Soviet cinema, Widdis draws

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38 Morley, *Performing Femininity.*
on theories of haptic perception to examine how film-makers used set elements in connection with their interest in models of spectatorship that were embodied and multi-sensory. She argues that Soviet film-makers’ experiments with faktura [texture], cinematic space and perception formed part of a broad revolutionary project to remake the relationship of Soviet subjects to their surrounding material environment by offering a new sensory apprehension of the world. Widdis’s study thus provides a model for how set design can be studied in relation to theoretical questions about the material environment.

C. Literature on the Construction and the Representation of the Material Environment in Russia Art

Since the publication in 1974 of Stephan Bann’s *The Tradition of Constructivism*, the first English-language study to consider the activities of early twentieth-century Russian artists outside the fine arts, a number of scholars have analysed how Russian artists became involved with a wide range of media in their pursuits to transform the material environment. Studies have examined creative practices, including ceramic design, textile production, advertising, and theatre design. In particular, Christina Lodder in her book *Constructive Strands in Russian Art 1914-1937* (2005) demonstrates how artists associated with Constructivism explored a range of creative endeavours. She argues that the movement’s aim to ‘shape the very stuff with which people live their everyday lives’ should not be interpreted in a narrow sense as producing utilitarian objects; rather, it represented a broad venture to integrate art with social life. In a similar vein to Lodder, Roann Barris and Christina Kiaer claim that Constructivist artists working in the realms of theatre and production art were concerned not only with creating new design

39 Widdis, ‘Faktura’ and her Socialist Senses.
46 Ibid.
prototypes, but also with transforming the relationship between people and things.\textsuperscript{47} Very few studies have, however, explored how artists also engaged with cinema in relation to their goal of transforming the relationship between people and their surrounding material environment. Monographs on individual artists who designed cinema sets, such as Aleksandr Rodchenko, tend to treat their involvement in cinema parenthetically, if at all.\textsuperscript{48}

Additionally, cultural historians such as Karen Kettering, Susan Reid and Marie Collier have examined the ways in which images of interiors and architecture published in contemporary journals framed debates about the material environment relating to domestic comfort, living standards and industrial construction.\textsuperscript{49} In her doctoral thesis, Maria Pasholok also explores how the domestic interior was represented in films and literature in the 1910s and 1920s.\textsuperscript{50} Despite her interest in interior scenery in cinema, however, Pasholok focuses on the role of the director and does not consider the work of \textit{kino-khudozhniki}. These cultural historians argue that images of architecture and the object world played a crucial role in informing cultural attitudes towards issues such as domesticity, consumer culture and industrialisation. Their studies thus provide a model for exploring not only how films provided a platform to promote new design aesthetics, but also how cinema discourses helped to shape debates about the material environment.

\textbf{III. Approach and Scope}

In its examination of how cinematic representations of the material environment related to wider cultural attitudes of the period, this thesis follows the approach of cultural historians such as Kettering, Reid and Collier. Like these scholars, rather than focussing on questions of style and iconography, I consider forms of visual culture, such as cinema, in relation to the social and historical context of their production, in order to suggest that they served an active role in


shaping cultural attitudes. I therefore combine close formal analyses of films and related visual material with discussion of socio-cultural and historical discourses of the period about the material environment. In addition to examining how issues relating to different material environments were discussed in newspapers, specialised journals and the popular press, I engage with the writings of cultural theorists, such as Boris Arvatov, Viktor Shklovskii and Sergei Tret’iakov. I choose to ground my discussion of debates about the material environment principally in discourses contemporaneous to the period under consideration, rather than to draw on the wide tradition of theoretical studies on materiality. In so doing, my thesis follows historicist approaches of interpretation such as the Cambridge School, which primarily analyse social discourses in the intellectual context of a given historical era.

In addition to exploring the intellectual contexts in which films were received, I also analyse the historically and culturally specific contexts in which they were produced. In so doing, I adopt a similar approach to industrial analyses in Film Studies that consider cinema as a cultural industry. In order to elucidate how the real working practices of kino-khudozhniki evolved, I examine primary sources, including film-makers’ memoirs, set design manuals and the contemporary cinema press, as well as such documents as studio contracts, expense receipts and production stills held at the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiry literatury i iskusstva (RGALI, Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts), the Gosudarstvennyi fond kinofil’mov Rossiiskoi Federatsii (Gosfil’mofond, State Film Archive of the Russian Federation) in Belye stolby and the Muzei kino in Moscow. Many film-makers’ memoirs and articles in the contemporary cinema press were concerned more with advancing a particular perception about kino-khudozhnik and their role than with describing actual working practices. I therefore analyse these texts not only in terms of their content, but also in that of their use of language, focussing on how shifts in terminology related to different perceptions about the kino-khudozhnik and the practice of set design.

Although a number of the kino-khudozhniki considered in this thesis worked in studios in the


52 For discussion of historicist approaches, such as those of the Cambridge School, see Mark Bevir, ‘The Contextual Approach’ in George Klosko (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of The History of Political Philosophy, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 11-23.

Soviet republics in the 1920s, my focus is exclusively on their work in Russia. An examination of the work of kino-khudozhniki in the Soviet republics would require further research, in order to explore issues — for example about the institutional relationship between regional studios and the central administration of film production based in Moscow and Leningrad, the differences between local and national cinema aesthetics and contemporary interests in ethnic culture and the primitive “other” — that are beyond the scope of this present study.

The chronological cut-off point for this thesis is the advent of sound technology at the beginning of the 1930s. The transition to sound posed technical challenges and altered working practices for many film-makers, including kino-khudozhniki. The limitations of early sound technology meant that a larger number of films were shot in studios, which in turn placed greater demands on artificial scenery. In terms of European and Hollywood cinemas, the advent of sound technology in the 1930s is generally seen to have ushered in a golden age in studio set design. More research is needed to analyse the extent to which this assessment holds true for Soviet cinema. The influence of the transition to sound on Soviet cinema design warrants its own attention and lies beyond the parameters of this thesis’s aims.

IV. Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter One addresses the major preoccupations affecting the theory and practice of set design in late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema. Drawing on archival and primary sources, I provide a typology of kino-khudozhniki and their working practices, examining their professional backgrounds, artistic training and the factors that motivated their move to work in Russia’s nascent cinema industry. I also explore the relationship between kino-khudozhniki, other film-makers and production departments and examine the responsibilities that they held in film-making teams. In considering how the kino-khudozhnik acted as a bridge between the technical and creative sides of studio film production, this chapter emphasises the importance that film-makers ascribed to the qualities of versatility, technical expertise and a collaborative work ethic, in addition to individual artistic vision.

The subsequent four chapters analyse the sets that kino-khudozhniki created for specific films.

55 Lilya Kaganovsky argues that the arrival of sound technology, coupled with both the shift in Soviet economic policy towards the centralisation of industry and the advent of Socialist Realism as the official method for all cultural forms, instigated the restructuring of the Soviet film industry, engendering a change ‘not only in the kinds of films that were being made, but also who was making them, where, with what equipment, and for what audience’. Ibid., p. 294.
These chapters are thematic, with each examining the representation of a different material environment: the rural provinces, the domestic interior, the workplace and spaces associated with artistic creation and performance. These environments have been selected on the grounds that they were among the main settings that characterised Russian and Soviet films in the silent era. Indeed, in 1919 the film-maker Aleksandr Razumnyi included four of them – a room in a workers’ quarters, an office in a Soviet institution, the interior of a peasant izba and a domestic room in the city centre – in a proposed list of five standardised settings for films to be made by the newly nationalised and restructured Soviet cinema industry. In these thematic chapters, I draw on select case studies of films, rather than attempting to give a comprehensive overview, as my intention is not to provide an exhaustive account of the various ways in which different material environments were represented in Russian cinema, but to consider key characteristic features. The choice of case studies is intended to strike a balance between well-known films and less canonical works. In this way, I hope both to provide a different perspective on films that have a large body of secondary literature dedicated to them but have been little analysed in terms of their set design and to expand the canon of films typically considered in studies on Russian and Soviet cinema. My analyses of the case studies all follow a loosely chronological order, stretching from the first decade of Russian fiction cinema to the end of the silent era in the early 1930s. In this way, I attempt to delineate how aesthetic and ideological concerns developed across the period as a whole, and to consider issues of continuity and change between late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema.

Due to limitations in studio space and lighting technology, many of the first Russian fiction films were shot on location in rural settings. Chapter Two therefore explores the ways in which the rural provinces were represented in films. It examines how during the silent era the use of rural settings was tied to debates about the merits and disadvantages of outdoor filming as opposed to using artificial studio sets, paying particular attention to the writings and designs of the kino-khudozhnik Dmitrii Kolupaev, a key interlocutor in these discussions. As Kolupaev’s writings reveal, film-makers chose to use rural settings not only for practical considerations, however. Their use also illustrated film-makers’ interests in cinema’s capacity to convey ethnographic knowledge about traditional Russian life and customs. The chapter therefore also examines how throughout the 1910s and 1920s kino-khudozhniki strove for ethnographic authenticity in their scenery, but were also concerned with how an abundance of set details might affect the psychological tension and sense of atmosphere in films.

In Chapter Three, my examination turns to the urban environment. From the early to mid-1910s, film-makers increasingly used urban settings in their films. The chapter explores how

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kinokhudozhniki harnessed elements of interior design and architecture, including windows, doorways, curtains and patterned textiles, to enhance cinema’s expressive potential. In particular, it highlights the work of Boris Mikhin, one of the first kinokhudozhniki to use interior elements for their formal expressivity. The chapter argues that kinokhudozhniki such as Mikhin also, however, used interior sets to convey meaning about the inhabitants’ experience of domestic space and their attitudes to concerns such as luxury and comfort. While these issues were pertinent in the late-Imperial era, they acquired particular significance following the 1917 Revolution and during the New Economic Policy era (NEP, 1921-1927). Drawing on the writings of the cultural theorists Boris Arvatov and Sergei Tret’iakov, the chapter analyses how representations of domestic interiors in early-Soviet films related to wider social issues about material agency.

Chapter Four explores the material environment of the workplace. While a number of studies have emphasised the importance of the factory work floor in late-Imperial and early-Soviet culture, this chapter focuses on the environment of the private office or study. It examines how film-makers represented these spaces as realms associated with personal fantasy. As such, the chapter seeks to explore the place of imagination and pleasure in late-Imperial and early-Soviet discourses about work. A key focus of this chapter is Evgenii Bauer, who used private studies in many of his sets to comment on the fantasist nature of his male protagonists and on their exploitation of others for personal gain. This chapter then moves on to examine how Lev Kuleshov and Vasili Rakhal’s, both of whom worked as kinokhudozhniki under Bauer at the Khanzonkov studio, subsequently used the private study in films made after the Revolution, namely Proekt inzhenera Praita (Engineer Prait’s Project, 1918), Stachka (Strike, 1925) and Vasha znakomaiia (Your Acquaintance, 1927), to voice similar concerns as Bauer.

Finally, Chapter Five considers the cinematic representation of a number of spaces associated with artistic creation and performance, in particular artists’ ateliers, cinema auditoriums and studios, and the circus. It examines the evolving ways in which kinokhudozhniki used artistic settings to comment self-referentially on the nature of different creative practices and on cinema’s status as an artistic medium. In the early to mid-1910s kinokhudozhniki such as Mikhin, Vladimir Egorov and Bauer employed artists’ studios and used paintings as motifs in order to elevate cinema’s cultural standing and to question its relationship to artistic traditions. As the decade progressed, however, and artists’ studios began to be denounced for their associations with bourgeois culture, kinokhudozhniki turned instead to representing film-making environments in order to explore questions about cinema as both a creative practice and a cultural industry. By the end of the 1920s, film-makers shifted their interests away from ontological questions and focussed instead on issues relating to creative independence and the social function of art in
revolutionary life, using the circus as a metaphor for artistic liberation and political activism.
Chapter One
Early Russian and Soviet Кино-художники: Professional Backgrounds and Working Practices

[Кино-художник] – архитектор, живописец, и прикладник. Он должен знать почти все ремесла. Он должен не хуже оператора знать технику освещения, технику операторской работы (в частности свойства оптики). Не хуже режиссера он должен знать стиль исторической эпохи, отобразить которую как-то стремится та или иная картина, он должен уметь подходить к историческим явлениям с определенным методом.¹

[[The kino-khudozhnik] is an architect, a painter and an applied artist. He must know almost all crafts. He must know no worse than the camera operator lighting techniques, methods of camera operation (in particular optical properties). No worse than the director, he must know the styles of the historical eras which different films seek to show; he must be able to approach historical phenomena with a precise method.]

[Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Tekhnika kinoatel’e’, 1925]

Introduction

In a statement in his 1925 article ‘Tekhnika kinoatel’e’ (Film Studio Technology), cited as the epigraph to this chapter, Sergei Kozlovskii (1885-1962), the head of the art department at the Mezhrabpom-rus’ studio (known from 1928 as Mezhrabpomfil’m), insisted that it was essential for the kino-khudozhnik to be skilled in all the arts and involved in all aspects of film production. That this statement appeared with minor modifications in Kozlovskii’s writings on cinema on three further occasions within five years indicates the importance that he attached to the quality of versatility among kino-khudozniki.² While Kozlovskii’s statement is partly geared towards self-aggrandisement, it is clear from a number of articles and memoirs written by other film-makers that versatility did indeed characterise the work of the kino-khudozhnik in early Russian and Soviet cinema.³ Demonstrating a willingness to take on various film-making responsibilities, the kino-khudozhnik was a key figure in the aesthetic and technical decisions that led to the creation of a film. However, the varied nature of their work means that analysing the contribution of kino-khudozniki to film production is problematic, and this has contributed to the fact that they have not always been fully recognised for their input, either by contemporaries or by scholars writing

¹ Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Tekhnika kinoatel’e’, Kino i kul’tura, 5, 1925, pp. 57-59 (p. 57).

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subsequently on the period.

This chapter sets out to examine how the roles and working practices of *kino-khudozhniki* evolved in Russian cinema from the origins of the national fiction film industry in 1907 to the advent of sound technology at the beginning of the 1930s. The period under consideration was one of immense artistic change, a time when traditional boundaries between artistic media were contested and cinema emerged as a new art form and became increasingly professionalised as an industry. It was also a period of great social and ideological change in Russian life, which in turn affected the structure of the film industry and of arts institutions. I will analyse the evolving roles and working practices of *kino-khudozhniki* in relation to this cultural and social context. In this way, the chapter seeks to provide a typological account of *kino-khudozhniki*, assessing the conventions that were common among *kino-khudozhniki* in this period rather than circumstances that were specific to individuals. First, I will explore the professional backgrounds and prior artistic training of the figures who came to work as *kino-khudozhniki* and will consider how this influenced their approach to set design. I will then examine the reasons why film producers sought to recruit individuals to act as *kino-khudozhniki* and outline the pressures that informed the decision of individuals to take on this role at a time when Russian cinema was still very much in its infancy. Drawing on film-makers’ memoirs and the contemporary cinema press, I will next investigate the collaborative nature of the professional relationships that *kino-khudozhniki* formed with production departments and other film-makers, as well as the responsibilities that they came to acquire within film-making teams. In so doing, this chapter aims to shed light on the *kino-khudozhnik*’s contribution to the aesthetic and technical decisions involved in film production.

I. The Artistic Training and Pre-cinema Affiliations of *Kino-khudozhniki*

In contrast to the first generation of directors and camera operators, who had principally gained their skills through professional work experience in the commercial and entertainment spheres of theatre, still photography or actuality film-making, the first *kino-khudozhniki* to work in Russian cinema had all received formal training in the fine arts. Both Kozlovskii and Aleksandr Razumnyi (1891-1972) note that, because of their training, during the earliest years of cinema film-makers relied upon *kino-khudozhniki* for their knowledge of pictorial conventions and

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aesthetic styles. Many had studied at established fine arts institutes, such as the Akademiia khudozhestv (Academy of Arts) in Saint Petersburg (from 1914 Petrograd and from 1924 Leningrad), the Kievskii khudozhestvennyi institut (Kiev Art Institute), the Odesskoe khudozhestvennoe uchilishche (Odessa Art College) and the Moskovskoe uchilishche zhivopisi, vaiania i zodchestva (MUZhVZ, Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture). This differs from what Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street describe as the initial education of set designers working in other European cinemas of the period, who had generally trained at applied arts and technical colleges, where commercial imperatives took precedence over experimentation and individual artistic visions.

The particular institutes where kino-khudozhniki initially studied helped shape their creative outlook and approach. A number of kino-khudozhniki, including Viktor Aden (1880-1942), Dmitrii Kolupaev (1883-1954), Petr Mosiagin (1880-1960) and Ivan Stepanov (1887-1953), trained in the painting department at MUZhVZ under Konstantin Korovin, a member of the Mir iskusstva (World of Art) movement. The activities of Mir iskusstva played an important role in the first decades of the twentieth century in elevating theatre design, which had previously been considered a minor art form, to the height of fine art. Alongside his pedagogical work, from 1901 to 1918 Korovin designed scenery and costumes for the Imperial Theatres in Moscow and Saint Petersburg/Petrograd. His earliest designs, such as those for Nikolai Rimskii-Korsakov’s 1909 opera Zolotoi petushok (The Golden Cockerel), demonstrate a concern for surface detail and use intricate patterning and strong tonal juxtapositions to create a sense of vibrancy. In an unpublished article, preserved in his personal archive, Sergei Kozlovskii acknowledged the importance of Mir iskusstva to the sphere of set design. Following the example of Mir iskusstva, many early Russian kino-khudozhniki used patterned textiles and wallpaper to exploit the tonal variations and contrasts attainable with orthochromatic film to achieve a lively aesthetic. In her biography of Iosif Shpinel’ (1892-1980), who worked as a kino-khudozhnik for Vseukrains’ke foto kino upravlinnia (VUFKU, All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration) from 1928, Tat’iana Tarasova-Krasina writes that the Mir iskusstva exhibitions also influenced Shpinel’s early practice. Rather than aesthetics, it was the incorporation of architectural structures and the

6 Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris and Sarah Street, Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007, p. 35.
9 Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i isskustva (RGALI, Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts) f. 2394, op. 1, ed. khr. 72.
cohesion between figures and surroundings in the paintings of artists such as Aleksandr Benua [Benois], Konstantin Somov and Sergei Sudeikin that impressed Shpinel’. Moreover, Vladimir Balliuzeek (1881-1957), who began his career as a kino-khudozhnik in 1915 for the Ermol’ev studio, worked as an assistant to Benua on his theatre productions of the mid-1910s at the Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr (MKhT, Moscow Art Theatre). The art historian Valentina Kuznetsova notes that in his work on the Ermol’ev studio’s 1916 adaptation of Aleksandr Pushkin’s ‘Pikovaia dama’ (The Queen of Spades, 1834), Balliuzeek borrowed several compositions from Benua’s 1911 graphic illustrations of Pushkin’s text. The sequence in which German approaches the Countess’s apartment along a shadowy corridor, illuminated by a single lit doorway, closely resembles Benua’s illustrations (Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). In addition to these compositional similarities, Balliuzeek’s designs share with Benua’s illustrations a concern for the expressive function of light and shadow to create dramatic tension.

Fig. 1.1. Aleksandr Benua [Benois], illustration for Pikovaia dama, 1911.

12 Ibid.
Several kino-khudozhniki, including Evgenii Bauer (1865-1917), Vladimir Egorov (1878-1960), Mikhail Kozhin (1877-1966) and Aleksei Utkin (1891-1965), trained at the applied arts college, the Stroganovskoe uchilishche teknicheskogo risovaniia (Stroganov Institute for Technical Drawing), where they studied under the architect Fedor Shekhtel’.\textsuperscript{13} Shekhtel’ was a leading figure during the early 1900s in promoting a form of art nouveau in Russia, typically referred to as russkii modern.\textsuperscript{16} As Emma Widdis notes, the influence of russkii modern is evident in many of Bauer’s films and in the earliest designs of Utkin and Egorov for cinema.\textsuperscript{17} A striking example of this is the study of the wealthy factory owner, Zheleznov, in Bauer’s Nabat (The Alarm, 1917), which is executed in an exaggerated gothic style that was common for russkii modern town houses in Moscow during this period (Fig. 1.3).\textsuperscript{18} Specifically, the study’s soaring gothic structures, pointed arches, stained glass windows and deeply-carved woodwork, which create dramatic shadows, recall Shekhtel’’s designs for Zinaida Morozova’s mansion in Moscow.\textsuperscript{19} The Russian film scholar Neia Zorkaia writes that Vsevolod Meierkhol’d’s 1915 adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s Portrait of Dorian Grey (1890) for the Thiemann and Reinhardt studio also exhibits the russkii modern aesthetic through the ‘krasota linii’ [beauty of line] and the play of light and shadow created by its sets, which Egorov oversaw.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} For information on the russkii modern style, see Elena Borisova and Grigory Sternin, Russian Art Nouveau, New York: Rizzoli, 1988.
\textsuperscript{18} Borisova and Sternin, Russian Art Nouveau, p. 144.
\textsuperscript{19} For information on the Morozova mansion, see ibid., p. 74.
In addition to these connections with the *Mir iskusstva* and the *russkii modern* movements, *kino-khudozhniki* were active members of diverse artistic circles and participated in various group exhibitions, both nationally and internationally: Viktor Simov (1858-1935) exhibited alongside the *Preobrazhenniki* (Itinerants) in the 1880s and 1890s;\(^{21}\) Anatolii Arapov (1876-1948) participated with the *Golubaia roza* (Blue Rose) group of Symbolist artists in their landmark 1907 exhibition;\(^{22}\) the Impressionist-style landscape paintings of Shpinel´ and Kolupaev were acquired by museums for their contemporary art collections;\(^{23}\) and in 1919 Vasilii Kamardenkov (1897-1973) joined the Obshchestvo molodykh khudozhnikov (OBMOKhU, Society of Young Artists), known for their experiments with industrial materials and abstract spatial constructions, and exhibited alongside them in international exhibitions organised by the Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul´turnoi sviazi s zagranitsei (VOKS, All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) during the early 1920s.\(^{24}\)

Likewise, *kino-khudozhniki* refer in their memoirs to eclectic aesthetic influences, including both established traditions and contemporary avant-garde movements. Kozlovskii explains how Leonardo da Vinci’s writings on the need for artists to develop their visual memory and train their observational skills of the natural world influenced his creative approach.\(^{25}\) Following da

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\(^{23}\) Tarasova-Krasina, *Iosif Shpinel*, p. 10 and Miasnikov, *Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1936*, p. 95. Neither source specifies which museums acquired these artists’ works.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 96.

\(^{25}\) Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, p. 87.
Vinci’s teaching, as a young art student Kozlovskii compiled albums of sketches and photographs of Odessa’s daily life and architecture, which he later referred to when developing set designs. He also assembled albums of paintings of the various Moscow suburbs depicted in the works of the Peredvizhniki artists Mikhail Nesterov, Vasili Polenov and Isaak Levitan, which he consulted when working on films.26 Sergei Iutkevich (1904-1985) recalls how, while studying painting under Aleksandra Ekster at the Kievskoe khudozhestvennoe uchilishche (Kiev Art School), he developed an interest in Cubo-Futurism and its concern to express the movement of objects and figures through space and time.27 Additionally, Nikolai Suvorov (1889-1972) stresses the impact that the work of German Expressionist artists, in particular Otto Nagel and Heinrich Zille, had on his practice while he was a student at the Saratovskoe khudozhestvennoe uchilishche (Saratov Art School).28

However, while influence can be discerned in general terms, it is impossible to identify a single dominant stylistic influence among the training and early artistic careers of kino-khudozhniki. Importantly, in their memoirs many kino-khudozhniki identified with artistic movements and traditions more as conceptual approaches to visual representation that could be adapted than as aesthetic styles to be directly translated to cinema.29 As Kozlovskii wrote, ‘[…] культура живописного искусства создала свои законы, которые не были целиком обязательными для каждого [кино-художника], но они формировали в той или иной мере его художественное мировоззрение’ [[…] the tradition of painting established its own laws, which were not entirely obligatory for every [kino-khudozhnik], but which did inform in one way or another his artistic worldview].30

In addition to this eclectic mix of influences, kino-khudozhniki had experience of working with diverse artistic media. Arapov, Egorov, Evgenii Enei (1890-1971), Kozlovskii and Shpinel’ all trained in both architecture and painting.31 Most of the kino-khudozhniki working in early Russian and Soviet cinema also had experience in the graphic arts. Arapov, Isaak Makhlis (1893-1958), Kamardenkov, Kolupaev and Iutkevich worked professionally in the field, contributing

26 Ibid., p. 88.
30 Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, p. 90.
31 Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930, pp. 78-99.
illustrations to magazines and journals or designing posters. This experience in the graphic arts provided *kino-khudozhniki* with an understanding of the expressive potential of a monochrome palette and its capacity to create a sense of mass and spatial depth; it also gave them experience of working with sequences of images. In his memoirs, Iutkevich discusses how his background in the graphic arts led him to adopt an approach to cinema design that privileged the play of light and shadow. Iutkevich’s sketches for one of his first projects as a *kino-khudozhnik*, the Goskino studio’s *Predatel* (The Traitor, 1926), demonstrate this approach through their stark juxtapositions of dark and light as a means to model volume (Fig. 1.4). An interest in graphics is also noticeable in Egorov’s sketches for set designs, which are characterised by their use of thick, bold lines, flattened forms and strong tonal contrasts. The early-Russian film-maker Vladimir Gardin even noted that Egorov introduced a graphic approach to cinema design. Gardin explained that ‘для заданной сценарием декорации [Егоров] находил всегда ее синтетически-смысловое графическое выражение. Подробности устраивались, и “ценное” обозначалось так четко, что глаз не разглядывал, а видел, как на хорошем плакате’ [For the scenery specified by a scenario, Egorov always found a synthetic-semantic graphic expression. Details were eliminated, and the “essence” was conveyed so clearly that the viewer’s eye did not need to search about, but just saw, as with a good poster]. To some extent, stylistic eclecticism was a common feature of artistic culture in the 1910s and 1920s in Russia. Catherine Cooke argues that during this period architectural training encouraged experience working in diverse media. Interdisciplinary societies such as Zhivskulˇptarkh (Commission for Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, 1919-1920) also promoted a synthesis among the visual arts. The diversity in the professional training of *kino-khudozhniki* has led Widdis to argue that during the late-Imperial and early-Soviet period the *kino-khudozhnik* was seen primarily as a skilled artist, and that creative talent was more significant than specialism in a particular style or artistic medium.

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32 Makhlis contributed to the journals *Krokodil* and *Teatr*; Stepanov worked as a graphic artist; Arapov contributed to the journals *Vey* and *Zolotoe runo*; Kamardenkov worked as a poster designer; and Kolupaev designed posters for the ROSTA agency. See ibid., pp. 78-99.

33 Iutkevich, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (Molodost’), p. 41.


35 Ibid.


37 Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 322.
The career paths of \textit{kino-khudozhniki} typically led from the art institute to the theatre. For many, this choice was apparently motivated by financial concerns as much as by creative preference. Biographies of Czesław Sabiński (1885-1941), Boris Mikhin (1879-1963) and Egorov state that they came from peasant and working-class backgrounds and were forced to earn a living from their practice.\(^{38}\) As theatre designers, they became accustomed to working on a large scale and as part of a collective; they also acquired skills in using lighting technology, as well as an awareness of the need to consider the relationship between scenery and actors. As was typical for the period, they developed their skills through practical work as assistants to more experienced theatre designers.\(^{39}\) During the 1900s and 1910s, there existed very few opportunities to undergo formal training in theatre design. Although in 1909 the Stroganovskoe uchilishche tekhnickeskogo risovaniia established a theatre-design department, none of the \textit{kino-khudozhniki} who studied there seems to have been connected with it.\(^{40}\) Theatre-design training remained limited even in the 1920s. In 1924, the Vysshie khudozhestvenno-tekhnnicheskie masterskie (VKhUTEEMAS, Higher State Artistic and Technical College) founded a theatre-design department.


\(^{40}\) Isaev, \textit{Stroganovka 1825-1918}, p. 183.
design course within its painting department under the directorship of Isaak Rabinovich (1894-1961), who worked as the *kino-khudozhnik* on Iakov Protazanov’s films *Proces o trekh millionakh* (The Case of the Three Million, 1926) and *Belyi orel* (White Eagle, 1928) and designed sculptures for Protazanov’s *Aelita* (1924). Iutkevich briefly attended the course while working as a designer for Moscow theatres. The course focused predominantly on the study of painterly methods, and students carried out very few experiments in three-dimensional form. It was practical experience working in the theatre, therefore, rather than theatre-design pedagogy, that was important for training *kino-khudozhniki* in the technical aspects of materials and three-dimensional construction.

It is perhaps not surprising that the majority of *kino-khudozhniki* working in late-Imperial Russian and early-Soviet cinema had previous experience of working as theatre designers. What is notable, however, is the fact that so many of them gained this experience from working at the MKhT during the 1900s and 1910s. The individuals who worked there during this period include Sabiński (1908-09), Mikhin (1910), Egorov (1905-12), Kolupaev (1906-12), Arapov (1910), Balliuzelek (1915) and Simov (1898-1912 and 1925-35). The approach to set design at the MKhT at this time is intimately connected with Viktor Simov, who worked as Head of Design there from its inception in 1898 until 1912, and again from 1925 until his death in 1935. Simov also worked intermittently in film as a *kino-khudozhnik* for the Rus’ studio in the late 1910s and for Mezhrabpom-rus’ during the 1920s. Under Simov, the MKhT initially adopted a Realist approach to set design. In line with its repertoire, which was dominated by the dramas of Anton Chekhov, contemporary settings of everyday life replaced the Romantic-style landscapes that were typical of Imperial Theatre productions at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The MKhT departed from the common practice adopted by theatres during this period of reusing scenery in numerous productions; instead, a team of in-house designers created sets for individual performances from scratch. Wall-papered rooms with real wooden furniture and stucco architectural features replaced the painted canvas backcloths that were typical of theatre design up to this point (Fig. 1.5). Simov also introduced more complex spatial compositions: niches, recesses and corners were used to

42 Iutkevich, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 1 (*Molodost’*), p. 32.
43 ‘Teatral’no-dekorativnoe odelenie zhivopisnogo fakul’teta VKhUTEMASa’, pp. 75-76.
44 Widdis also notes that a significant number of *kino-khudozhniki* worked at the MKhT. Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 319.
46 Nekhoroshev, *Dekorator Khudozhestvennogo teatra Viktor Andreevich Simov*, p. 5.
48 Ibid., p. 16.
49 Ibid., pp. 16-18.
convey different depths and to create a series of interconnected spaces among which different elements of the narrative were staged.\textsuperscript{50} Rooms were inclined at an angle to break up the traditional format of the box-shaped unit frontally facing the audience. Structures such as balustrades and benches were often placed in the foreground to emphasise the ‘fourth wall’, the illusory barrier at the front of the proscenium stage that separates the audience from the production (Fig. 1.6).\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Kino-khudozhniki} employed similar techniques in cinema design in the 1910s and the 1920s. For example, in the Thiemann and Reinhardt studio’s \textit{Kreitserova sonata} (The Kreutzer Sonata, 1914), Mikhin created sets consisting of a series of interconnected spaces of different depths and dimensions that were linked by a combination of doorways, arches and staircases. In one scene, he placed a balustrade in the extreme foreground (Fig. 1.7). Initially, the action takes place behind this feature, which serves to reveal the ‘fourth wall’. The presence of a ‘fourth wall’ is again emphasised in a subsequent scene in which the actors are shot through a window frame and against a background of draped curtains, referencing the stage curtains of the theatre. From 1909, Simov began to move away from the strict adherence to Realism that had characterised earlier MKhT productions, instead adopting an approach to set design based on the use of neutral backdrops and the incorporation of a few objects characteristic of the setting and the period of the production.\textsuperscript{52} From the early to mid-1910s \textit{kino-khudozhniki} also exploited a similar method in films, and in the early 1920s austere settings dominated Soviet cinema.\textsuperscript{53}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig15.jpg}
\caption{Viktor Simov’s interior set for the 1898 MKhT production of Anton Chekov’s \textit{Chaika} (The Seagull).}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Pozharskaia, \textit{Russkoe teatral’no-dekoratsionnoe iskusstvo}, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{52} Nekhoroshev, \textit{Dekorator Khudozhestvennogo teatra Viktor Andreevich Simov}, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{53} Cavendish notes the use of ‘spartan’ sets in several Soviet films of the 1920s. See Cavendish, \textit{The Men with the Movie Camera}, pp. 161 & 182. See also Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 324.
Fig. 1.6. Simov’s exterior set for the 1898 MKhT production of Chekov’s Chaika.

Fig. 1.7. Boris Mikhin’s set for Krietserova sonata.
In addition to Simov, Egorov also played a major role in the development of set design at the MKhT, where he worked as a designer from 1905 to 1920.\(^54\) The period 1905-12, when he worked alongside Vsevolod Meierkhol’d at Konstantin Stanislavskii’s experimental Studia na Povarskoï (Studio on Povarskaïa) is widely considered his most productive.\(^55\) In contrast to Simov, Egorov advanced an approach to set design that drew upon Symbolist tendencies, which placed greater emphasis on the creation of atmosphere as a way for the audience to identify with the emotions and psychology of characters. In line with this, Egorov introduced the use of plain, black velvet backgrounds in a 1907 production of Leonid Andreev’s *Zhizn’ cheloveka* (The Life of a Man) to heighten the expressive effect of lighting (Fig. 1.8).\(^56\) His use of gauzes and heavy velvets for the MKhT’s 1908 production of Maurice Maeterlink’s *Sinaia ptitsa* (Blue Bird) won critical acclaim for the way they enhanced the interplay of shadow and light to create dramatic tension.\(^57\) When the production was performed in Paris, the critic E. Beskin even referred to Egorov’s designs as ‘cinematographic’ for their exploitation of light.\(^58\) Oksana Chefranova notes that gauze veils were also used in *fleerie* theatre in the 1900s and early 1910s in order to create a sense of receding spatial depth.\(^59\) From the mid-1910s, *kino-khudozhniki* similarly experimented with ways of using textiles to create tonal variations. As several scholars have noted, Bauer in his sets for *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi* (Twilight of a Woman’s Soul, 1913) used layers of textiles of various opacities – from diaphanous tulle to heavy, black velvet – to create lighting effects that evoked symbolic associations and to convey the psychology of the film’s protagonists.\(^60\) Miasnikov writes that Protazanov also used black velvet backgrounds for the non-extant film *Grekh* (Sin, 1916) to create a tense atmosphere.\(^61\)

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58 Ibid., p. 560. Although Egorov used sets to play with different light effects, it is unclear whether he also experimented with lighting technology itself.


The influence of the MKhT on set design in film was manifest not only in specific stylistic approaches, but also in the reconceptualisation of the figure of the designer. Scholars typically consider the MKhT under Stanislavskii’s leadership in terms of its elevation of the director to an auteur position.\(^62\) However, it also promoted a new conception of the designer’s role in theatre: no longer was the designer simply a technical craftsman; rather, he played a decisive role in the development of an overall production. Before joining the MKhT, Simov worked as a minor designer for Savva Mamontov’s Private Opera in 1885.\(^63\) During the late-nineteenth century, Mamontov’s Private Opera was a cradle of artistic experimentation in set design.\(^64\) By enlisting as designers highly-esteemed artists, including Valentin Serov and Viktor Vasnetsov, the opera helped legitimise theatre as an artistic practice.\(^65\) Although in his memoirs Simov complains that, as a minor designer, his involvement in productions was limited, Mamontov’s Private Opera is generally considered to have promoted close collaboration between its designers and directors.\(^66\)

As head designer at the MKhT, Simov advanced a similar approach to design and involved himself in all the developmental stages of a production: he attended castings and readings; brought models of sets to rehearsals to enable actors to gain an appreciation of the production’s

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\(^63\) Pozharskaia, *Russkoe teatral’no-dekoratsionnoe iskusstvo*, p. 87.

\(^64\) For discussion of the impact of Mamontov’s Private Opera on the development of Russian theatre design, see Olga Hadley, *Mamontov’s Private Opera: The Search for Modernism in Russian Theater*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.

\(^65\) Ibid., p. 88.

setting (Fig. 1.9); and worked together with Stanislavskii on the preparation of prompt-books for actors.\textsuperscript{67} Reflecting on Simov’s work during the early 1900s, Stanislavskii would later write that he assumed the position of a co-director: ‘[Симов] был создателем новой эры в области художественного оформления, родоначальником нового типа художников-режиссеров’ [\textsuperscript{68}][[Simov] was the founder of a new era in the sphere of artistic scenery, the forerunner of a new type of artist-director].

Simov used this approach to set design for his work on the film \textit{Dev’i gory} (The Virgin Hills, 1919) for the Rus’ studio. According to Moisei Aleinikov, the proprietor of Rus’, the film was conceived as a collaboration between the realms of theatre and cinema.\textsuperscript{69} In addition to Simov, Aleinikov enlisted the MKhT director Aleksandr Sanin and a cast of 150 personnel from the MKhT and the Malyi Theatre for the production.\textsuperscript{70} The film’s primary goal was to ‘[…] pomogat’ akteru, ego perevoploshcheniiu, vyrazitel’nosti akterskikh sredstv’ [\textsuperscript{71}][[to help the actor in his embodiment and expression of the acting method]], and its design played a significant role in the realisation of this task. According to Aleinikov, Sanin and Simov paid close attention to the role of sets in creating atmosphere, which would help actors identify with their characters. As he had done at the MKhT, Simov made models of all the sets and brought them to the studio during filming. As Aleinikov observes, these models ensured a cohesion in

\textsuperscript{67} Nekhoroshev, \textit{Dekorator Khudozhestvennogo teatra Viktor Andreevich Simov}, p. 226. Several of Simov’s models are preserved at the Muzei Khudozhestvennogo teatra (The Moscow Art Theatre Museum) in Moscow.

\textsuperscript{68} Cited in Pozharskaia, \textit{Russkoe teatral’no-dekoratsionnoe iskusstvo}, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{69} Moisei Aleinikov, \textit{Puti sovetskogo kino i MKhAT}, Moscow: Goskinoizdat, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
style throughout the film.72 Aleinikov also notes that the close collaboration between Sanin, Simov and the camera operator Iurii Zheliabuzhskii helped raise the standard of production practices at Rus’ and set a precedent for future works.73 Thus it becomes clear that, while the literature which studies the influence of the MKhT on early Russian and Soviet cinema typically focuses on the development of acting techniques, the theatre’s influence on the development of set design in film, both stylistically and conceptually, is also significant.74

Specialist training for *kino-khudozhniki* only began to be developed in the mid-1920s. In 1924, an *arkhitekturno-dekorativnyi* [architectural-decorative] department was established at the Gosudarstvennyi tekhnikum kinematografii (GTK, State Institute of Cinematography) (from 1925 Gosudarstvennyi institut kinematografii, GIK) under the direction of Kozlovskii and the architect Konstantin Mel’nikov, who was closely associated with the Constructivist movement.75 Little information about the nature of the course exists except that the duration of study was three years.76 Considering both Kozlovskii and Mel’nikov’s interest at the time in developing methods of rationalising production processes, it can be assumed that the course had a practical, rather than theoretical, orientation and a concern for innovating design solutions to production processes.77 The first cohort of students graduated from the course in 1927 and included Moisei Aronson (dates unknown), who worked as a *kino-khudozhnik* from 1929; Feliks Bogoslavskii (dates unknown), who worked as a *kino-khudozhnik* from 1928; Valentina Khmeleva (1903-?), one of the first women *kino-khudozhniki*, who also worked in film from 1928; and Arnol’d Vaisfel’d (1906-1966), who worked as a *kino-khudozhnik* from 1929.78 In 1925, the Kievskii khudozhestvennyi institut opened a *foto-kinoteatral’noe* [photography, cinema and theatre] department. Vladimir Tatlin, one of the main proponents of the Constructivist movement, headed the department and gave lectures on material culture.79 Tatlin’s approach to material culture focused on the expressive potential of the *faktura* [texture] of materials, the use of new, technologically advanced materials and the innovation of techniques for processing materials.80 Although Tatlin never

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., pp. 52-53.
76 Miasnikov, *Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918-1930*, p. 41.
77 For information on Mel’nikov’s practice, see Selim O. Khan-Magomedov, *Konstantin Mel’nikov, Moscow: Stroiizdat*, 1990.
worked in film, he did appreciate the medium’s capacity to reveal different types of faktura, and he incorporated a film projector into his designs for the 1923 stage production of Viktor (Velimir) Khlebnikov’s Zangezi for this purpose.\(^{81}\) The kino-khudozhniki who graduated from the department include Vladimir Kaplunovskii (1906-1969), Morits Umanskii (1907-1948) and Iurii Shvets (1902-1972), all of whom began to work in film in 1929.\(^{82}\) The appointment of figures associated with Constructivism as directors of film courses at both the GTK and the Kievskii khudozhestvennyi institut reflects the rich dialogue that existed between the movement and cinema during the 1920s.\(^{83}\) Several practitioners associated with the movement, including Andrei Burov, Anton Lavinskii and Aleksandr Rodchenko, collaborated on designs for cinema in the late 1920s.\(^{84}\) Moreover, in a 1927 article in the journal Svetskoe kino Rodchenko associated the work of Kozlovskii in innovating production methods with the Productivist branch of the Constructivist movement.\(^{85}\)

In 1927, the Gosudarstvennyi institut istorii iskusstv (GIII, State Institute for the History of Arts) in Leningrad established a cinema department in its faculty of languages and material culture.\(^{86}\) The courses were theoretical and followed a formalist approach, which investigated aesthetic concerns about the nature of film and its relation to other art forms.\(^{87}\) Students were required to take courses in all of the faculty’s departments, which included a material culture and fine art department and a theatre department.\(^{88}\) In 1929, the kino-khudozhnik Boris Dubrovskii-Eshke (1897-1963) founded a special department of film art direction at the Akademiia khudozhestsv.\(^{89}\) According to the graphic artist Viktor Ivanov, who worked as a kino-khudozhnik at Mezhrabpomfilm during the 1930s, Dubrovskii-Eshke’s courses were so popular that all the students from the theatre design department transferred to the department of film art direction.\(^{90}\) Both the departments at the Akademiia khudozhestv and the GIII were short-lived, and produced few kino-khudozhniki of note. However, the establishment of specialist training within arts institutes does suggest that a broader education in the arts continued to be perceived as important for film design. Archival documents relating to the founding of the film art direction department at the Akademiia khudozhestv indicate that Dubrovskii-Eshke placed

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81 Zangezi was performed on 11, 13 and 30 May at the Moscow Muzei zhivopisnoi kul’tury (MZhK, Museum of Painterly Culture). See ibid., pp. 248-49.
88 Ibid.
particular emphasis on the development of painting and drawing skills in preparing future *kino-khudozhniki*, as well as the acquisition of a wide knowledge of artistic styles. This outlook persisted well into the 1930s, and when an arts faculty was eventually opened at VGIK in 1938, the easel painter Fedor Bogorodskii was appointed as the director. The foundation of specialist training also points towards a growing desire to professionalise the activity of the *kino-khudozhnik*; this is similarly reflected in the increased publication of texts on technical and conceptual aspects of the practice from the mid-1920s. Indeed, in 1925 Kozlovskii proposed that a special section of the film journal *Kino-zhurnal ARK* should be dedicated to publishing information on technical innovations in set design as guidance for novice *kino-khudozhniki*. In 1930, Kozlovskii together with the critic Nikolai Kolin published a comprehensive, book-length manual, *Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino* (The Artist-Architect in Cinema), on practical and aesthetic aspects of film set design.

Although opportunities for aspiring *kino-khudozhniki* to gain specialist instruction increased as the 1920s progressed, articles in the cinema press continued to lament the inadequacy of training. In *Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino*, Kolin and Kozlovskii recognised that it was not only the curricula of courses that were a concern, but also the type of institute that should be responsible for delivering training. According to them, it was still not clear whether an arts school such as VKhUTEMAS, a cinema training establishment such as GIK, or an entirely new institution should be responsible for educating *kino-khudozhniki*. This lack of resolution over the nature of training suggests that cinema design continued throughout the silent era to be appreciated as an essentially hybrid practice, which drew on diverse skills and disciplines, and that into the 1930s breadth of experience was still valued over specialism.

### II. *Kino-khudozhniki* and the Russian and Soviet Studio System

Although most of the first Russian *kino-khudozhniki* established enduring and successful careers in cinema that stretched over several decades, it seems that the majority of them did not make the choice to work in the industry independently but were actively recruited to join studios.

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91 RGALI f. 2605, op. 1, ed. kh. 27.
97 Ibid.
98 Balliuzek, Kozlovskii, Rakhal’s and Sabiński worked in cinema up to its mobilization towards the war effort in 1942, while the careers of Egorov, Enei, Suvorov, Shpinel’ and Utkin stretched into the 1950s and beyond.
Memoirs suggest that few kinokhudozhniki had a genuine, prior interest in the medium. Sabiński recalls that in the 1900s and early 1910s cinema was not yet considered an art but a lower form of entertainment, and that it was intuition which led him to accept Maurice Maître’s offer to join Pathé as head of its art department.  

99 Mikhin also notes the low esteem in which cinema was held at this time. Unlike other kinokhudozhniki, however, Mikhin consciously took advantage of cinema’s low status. Recognising the poor quality of film sets, Mikhin explains that he entered cinema with the desire to improve the standard of its design and mindful of the prospect of financial gain.  

In 1910, he approached the film producer Aleksandr Khanzhonkov and demanded to be provided with workers, material and an advance payment of one hundred rubles in return for creating custom-made sets to replace those that the studio borrowed from the theatre. Although outraged by Mikhin’s audacity, Khanzhonkov agreed, believing that a studio khudozhnik would improve the artistic quality of his films.  

Within a month Mikhin had secured a high salary, a flat in Moscow and respect among other members of the studio.  

As Denise J. Youngblood notes, many early Russian film producers were motivated by a sincere desire to gain artistic respectability for cinema. To this end, they promoted cinema as ‘a community of cultured individuals’ by inviting established creatives from other artistic spheres, most notably directors, actors and designers from the theatre.  

For the Thiemann and Reinhardt biographical film about the writer Lev Tolstoi, Ukhod velikogo starca (The Departure of the Great Old Man, 1912), the director Iakov Protazanov recruited as the kinokhudozhnik the painter and sculptor Ivan Kavaleridze, who was working on a commission of a portrait bust of Tolstoi at the time.  

Impressed by the MKhT’s 1915 production of Aleksandr Pushkin’s Malen’kie tragedii (Little Tragedies, 1830), Protazanov sought out Balliuzek, who had worked with Benua on the production’s scenery, for the position of kinokhudozhnik for his 1916 adaptation of Pushkin’s ‘Pikoviya dama’.  

In 1915, the studio Thiemann, Reinhardt, Osipov and Co. approached Egorov to work on Portret Doriana Greia. According to Gardin, Egorov’s arrival at the studio was significant in elevating the artistic quality of cinema: ‘У Тимана появился художник В. Е. Егоров. Повсюду заговорили о новом направлении в постановках фирмы, о введении живописных приемов, о построении кадра, основанном на принципе красоты общедекоративного плана’ [The artist V. E. Egorov came to Thiemann. Everywhere people
began talking about a new direction in the firm’s productions, about the introduction of pictorial techniques and about the construction of frames based on the beauty of the overall decorative scheme]. Additionally, Aleinikov acknowledges that during the late 1910s Rus’ consciously borrowed conventions from established art forms to improve the aesthetic quality of productions and the organisation of studio practices. In line with this, Aleinikov invited Simov to work on several productions for the studio. Film producers continued to employ this tactic during the Soviet period. For Deorets i krepost’ (The Palace and the Fortress, 1923) – one of the first Soviet films to be exported to a foreign market – Sevzapkino enlisted the architect Vladimir Shchuko to oversee the film’s design. Widdis also notes that Sovkino recruited Burov, a member of the Ob’edinenie sovremennykh arkhitectorov (OSA, Society of Modern Architects), to create the Constructivist-style dairy farm for Sergei Eisenstein’s Staroe i novoe (The Old and the New, 1929).

The way in which kino-khudozhniki were initially credited for their work similarly reflects the desire of early Russian film-makers to associate cinema with high culture. For the Khanzhonkov studio’s early productions in 1908, Pesn’ pro kuptsa Kalashnikova (Song about the Merchant Kalashnikov) and Russkaia svad’ba XVI stoletiia (A Sixteenth-Century Russian Wedding), Veniamin Vishnevskii’s filmography notes that the kino-khudozhnik V. Fester created his designs ‘po risunkam’ [according to the drawings] of the acclaimed Russian painters Vasnetsov and Konstantin Makovskii. Likewise, the designs for the joint Khanzhonkov and Pathé production God 1812 (The Year 1812, 1912), made to mark the centenary of the Great Patriotic War of 1812, were recorded as being based on Vasili Vereshchagin’s celebrated painting cycle of the same subject, which was being exhibited in Moscow at the same time as the film’s release. This promotional strategy continued to be used throughout the mid-1910s. Publicity material for Aleksandr Drankov’s Trekhsotletie tsarstvovaniia doma Romanova (The Tercentenary of the House of Romanov, 1913) advertised that Bauer’s designs were based on Vasnetsov, Makovskii and Ivan Bilibin. From 1915, promotional material in the cinema press began to use cinema design widely as a marketing tool: film stills of richly decorated interiors occupied full and half-page spreads; adverts publicised a production’s ‘roskoshnye’ [luxurious] costumes and sets and its ‘chudnaia’ [wondrous] representation of nature; and the names of kino-khudozhniki featured in an equally prominent position beside that of the director, well-known

110 Aleinikov, Putei svetskogo kino i MKhAT, p. 52.
111 Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 323. The film was originally titled General’naia liniia (The General Line).
114 See Zhivoi ekran, 12, 1913, p. 1.
theatre actors and the author of a film’s literary text. Indeed, *Sine-fono* advertised Egorov’s involvement in *Portret Doriana Greia* with a full-page spread.\textsuperscript{116} In other advertising material for the film in the journal, Egorov’s name was featured in bold type next to that of the famous Meierkhol’d himself.

The inclusion of the names of *kino-khudozniki* during this period marks a significant step forward in the recognition of their contribution to cinema. Their position was further cemented by the fact that, from 1918, the weekly cinema journal *Kino-gazeta* began to include a regular feature on individual *khudozniki*, with articles on Utkin, Aleksandr Loshakov, Kuleshov and Egorov.\textsuperscript{117} However, throughout the 1910s films continued to be produced without formally accrediting *kino-khudozniki*. According to Miasnikov, only seven out of the fifteen films released in 1919 credited *kino-khudozniki*.\textsuperscript{118} Formal recognition of creative input was a matter of concern among *kino-khudozniki* during the 1920s also. In 1928, the section of *khudoznikov-arkhitektorov* published a resolution in which they demanded that *kino-khudozniki* must be formally recognised for their work.\textsuperscript{119}

During the 1910s and 1920s, *kino-khudozniki* were employed on both flexible and permanent studio contracts. Little information exists about the terms of these contracts, however. Both late-Imperial and early-Soviet studios would typically employ a ‘postoiannyi’ [permanent] *kino-khudoznik*. Mikhin oversaw the design department of the Khanzhonkov studio from 1909 to 1913, when growing tensions over pay, as well as Antonina Khanzhonkova’s interference with set design, forced him to leave for the Taldykin studio.\textsuperscript{120} Sabiński worked as the head of the art department at Pathé until 1914, when he followed Protazanov and Gardin to join the Ermol’ev studio. Throughout the 1920s, Kozlovskii and Vasilii Rakhal’s headed the design departments at the Mezhrabpom-rus’ (from 1928 Mezhrabpom-fil’m) and the Goskino (from 1924 Sovkino) studios respectively. Studios would also, however, engage individuals for particular commissions, resulting in a high level of mobility among *kino-khudozniki*. Between 1923 and 1930, for example, Vladimir Balluzek worked on films for Mezhrabpom-rus’, Sevzapkino and Sovkino, as well as the Belarusian Belgoskino, the VUFKU and the Azerbaidzhanskoe fotokino.

\textsuperscript{115} For example, see publicity material for *Venetsianskii istukan’* in *Sine-fono*, 13, 1915, pp. 6-7. Anna Kovalova also notes that from 1914/1915, cinema journals began to use outlandish marketing slogans for films. See Anna Kovalova, ‘World War I and Pre-Revolutionary Russian Cinema’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 11, 2017, 2, pp. 92-117 (p. 98).

\textsuperscript{116} *Sine-fono*, 14-15, 1915, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{118} Miasnikov, *Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930*, p. 8.


\textsuperscript{120} Boris Mikhin, ‘Otryvki iz proshlogo’ [1946, unpublished], in Ivanova et al., *Veliki kinevo*, pp. 164-65.
Despite the mobility of *kino-khudozhniki* during the 1910s and 1920s, several studios did establish stylistic reputations. The Khanzhonkov studio became known for its grandiose sets overcrowded with objects. Indeed, the term *khanzhonkovshchina* became a synonym for cinematic decadence in the 1920s. An interest in traditional Russian subjects and everyday life was a hallmark of Pathé productions. Youngblood notes that Thiemann and Reinhardt films were characterised by their ‘cosmopolitanism’, which was influenced by the American and Italian films that they also distributed. As Robert Bird argues, in the 1920s Sevzapkino (from 1935 Lenfilm) and Mezhrabpom-rus’ were the only two studios with distinct stylistic profiles. It can be no coincidence that these studios were known for the prominent position they accorded to *kino-khudozhniki*. Indeed, Kozlovskii recalls that Mezhrabpom-rus’ paid close attention to the technical aspects of set design and employed Balliuzek, Egorov, Simov and Stepanov, as well as himself, as *kino-khudozhniki*. Petr Bagrov claims that the main characteristic of Leningrad filmmaking of the 1920s was the existence of close creative alliances within which the *kino-khudozhnik* had an unusual degree of importance. In addition to the Fabrika ekstsentricheskogo aktera (FEKS, Factory of the Eccentric Actor) collective – the directors Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, the camera operator Andrei Moskvin, and the *kino-khudozhnik* Enei – these alliances included the collaboration of the *kino-khudozhnik* Semen Meinkin with the director Evgenii Cherviakov and the camera operator Sviatoslav Beliaev, and that of the *kino-khudozhnik* Suvorov with the director Vladimir Petrov and the camera operator Viacheslav Gordanov. According to Bagrov, the prominence of the *kino-khudozhnik* within these production teams led to the establishment of a distinct style of filmmaking based around the tight framing of faces and objects. Bird describes the stylistic approach of Mezhrabpom-rus’ and Sevzapkino as ‘vernacular modernism’ – a term he borrows from the film scholar Miriam Hansen, who used it to refer to ‘an international modernist idiom on a mass basis’.

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121 The contracts for Balliuzek’s commissions at various studios are housed at RGALI. ф. 2637, оп.1, ед. хр. 34.
123 Cherchi Usai et al., *Silent Witnesses*, p. 574.
126 Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, p. 81.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
131 Ibid., p. 69.
urbanism, the eccentric, sometimes verging on the grotesque, and cinema specificity as a form of vernacular modernism.\footnote{132} Aside from these two studios, film production during the 1920s was characterised more by distinct schools of film-makers than by studio styles. As Philip Cavendish shows, this period saw the formation of a number of close creative alliances between film-makers with like-minded artistic temperaments.\footnote{133}

### III. Collaborative Relationships

The principle of collective creation occupied a prominent position in cinema discourses throughout the silent era. In the earliest years of Russian cinema, the principle was associated with film’s ability to synthesise a number of creative practices, while during the Soviet period it assumed an ideological significance as a repudiation of the perceived bourgeois concept of individual authorship. Film-makers’ memoirs and articles published in the cinema press throughout the 1910s and 1920s repeatedly stress the collaborative nature of the kino-khudozhnik’s role and their requirement to work with the full range of production departments and film-makers.\footnote{134} In Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino, Kolin and Kozlovskii even argue that ‘В общем организме художник тысячью нитей связан с каждым отдельным работником, с каждым отдельным цехом. Деятельность художника более коллективна, чем деятельность режиссера, оператора, актера’ [In the studio organism, the khudozhnik is connected by a thousand threads with each individual worker, with each individual workshop. The work of the khudozhnik is more collective than that of the director, camera operator or actor].\footnote{135}

As Kolin and Kozlovskii indicate, the relationship of the kino-khudozhnik with each of the technical and craft workshops varied.\footnote{136} Although the kino-khudozhnik was responsible for commissioning and overseeing assignments from all production workshops, they were more actively involved in the realisation of the tasks of some workshops than in those of others. While the department of rabochie-postanovshchiki [production workers] followed the orders of the kino-khudozhnik precisely, the butaforeski [scenery] manufacturers had more creative independence. Kolin and Kozlovskii cite the example of the stucco workshop of the Leningrad studio Sovkino, which the sculptor N. Fishman oversaw.\footnote{137} Made specially for individual productions and rarely

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\footnote{132}{Ibid., pp. 68-69.}
\footnote{133}{For discussion of the aesthetic styles of various production teams in 1920s Soviet Russia, see Cavendish, \textit{The Men with the Movie Camera}.}
\footnote{134}{Examples include Kozlovskii, ‘Prava i obiaznosti kino-khudozhnika’, pp. 16-17; Isaak Makhlis, ‘Role khudozhnika v kino’, \textit{Kino-zhurnal ARK}, 11-12, 1925, pp. 15-16; and Kolupaev, ‘Khudozhnik v kino-proizvodstve’, p. 18.}
\footnote{135}{Kolin and Kozlovskii, \textit{Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino}, p. 407.}
\footnote{136}{Ibid., pp. 407-10.}
\footnote{137}{Ibid., pp. 408-09.}
reused, their sculptural and architectural pieces demonstrated a high level of artistry.\textsuperscript{138} Indeed, in a 1929 issue of the journal \textit{Kino i kul’tura}, the critic E. Veisenberg dedicated a four-page article – an exceptional length for this period – to the artistic skill of the Sovkino stucco workshop.\textsuperscript{139} Veisenberg remarked on the precision of the workshop’s creations and their ability to make card and \textit{papier mâché} look like granite and steel. According to Veisenberg, this led even the Society of Architects to mistake their scenery for real structures.\textsuperscript{140} However, Kolin and Kozlovskii write that the insufficient artistic expertise of other craft workshops required the \textit{kino-khudozhnik} to be more closely involved in the execution of their tasks.\textsuperscript{141} On several occasions, Kozlovskii notes the carelessness with which \textit{rekvizit} [prop] workshops followed requests for specific objects.\textsuperscript{142} In his memoirs, he recalls that when working on the film \textit{Liubov’ i nenavist’} (\textit{Love and Hate}, 1935), he was provided with a black horse, instead of the white horse he requested.\textsuperscript{143} Kozlovskii painted the horse white, which led to its owner refusing to accept it back. In their role as coordinators of the various production workshops, \textit{kino-khudozhniki} provided, as Suvorov would later describe, an ‘osnovnoe zveno’ [essential link] between the technical and practical side of studio operations and the creative aspect of film production, predominately associated with the main film-making unit of the camera operator, director and scenarist.\textsuperscript{144}

During the 1910s and 1920s, studio administrators typically determined the appointment of a \textit{kino-khudozhnik} to a film-making unit.\textsuperscript{145} By the end of the 1920s, \textit{kino-khudozhniki} still campaigned for the right to refuse to work with film-makers, whose artistic interests departed from their own.\textsuperscript{146} Permanent studio \textit{kino-khudozhniki} were expected to work with a number of different directors and camera operators on a range of film genres and styles; they also often worked on more than one film at a time. Adaptability and flexibility, it would seem, were required from \textit{kino-khudozhniki} first before an individual style. \textit{Kino-khudozhniki} themselves promoted the idea that it was their duty to suppress their own creative approach for the greater good of an overall production. Indeed, by the end of the 1930s Suvorov claimed that ‘[...] “незаметность” работы художника в кинокартине по большей части является самым большим ее достоинством.’ [[...] the “inconspicuousness” of the \textit{khudozhnik’s} work in a film is, for the most part, its greatest merit].\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Kino-khudozhniki} heavily criticised films in which an individual’s style was distinctly

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{139} E. Veisenberg, ‘V lepnoi masterskoi leningradskoi kinofabriki’, \textit{Kino i kul’tura}, 3, 1929, pp. 24-27.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 25.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{141} Kolin and Kozlovskii, \textit{Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino}, p. 409.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{142} Ibid. and Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, pp. 82-84.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{143} This is the only example that Kozlovskii provides. See ibid., p. 84.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{144} Nikolai Suvorov, ‘Khudozhnik v kino’ [1938], \textit{Kinovedcheski zapiski}, 99, 2009, pp. 301-03 (p. 301).}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{145} Anon., ‘Rezolutsiia sektsii khudozhnikov arkhitektorov’, p. 13.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{147} Suvorov, ‘Khudozhnik v kino’, p. 301.}
\end{footnotes}
apparent. Iutkevich recalls how he made this mistake in his first experience as a kino-khudozhnik:

When I started working in cinema, I was commissioned to design sets for the film “The Traitor”. I threw myself into my work with great enthusiasm, and, since it was my “debut”, I decided to show off everything I could do, as they say “my calling card”. We had to build a lot of pavilions – around thirty, and I began to build them in different ways. This was a useful experience for me. I could try out different combinations that fascinated me, but in the most important aspect, I was mistaken.

We can find a number of instances when a kino-khudozhnik worked in a style that contrasted with that with which they were typically associated. Kozlovskii, who described his own approach to set design as ‘realisticheskii’ [realistic] and concerned with ‘tochnyi adres’ [precise address] and ‘dostizhenii zhisnennoi pravdy’ [the achievement of verisimilitude], was responsible for creating not only the contemporary everyday life sets in Aelita, but also the fantastical Mars scenery. Likewise, Balliuzek, whom Miasnikov associates with the creation of sumptuous interiors for period dramas, worked on the minimalist sets of the Mezhrabpom-rus’ films Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’prom (The Cigarette Girl from Mossel’ prom, 1924) and 2-Bul’di-2 (The Two Buldis, 1929). The requirement for kino-khudozhniki to work to a specific commission should not necessarily be seen as a curtailment of their creativity, however. There are many examples of productions where kino-khudozhniki remained relatively free to develop design solutions. For example, writing in 1968 about his work with Protazanov during the 1910s, Balliuzek noted:

С Протазановым было легко и интересно работать. Он как режиссер не ограничивал фантазии художника, поощряя инициативу членов коллектива. При этом он незаметно, очень деликатно, но настойчиво требовал от меня единства изобразительного, художественного решения картины с общим

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149 Sergei Iutkevich, Chelovek na ekrane: Chetyre besedy o kinosiskusstve: Dnevniki rezhissera, Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1947, p. 135.
150 Cited in Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930, p. 18.
151 Ibid., p. 88.
It was easy and interesting to work with Protazanov. As a director, he did not restrict the kino-khudozhnik’s fantasy and encouraged the initiative of team members. At the same time, he imperceptibly, very delicately, but persistently demanded that I unite the artistic aspect of the film with its general meaning. Also valuable was the fact that Iakov Aleksandrovich required the kino-khudozhnik not only to create spectacularly painted scenery, but also to direct their attention to conveying the psychological essence of the image through fine art methods.

A number of film-makers expressed the view that the kino-khudozhnik was a creative interpreter acting on his own artistic initiative, rather than a technician slavishly following directives.

Writing about his work on Portret Doriana Greia, Meierkhol’d referred to Egorov as ‘an inventive collaborator’. Shpinel’ also noted that the director Aleksandr Dovzhenko valued the creative input of other members of the film-making team: ‘[Dovzenko] всегда искал в своих коллегах по съемочной группе не только точных исполнителей, но и союзников, единомышленников.’ [In terms of his colleagues in the film unit, [Dovzhenko] always looked not just for precise executors, but also for like-minded allies].

Despite demands for adaptability, the relative freedom that kino-khudozhniki enjoyed in practice meant that a number of individuals did come to establish reputations for a particular set of aesthetic preferences. These reputations continued to inform the selection of kino-khudozhniki for special commissions. Miasnikov notes how Protazanov carefully chose the kino-khudozhniki with whom he worked, enlisting Kozlovskii when a film demanded precision in detail and Egorov when atmosphere was the primary concern. Widis identifies several cases in the 1920s and 1930s when the collaboration of an individual kino-khudozhnik with particular film-makers had a marked influence on stylistic approach. According to Widis, the partnership of Rakhal’s with Sergei Eizenshtein and Eduard Tisse was ‘highly distinctive’. Indeed, Cavendish writes that extreme staging in depth, an interest in faktura and the use of natural objects as framing devices characterise their work on the films Stachka (Strike) and Bronenosets Potemkin (Battleship Potemkin) in 1925. Widis also notes that Boris Barnet worked consistently with Kozlovskii in the late

152 Balliuzech, ‘Na sˇ´emkakh “Pikovoi damy”’, p. 103.
155 Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930, pp. 18.
157 Ibid.
158 Cavendish, The Men with the Movie Camera, pp. 91-92.
1920s, and that the “everyday” style in Soviet set design characterises their productions *Devushka s korobkoi* (The Girl with a Hatbox, 1927) and *Dom na Trubnoi* (The House on Trubnaia, 1928). Other such instances include Kozlovskii’s collaboration with the director Vsevolod Pudovkin and the camera operator Anatoli Golovnia on the films *Mat’* (Mother, 1926), *Konets Sankt-Peterburga* (The End of Saint Petersburg, 1927), *Potomok Chingis-khana* (The Heir to Genghis Khan, 1928), *Prostoi sluchai* (A Simple Case, 1930) and *Dezertir* (The Deserter, 1933). Kozlovskii’s stark sets for these films contributed to the development of a style of cinematic representation based upon compositional restraint and precision. In his memoirs, Kozlovskii recalls that his collaboration with Pudovkin and Golovnia was particularly productive, and was ruptured only by Pudovkin’s departure from Mezhrabpomfilm to Mosfilm in the 1930s. Enei’s collaboration with FEKS stretched to seventeen productions over four decades. The way in which Enei’s sets exploited the interplay of light and shadow to create atmosphere contributed to the development of a particular filmmaking approach that was concerned with what Cavendish terms ‘the poetic qualities of light’.

*Kino-khudozniki* collaborated not only with directors and camera operators, but also with other *kino-khudozniki*. In some instances, this collaboration functioned as a form of training whereby a *kino-khudoznik* relatively new to cinema would work alongside one with greater technical expertise. Examples of this include Bauer’s work with Utkin on *Zhizn’ za zhizn’* (Life for a Life, 1916) and with Lev Kuleshov on *Zhizn’ za zhizn’* (In Pursuit of Happiness, 1917); and the pairing of Rakhal’s with a young Iutkevich on *Predatel’* and with Rodchenko on his first fiction film, *Vasha znakomaia* (Your Acquaintance, 1927). Lesser technical experience did not prevent *kino-khudozniki* from enjoying considerable creative freedom within these partnerships, however. Recalling his work with Rakhal’s, Iutkevich wrote that ‘с видимым интересом [Рахальс] выполнял все мои придумки, часто весьма хитроумные, и с охотой шел на смелые эксперименты’ [with obvious interest, [Rakhal’s] realised all the ideas that I thought up, which were often very complicated, and willingly undertook bold experiments]. Film-makers note that it was Kozlovskii who frequently mentored inexperienced *kino-khudozniki*; his willingness

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159 Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 315.
160 Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, p. 82.
161 Ibid.
162 For discussion of FEKS’s aesthetic approach to filmmaking, see Cavendish, *The Men with the Movie Camera*, pp. 196-240.
163 Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 323.
164 Kuleshov first worked with Bauer in 1916 on an adaptation of Émile Zola’s *Thérèse Raquin*, which was never released. See Lev Kuleshov, ‘Evgenii Frantsevich Bauer’ in his *Sobranie sochinenii v trekh tomakh*, vol. 1, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1987-88, pp. 403-09.
167 Ibid., p. 206; Razumnyi, *U istokov*, pp. 65-66; and Miasnikov, *Ocherki istorii svetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930*, p. 44.
to share trade secrets and to offer guidance earned him a reputation as a father-figure among
*kino-khudozhniki* and the nick-name ‘Diadia Sergei’ [Uncle Sergei].

Studios also enlisted multiple *kino-khudozhniki* for major productions to increase the artistic calibre of a film. The earliest example of this is *God 1812*, for which Fester and Sabinski were employed alongside other *kino-khudozhniki*. Film-producers used this tactic throughout the 1910s and 1920s: the Ermol’ev studio employed Balliuzek, Loshakov and the costume designer V. Vorob’ev for the extravagant production *Otets Sergii* (Father Sergius, 1918), and Mezhrabpomfilm enlisted Arapov, Balliuzek and Kozlovskii for *Prazdnik sviatogo Iorgena* (The Feast of St Jorgen, 1930). The film-maker Aleksandr Ivanovskii recalls the arguments that arose between Balliuzek and Loshakov on *Otets Sergii* as a result of their ‘raznykh tvorcheskikh ustremlenii’ [different creative inclinations]. Apart from Ivanovskii’s observation, information on the nature of these collaborations is scarce. It is therefore difficult to establish whether collaborations involved the exchange of ideas and the sharing of tasks, or whether *kino-khudozhniki* worked on individual elements of a production separately. Miasnikov writes that the relationship between *kino-khudozhniki* was typically open and cooperative rather than territorial or competitive. Likewise, Iutkevich recalls the amicable and family-like nature of the film-making units at Goskino in the mid-1920s. This corresponds to Cavendish’s description of the ‘democratic’ atmosphere within film-making teams of the Soviet silent era, when film-makers valued creative exchange and individual expertise.

**IV. Roles and Responsibilities**

As the previous sections of this chapter have demonstrated, throughout the silent era the role of the *kino-khudozhnik* was an amorphous one with many and varied responsibilities. Film-makers note in their memoirs that the first decade of fiction-film production was disorganised and improvised and suffered from a lack of skilled personnel. As Cavendish observes, divisions of responsibilities among film-makers were fluid, and individuals took on a variety of tasks as the immediate situation demanded. Alongside their formal responsibilities relating to the aesthetic

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169While the credits state that a number of *kino-khudozhniki* worked on the film, they give only the names of Fester and Sabinski. See Vishnevskii, *Khudozhestvennye fil’y dorevoliutsionnoiRossii*, p. 24 and Ivanova et al., *Velikii kinemo*, p. 103.
171Miasnikov, *Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930*, p. 22.
173Cavendish, *The Men with the Movie Camera*, p. 16.
side of film production, kino-khudozhniki assumed various organisational, administrative and creative tasks. As the cinema industry became increasingly professionalised during the 1920s, however, pressure mounted to define more clearly the formal responsibilities of the kino-khudozhnik. Beginning in 1925 and continuing into the 1930s, kino-khudozhniki wrote a number of texts that attempted to define their role in film production. The most comprehensive of these texts was Kolin’s and Kozlovskii’s Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino, which outlined the kino-khudozhnik’s responsibilities and set out a general approach to set design in an attempt to formalise working practices.

In early Russian and Soviet cinema, set design was as much a practical as a conceptual task. Accordingly, the formal responsibilities of the kino-khudozhnik during this period can be separated into two main, albeit interrelated, spheres, one associated with developing cinema design technology and production methods, and the other relating to aesthetic decisions. In the first, more practical role, the kino-khudozhnik oversaw the construction of artificial scenery. The fact that early-Russian studios employed few people meant that kino-khudozhniki usually had to participate in the physical construction of sets. Sabiński recalls that at Pathé in the early 1910s he worked without carpenters or painters in a small production team of ten to fifteen members. According to Miasnikov, shortages in studio personnel meant that the kino-khudozhnik also held financial responsibility for a film’s design budget.

As the material, technological and human resources of studios developed, the role of the kino-khudozhnik evolved into that of a coordinator of a number of production workshops and technicians. This was no small task. In 1929, a review commission noted that Mezhrabpomfilm employed thirty-five lighting technicians and twenty-eight craftsmen for assembling prefabricated scenery, known as the fundus system. Kolupaev notes that by 1930 studios typically counted eight different production departments: rabochie-postanovshchiki/drapirovshchiki/plotniki [production workers/drapers/carpenters]; a stoliarnyi [woodwork] workshop; a maliarnyi [painting] workshop; a butaforskii [scenery] workshop; a rekvizitorskii [prop] workshop; a kostiumernyi [costume] workshop; a grimernyi [makeup] department; and an osvetitel’nyi [lighting] department.


177 Sabiński, ‘Iz zapiskh starogo khinomastera’, p. 60.

178 Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii russkogo i sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1908–1917, p. 8.


commissioning of these workshops for individual films, taking into account each workshop’s standard production rate as well as material and spatial requirements so that the different design elements would be ready in time for filming. They were also accountable for enforcing a certain standard of quality among workshops. According to Kolin and Kozlovskii, a lack of skilled craftsmen meant that *kino-khudozhniki* continued to be involved in executing set elements throughout the 1920s. Beside the preparation of sets, the *kino-khudozhnik* managed the logistics of storing sets in studio warehouses, kept the inventory of all the sets housed by studios and organised the rotation of sets in accordance with a studio’s shooting schedule. Working documents from Mezhrabpom-rus’, cited by Kolin and Kozlovskii, indicate that *kino-khudozhniki* were also in charge of drawing up a daily schedule of the studio’s use.

In their role as production surveyors, *kino-khudozhniki* strove to develop technical innovations to improve design technology and practices. Between 1910 and 1913, Mikhin and Sabiński, simultaneously yet independently from one another, developed a method of pre-fabricated sets made of standardised parts, known as the *fundus* system. The *fundus* significantly reduced both the time it took to construct sets and the amount of material used. It also made it easier to store sets and to transport them between studio and warehouse. Moreover, the system led to many important aesthetic evolutions in set design that will be discussed in detail in the following chapters of this thesis. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, *kino-khudozhniki* worked to develop methods for standardising cinema design that would accommodate production demands. As noted in the Introduction, sometime soon after the nationalisation of cinema in 1919, Razumnyi proposed the construction of five standardised settings: a room in workers’ quarters, an office in a Soviet institution, an interior of a peasant izba, a room in the city centre and a kitchen. Razumnyi’s proposal was intended to address the extreme material and financial shortages at this time and to increase the low levels of film production. It can also be seen as an attempt to standardise the genre of films produced to those that addressed contemporary domestic and working life, however. During the 1920s, Kozlovskii introduced a series of rationalisation and standardisation methods at Mezhrabpom-rus’, which further decreased production time and costs. These included the standardisation of coloured paints, an inventory system for *fundus*

181 Ibid., p. 407.
182 Ibid., pp. 410-11.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., p. 411.
186 Writing in 1926, Aden noted that the *fundus* system reduced production time from roughly three days to four hours. See Aden, ‘Kino-khudozhnik na zapade i v SSSR’, p. 17.
188 Ibid.
189 Miasnikov, *Ocherki istorii russkogo i svetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1908–1917*, p. 38.
parts and a photographic archive of locations for outdoor filming. Kozlovskii also further developed the *fundus* system both by replacing nails with special clamps to join individual sections, which prolonged the life of the individual parts, and by strengthening sections so that they could support the weight of lighting equipment. This facilitated the use of top-lighting in films, which was previously restricted by the low ceilings of early Russian and Soviet studios that limited the use of overhead balconies for lighting units.

These technical innovations not only modified production practices, they also contributed to the development of cinema aesthetics. They are therefore closely connected with the *kino-khudozhnik*’s role as, to quote Suvorov, ‘konsul’tantom izobrazitel’noi storony fl’m’ [a consultant on the visual side of film]. What this entailed remains vague. For Sabiński, in addition to developing visual motifs, it included consulting on Russian *byt* [everyday life]. For Rodchenko, however, it meant coordinating spatial relations and constructing lived environments. This nebulous concept of artistic representation means that it is often hard to define clearly where the responsibilities of the *kino-khudozhnik* ended and where those of other film-makers began.

Typically, the creative genesis of a film would begin with the scenario. In the earliest years of Russian cinema, scenarios were usually drawn up at the last minute, sometimes even the night before filming. It was rare for studios to employ permanent scenarists, and it was occasionally *kino-khudozhniki* who took on the task. Sabiński started writing scenarios for Pathé in 1910 and continued to produce them throughout that decade. In 1913, Mikhin also began to work as a scenarist alongside his role as a *kino-khudozhnik*; and in 1919 Kozlovskii wrote several scenarios. According to Aden, even in the mid-1920s scenarios were still often hastily drawn up, and *kino-khudozhniki* had to use their own initiative to break the film down into a series of spaces and essential architectural and decorative features. In their 1928 resolution, the section of khudozhnikov-arkhitektorov lobbied for the *kino-khudozhnik* to be involved in working out the scenario together with the director, camera operator and scenarist.

During the first two decades of Russian cinema, the research periods following scenario

192 Kozlovskii writes that in this period overhead balconies were the method most commonly used by German studios for supporting lighting equipment. Ibid., p. 59.
194 Rashit Yangirov, ‘Czeslaw Genrikhovich Sabinski’ in Cherchi Usai et al., *Silent Witnesses*, pp. 582-84.
197 None of these scenarios was realised as a film. Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei žizni’, p. 68-69.
production were rarely extensive or noteworthy. Studios produced films at a rapid pace. Sabinski recalls that he was expected to construct sets in days, sometimes just in hours. There was therefore no time for in-depth research. Instead, *kino-khudozhniki* were expected to draw on their own knowledge and on resources close at hand. Razumnyi notes that he brought specialist art books to show the director Mikhail Verner, and from these the pair selected visual motifs. Kozlovskii also writes that he accumulated a large collection of art publications, which he consulted together with directors. His personal archive at Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv literatury i iskusstva (RGALI, Russian State Archive of Literature and Arts) contains hundreds of examples of exhibition clippings and images of paintings, costumes, decorative patterns and architectural motifs.

In the 1900s and 1910s, film-makers chose shooting locations primarily for their convenience. Outdoor filming was therefore mainly confined to suburbs within easy reach of studios, most of which were located in Moscow. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, in the 1920s filming expeditions became more frequent. Widdis notes that a number of critics rejected the use of studio sets in favour of the energy of outdoor filming. Kolin and Kozlovskii observed that in comparison with foreign cinema more Soviet films of this period were shot outdoors, as state support gave Soviet film-makers access to a variety of locations. Very few sources, however, detail the extent of influence that *kino-khudozhniki* had on exterior filming. Kolin and Kozlovskii certainly saw that choosing locations for outdoor filming was one of the *kino-khudozhnik*’s roles, and asserted that *kino-khudozhniki* must create photographic archives at film studios for selecting specific filming locations. Kolupaev similarly promoted the *kino-khudozhnik*’s involvement in selecting locations, arguing, in several articles published in the mid-1920s, that they must work with a photographic commission to scout out certain sites for outdoor filming. As previously noted, Kozlovskii kept a photograph album of potential shooting locations, which he first consulted in 1918 while working on *Polikushka* (1919) and *Soroka-vorovka* (The Thieving Magpie, 1920). Kozlovskii writes that he established a reputation among film-makers for his knowledge of potential filming locations, and he advised on the selection of locations for many films.

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202Sabinski notes that it was common for studios to produce up to thirty films a year. Sabinski, ‘Iz zapisok starogo kinomastera’, p. 60.
203 Ibid., p. 61.
205 Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, p. 90.
206 RGALI, f. 2394, op. 1, ed. khr. 165.
210 Ibid.
including Konets Sankt-Peterburga and Okraina (Outskirts, 1933). However, Kozlovskii notes that albums increasingly lost their usefulness as the large-scale industrialisation of the countryside during the Soviet period fundamentally changed many of the sites in the photographs. Several photographs in the contemporary cinema press indicate that artificial architecture was constructed for location filming, while Egorov’s unpublished article ‘Khudozhiik oformleniia teatral’ noi stseny i khudozhiik kino kartin... kakaia raznitsa?’ (The Artist of Theatre Stage Scenery and the Artist of the Film Frame... What’s the Difference?) is illustrated with examples of artificial scenery created for outdoor scenes (Figs. 1.10 & 1.11). Balliuszek’s set-design manual Zhivopisno-maliarnye raboty na kinoproizvodstve: Posobie dla rabochikh otdelchogo tsekha kinostudii (Painterly Work in Film Production: A Manual for Workers of the Decorative Workshop of the Film Studio, 1948) also shows that painted canvas backdrops were used before the introduction of colour film. However, according to Kolin and Kozlovskii, kino-khudozhniki rarely accompanied film-making teams on shooting expeditions, but more often remained at the studio to oversee the development of artificial scenery. Given their absence during location filming, we can assume that the kino-khudozhnik’s influence on compositional decisions and the framing of outdoor scenes was considerably more limited than in studio film-making. According to Razumnyi, studio scenes were typically shot first, suggesting that artificial scenery continued to act as the main factor determining the overall aesthetic approach to a production. As Lesnaia noted in her 1929 article ‘Khudozhiik v kino’ (The Artist in Cinema), when film-makers ran out of time and the seasons changed preventing the continuation of shooting at a certain location, then kino-khudozhniki were required to create replicas of clouds, rivers and cliffs in the studio.

213 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
214 Ibid.
217 Kolin and Kozlovskii, Khudozhiik-arkhiitektur v kino, pp. 405-06.
218 Razumnyi, U islosov, p. 49.
Fig. 1.10. Vladimir Egorov, ‘Khudozhnik oformleniia teatral’noi stseny i khudozhnik kino kartin... kakaia raznitsa?’ (The Artist of Theatre Stage Scenery and the Artist of the Film Frame... What’s the Difference?). RGALI f. 2710, op. 1, ed. khr. 59, p. 9.

Fig. 1.11. Egorov, ‘Khudozhnik oformleniia teatral’noi stseny i khudozhnik kino kartin... kakaia raznitsa?’ RGALI f. 2710, op. 1, ed. khr. 59, p.10.
Time constraints meant that *kino-khudozhniki* frequently did not prepare sketches. Miasnikov writes that Balliuzek and Egorov were remarkable among *kino-khudozhniki* of the 1910s for their use of sketches. From their memoirs, we also know that in the late 1910s Kuleshov and Razumnyi executed sketches for their films. From the 1920s, sketches became more common and those of Enei, Iutkevich, Kozlovskii, Shpinel’ and Suvorov for their films of the mid- to late 1920s have been preserved. According to Razumnyi, sketches were done quickly in watercolour with the purpose of establishing key visual motifs and the general aesthetic concept of a film. Kozlovskii’s personal archive contains a number of set design sketches, which are undated and unattributed, that focus on how various architectural forms could be combined to create effective compositions. Shaded in charcoal, they also display an interest in the tonal distribution of frames. Rather than acting as blueprints for particular sets, it is likely that these sketches functioned more as templates, which Kozlovskii would then adapt for individual films. Similarly, Egorov’s sketches for *Ledianoi dom* (The Ice House, 1928), housed at Muzei kino in Moscow, are concerned primarily with establishing the spatial and tonal composition of the scenes to create a sense of atmosphere rather than with providing detail. They include few references to real places and show limited interest in actors and their costumes and make-up. As Miasnikov notes, Egorov was remarkable for including people at all in his sketches. Those of Iutkevich, Enei, Kozlovskii, Shpinel’ and Suvorov rarely include figures. Correspondingly, several accounts specify that costume and make-up did not typically fall under the responsibility of the *kino-khudozhnik* but were either out-sourced or delegated to studio costume-designers and make-up artists.

Egorov’s sketches for cinema design differ remarkably from those executed for the theatre, in terms of their framing. While his theatre sketches are frontally facing compositions that maintain an omniscient distance and are constructed around a box-like perspective with little sense of spatial depth, his cinema sketches are tightly cropped and framed from sharp angles of vision, which could be achieved by a camera but would be impossible on the stage. In his article ‘Khudozhnik oformleniia teatral’ni stseny i khudozhnik kino kartin... kakaia raznitsa?’, Egorov juxtaposed illustrations of design sketches for the theatre and for cinema in order to demonstrate how *kino-khudozhniki* took into account the different positions of the camera and the various angles from which the set would be filmed (Fig. 1.12). Sketches not only provided visual outlines; they were also important documents for mediating creative exchange between the *kino-

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221 Razumnyi, *U istorii*, p. 23.
222 Kozlovskii’s sketches are housed at RGALI f. 2394, op. 1, ed. khr. 6-165.
khudozhnik, the director and the camera operator. Kuleshov and Razumnyi note how they discussed their sketches with other film-makers, and subsequently made alterations to their designs.\(^{226}\)

In addition to making sketches, Kozlovskii would construct models.\(^{227}\) These acted as crucial templates that formed the basis of the kino-khudozhnik’s interaction with production departments. Kino-khudozhniki also developed models to resolve technical challenges in films. In his work on God 1812, for example, Sabiński used models to create the scenes of Moscow burning.\(^{228}\) Similarly, Balluzek used small-scale models for Pikovaia dama in his attempts to create an illusion of the Countess’s mansion against a background of fireworks.\(^{229}\) Besides models, kino-khudozhniki developed a number of technical innovations to overcome design challenges. For Pikovaia dama, Balluzek made a device constructed from two bicycles that allowed the camera to follow closely behind the actors and capture an unfolding panorama of an enfilade of rooms.\(^{230}\) In Kaiulostro (1918), Kozlovskii and the director and camera operator Władysław Starewicz innovated a technique of painting on glass, known as dorisovki, to overcome the small size of the studio and to suggest a sense of continuing space.\(^{231}\)

\(^{227}\) Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1918–1930, p. 33.
\(^{228}\) Sabinski, ‘Iz zapisok starogo kinomastera’, p. 61.
\(^{229}\) During filming, the fireworks set the scenery alight and these scenes had to be abandoned. Balluzek, ‘Na s´emkakh “Pikovoi damy”’, p. 102.
\(^{230}\) Ibid.
\(^{231}\) Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’, p. 70.
Several sources indicate that kino-khudozhniki conceptualised cinema design in terms of how it would be processed by the camera. According to Miasnikov, Kozlovskii would use spare film-stock to create experimental films of set fragments, which he then studied to develop new design methods.\footnote{Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii russkogo i sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1908–1917, p. 58.} Later, in his work on \textit{Lenin v Oktiabre} (Lenin in October, 1937), Dubrovskii-Eshke made photographic studies of small-scale models in order to understand how his sets would be processed cinematically.\footnote{RGALI f. 2605, op. 1, ed. khr. 129.} Kino-khudozhniki also paid close attention to how the placement of objects in a frame would affect the overall tonal composition of a scene. In their set design manual, Kolin and Kozlovskii provide a detailed explanation of which tones specific colours would translate into when shot on orthochromatic film.\footnote{Kolin and Kozlovskii, \textit{Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino}, pp. 416-17.} They also specify the colours most appropriate for the different planes of the composition. Kino-khudozhniki would frequently acquire objects from photography studios, where they were already adapted to being shot in black and white.\footnote{It is likely that objects were adapted by being painted in different colours. Ibid., p. 388 and Miasnikov, \textit{Ocherki istorii russkogo i sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva}, 1908–1917, p. 29.} In order to heighten the expressive impact of tonal contrasts, they would paint objects in a monochrome scale.\footnote{Ibid., p. 18.} Alongside the tone of objects, kino-khudozhniki also paid close attention to their \textit{faktura}. Indeed, Kuleshov believed that the kino-khudoznik’s primary concern should be exploiting the characteristic properties and expressive potential of various materials.\footnote{Lev Kuleshov, ‘Concerning Scenery’, \textit{The Art of Cinema} [1929] in Ronald Levaco (ed. and trans.), \textit{Kuleshov on Film: Writings}, Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 68-77 (p. 70).} He describes the various experiments he conducted with different surface finishes: oil paint, primers and beeswax were combined to create various coatings that produced different expressive effects when shot on camera.\footnote{Ibid., p. 72.}

As artistic consultants, the influence of kino-khudozhniki often crossed over into areas typically associated with the figures of the director and the camera operator. A number of texts suggest that the kino-khudoznik collaborated closely with the camera operator and lighting technicians on lighting decisions.\footnote{Examples include Kozlovskii, ‘Prava i obiazannosti kino-khudozhnika’, pp. 16-17; Lev Kuleshov, ‘Zadachi khudozhnika v kinematografie’, \textit{Vestnik kinematografii}, 1917, 27, pp. 37-38; and Makhlis, ‘Rol’ khudozhnika v kino’, pp. 15-16.} During the earliest years of cinema, formal responsibility for lighting was not yet established, which at times led to disagreements between film-makers. Meierkhol’d writes how during work on \textit{Portret Doriana Greia}, the camera operator Aleksandr Levitskii and the kino-khudoznik Egorov argued over lighting responsibility.\footnote{Vsevolod Meierkhol’d, ‘Portret Doriana Greia’ [date unknown], \textit{Iz istorii kino}, 6, Moscow, 1965, pp. 15-23 (p. 19).} Meierkhol’d explains that ‘B rearpe
это дано художнику. Но раз аппарат находится у оператора, то и освещать, естественно, должен он, так как ему виднее, что и как надо [сделать], чтобы осветить картину’ [In the theatre it is given to the khudozhnik. But once the camera is in the hands of the camera operator, then naturally he must be responsible for lighting since he knows much better what to do in order to light the picture]. However, Egorov’s sketches for the film which he included in the article ‘Khudozhnik stseny teatra i khudozhnik kadra kino... kakaia raznitsa?’ demonstrate that he constructed sets that took account of lighting effects and accommodated the provision of different camera angles. Debates over lighting persisted throughout the 1920s. Writing in the mid-1920s, Kozlovskii argued that the insufficient knowledge on the part of many camera operators and lighting technicians required the kino-khudozhniki to intervene in lighting decisions. However, Makhlis declared that what Soviet cinema needed were ‘operatory-khudozhniki’ [camera operator-artists], who would play an active role in lighting and framing scenes in order to ensure the best possible expression of furniture, props and actors. In their 1928 resolution, the section of khudozhnikov-arkhitektorov proposed that the kino-khudozhniki and the camera operator must together determine lighting, but that in cases of disagreement the kino-khudozhnik has a right of veto. It is impossible to verify the extent of influence that kino-khudozhniki had on lighting practices in reality. Although Cavendish argues that lighting was primarily the sphere of the camera operator, he recognises that the use of particular sets and their distribution within a frame did contribute to the adoption of a particular lighting approach.

Due to a shortage of sufficiently skilled directors and camera operators in the 1900s and 1910s, the kino-khudozhnik at times stepped in to help direct and film scenes. From as early as 1907, Kozlovskii notes that he guided camera operators working at Pathé on the framing of scenes for documentary films. Sabinski recalls how, while working as a kino-khudozhnik at Pathé, he advised Maître on the coordination of actors and helped direct and edit scenes of Russian folk-life. Similarly, Razumnyi writes that his work at the Ermol’ev studio in the late 1910s quickly exceeded overseeing scenery to include making decisions about directing, camera operation, editing and the developing of film. Following the emigration of many directors and camera operators in the early Soviet period, kino-khudozhniki became highly valued for their knowledge of

241 Ibid.
244 Makhlis, ‘Rol’ khudozhnika v kino’, p. 16.
246 Cavendish, The Men with the Movie Camera, p. 217.
247 Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Tridtsat’ let raboty khudozhnikov v sovetskoj kinematografii’ [unpublished, 1949], RGALI f. 2394, op. 1, ed. khr. 69.
249 Razumnyi, U’sitokov, pp. 24-25.
the technical aspects of film-making. In 1919, Neptun studio hired Kozlovskii to oversee a second proposed studio as both its director and its kino-khudozhnik. Moreover, it was Kozlovskii’s recommendation that Aleinikov sought when hiring a permanent camera operator for Rus’ in 1919. While working at Mezhrabpom-rus’ in the 1920s, Kozlovskii assisted the theatre director Leonid Baratov in directing his first productions. In 1922, Mikhin became the director of the third film-production studio of Goskino, where he advised on appointing personnel to film-making units and monitored film production. The diversity of responsibilities adopted by kino-khudozhniki corresponds to what Bergfelder, Harris and Street term in relation to the German film industry of the 1920s and 1930s an ‘artisanal’ approach to film-making, in which flexibility, experimentation and creative exchange were paramount. Entrusted with such wide-ranging responsibilities, the kino-khudozhnik was, therefore, a key figure in the aesthetic and technical decisions that led to the creation of a particular film.

The flexible nature of the role of the kino-khudozhnik and his close involvement with the various aspects of cinema led to the acquisition of skills that could be directly transferred into the sphere of directing. It is therefore unsurprising that a large proportion of kino-khudozhniki of the 1910s and 1920s went on to work as professional directors during their careers. These figures include: Balliuzek, Bauer, Iutkevich, Kavaleridze, Kuleshov, Mikhin, Mosiagin, Razumnyi and Sabiński. In their work as directors, many former kino-khudozhniki functioned as auteurs in the sense that they maintained a large degree of control over decisions relating to cinema design, scenario writing and camera operation in addition to directing. Both Razumnyi and Sabiński even used the title kino-master, instead of the accepted term rezisser [director], to reflect the multiple roles that they embodied.

251 Kozlovskii recommended Zheliabuzhskii for this position. See ibid., p. 69.
252 Ibid., p. 81.
253 Cavendish notes that it was Mikhin who recommended Eduard Tisse as a camera operator to Sergei Eizenshtein in 1923. See Cavendish, The Men with the Movie Camera, pp. 58-59.
254 This model contrasts to the more hierarchical assembly-line approach adopted by Hollywood studios from the mid-1910s, where individual production tasks were delegated among specialists. See Bergfelder, Harris and Street, Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination, p. 43.
Chapter Two
The Rural Environment

Many of the earliest Russian fiction films used rural settings and combined outdoor filming with artificially constructed sets. Restrictions in studio space and limitations in lighting technology encouraged Russian film producers, such as Aleksandr Khanzhonkov, to establish bases for filming on the outskirts of Moscow, which had served as the centre of Russian film production since the 1900s.¹ For Khanzhonkov, the natural features and existing architecture were an important consideration in choosing filming sites, as he recalls: ‘Для постановки картин я стал искать уединенный участок, с лесом, прудом и, по возможности, строениями в русском стиле. Всем этим условиям удовлетворялся найденный в Сокольниках дачный участок, который и был немедленно взят мною в аренду для кинопостановок’ [For the setting of pictures, I searched for a remote patch of land with a forest, a lake and, as far as possible, buildings in the Russian style. All these conditions were satisfactorily found at a country house plot in Sokolniki, which I quickly rented for filming].² In his memoirs, the kino-khudozhnik Boris Mikhin describes the Khanzhonkov studio’s main outdoor filming base, established in 1908/09 at Krylatskoe lake in Moscow’s Kuntsevo suburbs, as a small site with a single wooden stage erected next to a peasant izba, which was used primarily for preparing the actors’ costumes and make-up but which was also, on occasion, incorporated as a set in films.³ Painted canvases were nailed to two bars on the stage. However, when the wind blew, the canvases would flap, destroying the illusion of painted scenery and halting filming.⁴

Despite the rudimentary nature of such film sites, even in the very earliest Russian fiction films the rural environment was much more than a picturesque backdrop; rather, film-makers used the natural and the artificial features of rural settings as a means to structure composition, to heighten dramatic tension, to create mood and atmosphere and to convey narrative and symbolic meaning. The story of Aleksandr Drankov’s endeavour in 1907 to produce a film adaptation of Aleksandr Pushkin’s Boris Godunov (1831) reveals the importance that film-makers attached to the rural environment as scenery; it also demonstrates the potential that rural scenery had to undermine a film’s success, for Drankov would later deny Boris Godunov the title of the first Russian fiction film, conferring it instead on the later and apparently more accomplished Sten’ka Razin (1908). The recollections of one of the film’s actors, Nikolai Orlov;

¹ For discussion of early Russian film studios and their technological resources, see Gennadii Miasnikov, Ocherki istorii russkogo i sovetskogo kinodekoratsionnogo iskusstva, 1908-1917, Moscow: VGIK, 1973, pp. 20-21.
² Aleksandr Khanzhonkov, Pervye gody russkoi kinematografii [1937], Moscow: Liteo, 2016, p. 35.
⁴ Mikhin, ‘Rozhdenie fundusa’, p. 151.
about working on *Boris Godunov* are so illuminating both about the difficulties which the natural and the artificial elements of scenery caused in the production process and about the conflict which they created between film-makers and actors that they are worth quoting at length:

[…The actor G. F. Martini] went on strike when he realised that the scene by the fountain would be shot without the sets but next to a real fountain that was situated between the theatre and a café-chantant. However, it was not long before Marina Mnishek (played by K. Loranskaia) and Drankov were able to convince him that everything would turn out even better by the real fountain. So they decided to start with this scene by the fountain, and it was the view of both Martini and Loranskaia that the whole sense of the scene derived from precisely the point that Marina Mnishek suddenly appears from out of the bushes. After endless arguments Drankov decided to pay for some trees to be felled, brought along and re-erected as artificial shrubbery... Next day, early in the morning, a lot of tall felled trees were brought along and laboriously erected round the fountain. They produced quite a picturesque landscape, but it was spoiled by the fact that, through the trees, you could see quite clearly and distinctly various buildings that were remote in style from the sixteenth century... Martini, seeing the whole set that had been prepared for shooting absolutely refused to start filming [… ]. When at last everyone had stopped arguing and agreed to ‘rush’ the scenes in front of the camera, it turned out we had to move the trees. Since nine o’clock, when the trees had been erected round the fountain, the sun had moved and the shrubs were beginning to produce shadows that we didn’t want. This meant that we had to change the whole mise-en-scène and that meant changing the set as well. Once again we began to argue: what should we change? The mise-en-scène or the set? Then the workmen came and began ‘remaking’ the scenery.5

Orlov’s memoirs convey the steps that the film-makers took to alter the natural environment so as to create a particular effect. They also demonstrate how the rural landscape’s scenic elements – both those existing prior to the film-makers’ arrival and those that were the result of the film-makers’ interventions – interfered with filming, either because their aesthetic style was incongruous with the scenario or because they produced undesirable lighting conditions. Moreover, as the reaction of Martini suggests, for many actors, accustomed to performing on the theatre stage with artificial sets, the use of elements of the real world as scenery breached accepted conventions.

Some film-makers did recognise that the natural elements and the material infrastructure of the rural environment could be more effective than artificial scenery and studio sets, however. Debates about the merits and disadvantages of these approaches to scenery continued

throughout the 1910s and 1920s in Russia. For many film-makers, the use of location filming over studio sets was associated with an interest in cinema’s capacity as a photographic medium to convey knowledge about traditional Russian life and customs. This chapter will therefore consider how debates about rural scenery related to contemporary interests in ethnographic authenticity. It will also examine how film-makers’ strivings for ethnographic verisimilitude correlated with their desires to create psychological tension and a sense of atmosphere in films.

Since the rise of Slavophile thought at the beginning of the nineteenth century, rural peasant life had been identified as the locus of the national spirit and identity. Uncorrupted by western capitalist values, the rural peasantry was seen to perpetuate a simple and honest lifestyle that preserved native customs and traditions. This chapter will therefore explore how the representation of the rural environment in fiction films was associated with articulations of national identity and film-makers’ attempts to create a native Russian cinema. It will also examine how, in the 1920s, film-makers addressed the collision of rural traditions and customs with new Soviet ways of life, and the extent to which the provincial environment and lifestyles might be transformed through infrastructural and technological development. For each of the films considered in the chapter, a different kino-khudozhnik worked on designing the scenery. Although the films share many of the same thematic concerns, the ways in which the film-makers explored these concerns visually through the use of sets vary considerably.

I. Authenticity, the Russian Landscape and the Search for a Native Cinema

Since 1904/1905, the French production company Pathé Frères had made films on Russian historical subjects, and in 1908 it had begun work on a series of twenty-one documentary films of Russian life, collectively titled "Zhivnopisnaia Rossiia" (Picturesque Russia). The series enjoyed limited success in Russia, however, as its ethnographic-style observations of everyday life were aimed primarily at a foreign audience interested in learning about Russian customs. As Jay Leyda notes, by the end of 1907 the Russian press had begun to publish demands for a ‘native’ cinema. In response, a number of Russian film-makers set out to create fiction films that drew on subjects based on national folklore and traditions, featured a cast of Russian actors and used distinctly Russian settings. The first of these ‘natively produced’ films, Aleksandr Drankov’s Sten ’ka Razin, which was released in 1908, the same year as Pathé’s documentary films, was a huge success.
success. This experience encouraged Pathé, in the summer of 1909, to establish its first production unit operating from Moscow, which employed native actors and film-makers to create films on Russian historical and traditional folk subjects.

_Ukhár’-kupets_ (The Dashing Merchant, 1909) was the first of a series of fiction films on Russian life that Pathé produced. Based on Ivan Nikitin’s popular folk song of the same title, _Ukhár’-kupets_ tells the story of a drunken peasant who, despite his wife’s protests, sells his daughter Masha to a merchant at a village dance. In a review published in the journal _Sine-fono_, the critic Samuil Lur’e claimed that the film’s portrayal of Russian folk life was especially convincing as a result of using Russian actors and personnel in the production process. According to Lur’e, ‘Слишком много в русской жизни самобытности, и она может быть передана только человеком, с детства сжившися с нею’ [So much in Russian life is distinctive, and it can be conveyed only by a person who has experienced it from birth]. Publicity material similarly emphasised that the film drew on Russian expertise and the Russian lived experience. In particular, Pathé sought native talent for the film’s sets, and employed Mikhail Kozhin, an established stage designer who had created scenery for the Malyi theatre and the Bol’shoi opera since 1904, to work as the *kino-khudozhnik* alongside the French camera operators Georges Meier and Toppi. At the same time as he designed the sets for _Ukhár’-kupets_, Kozhin worked as the _kino-khudozhnik_ on two other Pathé films based on historical Russian subjects, _Petr Velikii_ (Peter the Great, 1910) and _Episod iz zhizni Dmitriia Donskogo_ (Episode from the Life of Dmitrii Donskoï, 1910).

For all three of these films, reviews in the contemporary cinema press commented on the authentic representation of Russian life, noting in particular the historical and ethnographic details of the set design. An anonymous reviewer writing in _Sine-fono_ praised _Petr Velikii_ for the film-makers’ high standard of historical research and the attention paid to the costumes, sets and props. Another reviewer writing in _Kine-zhurnal_ noted both that the director Vasili Goncharov had based the film’s scenario on the research of the historian Chistiakov and that the film-makers had drawn on the history paintings of the esteemed artist Nikolai Samokish for

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11 Abel, ‘Pathé’s Stake in Early Russian Cinema’, p. 244.
13 Ibid., p. 39.
14 For example, see _Sine-fono_, 29, 1909, p. 8.
15 The film is variously attributed to the directors Kai Hansen, Moris Gash [Maurice Gache], Vasili Goncharov and Mikhail Novikov. For biographical information on Kozhin, see Pavel Isaev, _Straganovka 1825-1918: Biograficheskiy slovar’,_ vol. 2, Moscow: Labirint, 2004, p. 181.
16 _Sine-fono* [1909] in Ivanova et al., _Velikii kinemo_, pp. 33-34.
representing the battle scenes.\textsuperscript{17} As discussed in Chapter One, early Russian film-makers frequently associated films with the paintings of well-known artists in order to seek to place cinema on a par with high culture and to attract an upmarket audience.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that films were associated exclusively with the paintings of Russian artists also suggests that film-makers were concerned to associate cinema with a national artistic tradition.

The same concern for historical and ethnographic authenticity is apparent in Kozhin’s set designs for \textit{Ukhar´-kupets}. Indeed, in his review of the film \textquote{Lur´e} claimed that ‘[...] вся декорация представляет собой сколок с действительности’ \textquote{[...] all the decoration appears to be a fragment of reality}.\textsuperscript{19} This ethnographic verisimilitude is achieved primarily through the intricacy of Kozhin’s painted scenery. In the scenes that take place in the peasant izba, furniture is ornamented with patterning and the areas surrounding the doors and the window are embellished with elaborate motifs, drawn from traditional folk art (Fig. 2.1). While a number of films made in the late 1900s and the early 1910s incorporated decorative patterning in their painted scenery of peasant izbas, such as the Khanzhonkov studio’s \textit{Boiarin Orsha} (The Boyar Orsha, 1908) and \textit{Mazepa} (1909), Kozhin’s designs are remarkable in terms of the level of detail.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Fig. 2.1.} \textit{Ukhar´-kupets}, izba interior.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Kine-zhurnal} [1910], ibid., p. 33
\textsuperscript{18} See Chapter One, pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{19} Lur´e, \textit{Sine-fono}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{20} V. Fester worked as the kino-khudozhnik on \textit{Boiarin Orsha} and \textit{Mazepa}. Very little information exists on Fester. See Khanzhonkov, \textit{Pervye gody russkoi kinematografii}, p. 41.
Kozhin had initially trained at the Stroganov uchiliszcze under Fedor Shekhtel’21 who played an important role in reviving interest in Russian folk art in the first decades of the twentieth century. Subsequently, he worked as a theatre designer at Savva Mamontov’s Private Opera alongside artists such as Konstantin Korovin, who was known for his elaborate theatre sets that drew inspiration from native folk legends. Mamontov’s Private Opera was one of a number of Russian theatres at the turn of the twentieth century that demonstrated a marked interest in the ethnographic and historical accuracy of sets, props and costumes. Designers often undertook intense preliminary research, which included studying historical and ethnographic sources, regional topography and contemporary iconography.22 Similarly, the Malyi theatre, where, as we recall, Kozhin worked on a number of productions, was known for the historicism of its sets, which designers often created in consultation with ethnographers and archaeologists.23

In addition to reflecting an interest in ethnographic and historical authenticity, the use of folk patterning in Ukhar˚-kupets creates a striking visual effect. The film-makers’ concern to make a film that was aesthetically pleasing, as well as ethnographically accurate, is also demonstrated through their experimentation with colour. Ukhar˚-kupets was the first hand-coloured Russian fiction film.24 In the absence of original coloured prints it is impossible to tell precisely what effect colour would have had. However, it is likely that its application would have accentuated the folk patterning. Moreover, decorative details serve to highlight particular characters. It is notable that, in contrast to other characters, it is the protagonists – the peasant father and his daughter Masha – who are most frequently framed against patterning. The arrangement of sets also works to privilege certain characters. In a number of scenes, the male patriarch is positioned in the centre of the composition, and tables and chairs are angled so as to direct the viewer’s eye towards him. The patriarch is situated in front of an area of empty space, which functions as a stage for various characters to come and address themselves to him. As Iuri˚ Tsiv˚ian notes, the use of precision blocking, in particular the central positioning of protagonists, is a feature that is distinctive to early Russian cinema and one way in which it departs from the tradition of the theatre, in which the range of vantage points in the auditorium means that the precise positioning of actors is less effective.25 Moreover, the frontally-facing composition in Ukhar˚-kupets also corresponds to what Emma Widdis describes in relation to 1920s Soviet cinema as the use of framing devices and other cinematic techniques to comment on traditional

21 For discussion of Shekhtel’’s interest in Russian folk art, see James Cracraft and Daniel Bruce Rowland (eds), Architectures of Russian Identity, 1500 to the Present, London and Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003, p. 77.
24 Ivanova et al., Veliki˚ kinema, p. 39.
25 Yuri˚ Tsiv˚ian [Iuri˚ Tsiv’ian], ‘Sten’ka Razin’ (‘Ponizovaia vol’nitsa’), Rossia (1908), Iskusstvo kino, 7, 1988, pp. 93-96 (p. 95).
provincial culture’s preoccupation with display.\textsuperscript{26}

In comparison to the fiction films on Russian life designed by Kozhin, the Pathé films made on traditional Russian subjects from 1910 onwards exploited the expressive potential of natural outdoor settings to convey a sense of atmosphere. That year, Pathé hired the Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr (MKhT, Moscow Art Theatre) set designer Czesław Sabiński\textsuperscript{26} to work as the \textit{kino-khudozhnik} on several films on Russian life, including \textit{Mara} (1910), \textit{L'khaim} (1910) and \textit{Skazka o rybake i rybke} (The Tale of the Fisherman and the Little Fish, 1911). According to Sabiński’s memoirs, his responsibilities stretched beyond designing scenery and included consulting on acting techniques, placing actors within the frame and ‘representing traditional Russian life’.\textsuperscript{27} For \textit{Skazka o rybake i rybke}, Sabiński even wrote the scenario, which was based on Aleksandr Pushkin's fairy-tale verse of the same title published in 1833. \textit{Skazka o rybake i rybke} tells the story of a fisherman who catches a magical golden fish, which promises to grant his and his wife’s wishes for increased wealth and social status in return for its freedom. Pushkin’s tale offered Sabiński the opportunity to create a number of sets to correspond with the different ranks of rural society, from the peasantry to the boyar class and the nobility, as well as to use coastal and provincial landscapes.

As with Pathé’s earliest films, Sabiński’s set designs for \textit{Skazka o rybake i rybke} demonstrate a concern with ethnographic accuracy. Rashit Iangirov characterises Sabiński’s style of sets as ‘high quality reproductions of the ultra-realist school of the Moscow Art Theatre’.\textsuperscript{28} As with the Malyi theatre, the MKhT’s productions of the late 1890s and early 1900s were notable for the historical and ethnographic authenticity of their scenery. For many of these productions, such as \textit{Tsar Fedor Ioannovich} (1890), the MKhT’s principal director Konstantin Stanislavskii and head designer Viktor Simov undertook research trips to the Russian provinces to observe traditional rural life and to gather ethnographic material.\textsuperscript{29} For \textit{Skazka o rybake i rybke}, the film-makers similarly conducted research trips, travelling to a coastal area that corresponded with Pushkin’s description of the landscape.\textsuperscript{30} A concern for ethnographic detail is also evident in the artificial scenery that Sabiński designed for the film. The exterior of the Boyar’s house is decorated with intricate patterning, while the palace interiors are ornamented with elaborate painted frescos.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Czesław Sabiński [Czesław Sabiński], ‘Iz zapisok starogo kinomastera’, \textit{Iskusstvo kino}, 5, 1936, pp. 60-63 (p. 60).
\item \textsuperscript{28} Rashit Yangirov [Iangirov], ‘Cheslav Sabinski’ in Paolo Cherchi Usai, Lorenzo Codelli, Carlo Montanaro and David Robinson (eds), research and coordination by Yuri Tsivian, \textit{Silent Witnesses: Russian Film 1908-1918}, London and Pordenone: Edizioni dell’immagine and British Film Institute, 1989, p. 532.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Nick Worrall, \textit{The Moscow Art Theater}, London: Routledge, 2003, p. 86.
\item \textsuperscript{30} \textit{Sine-fono} [1911] in Ivanova et al., \textit{Veliki kinem}, p. 101.
\end{itemize}
In addition to painted decoration, Sabiński strove to create a sense of authenticity through the rural environment’s material artefacts and infrastructures. In the scenes that show the fisherman’s peasant hut, pots and tools of different sizes and materials are strewn across the ground. Details such as the hut’s lopsided wood panelling, its small sunken window and the ragged textiles that hang outside its entrance convey the poverty of peasant life and the fisherman’s downtrodden existence.

These scenes of rural poverty contrast starkly with the picturesque quality of the landscape. In several of the coastal scenes, dazzling reflections of light gleam on the water’s surface. Compositions are carefully constructed so that the sweeping curve of a bay is contrasted with the vertical trunks of trees. As Paolo Cherchi Usai notes, several of the films on which Sabiński worked in the early 1910s are remarkable in terms of their picturesque landscapes. He even refers to the woodland scenes in L’Khaim as ‘Arcadian’ in terms of how the female figures are arranged on a hill bank to resemble classical mythological compositions. In Skazka o rybake i rybke, the ethereal quality of the landscape corresponds to the film’s fairy-tale scenario. In his commentary on the film, Cherchi Usai argues that the natural beauty of the coastal scenes contrasts with the ‘clumsiness’ of the over-sized papier-mâché fish. The fact that Sabiński held a reputation in early Russian cinema for his proficiency as a prop and model maker and the level of verisimilitude achieved in the scenery for the palace and boyar’s house in Skazka o rybake i rybke suggest, however, that the artificial appearance of the fish is deliberate, and is intended to

31 Cherchi Usai et al., Silent Witnesses, p. 102.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
heighten the fairy-tale quality of these episodes.\textsuperscript{34} In the coastal scenes, the shiny surface of the fish’s body echoes the glittering reflections of light on the sea, while its exaggerated size alludes to its magical properties as well as to the power it holds over the fisherman.\textsuperscript{35}

Over the course of the film, subtle changes in the seascape work to convey a shift in the relationship between the fisherman and the natural world. Initially, the sea is calm and light gleams off its undisturbed surface. On the fisherman’s first expedition, during which he catches the magical fish, he is pictured in control of the sea, with his boat positioned in the centre of the composition taking up the majority of the frame (Fig. 2.3). As the film progresses, however, and the situation between the fisherman and the fish is reversed, leaving the fisherman dependent on the fish’s will, the sea fills a greater proportion of the frame while the fisherman is left marginalised, standing on a small rock in the corner of the composition (Fig. 2.4). The sea becomes more turbulent and waves crash against the jagged rocks, conveying the limits of the fisherman’s control over the natural world. Thus, Sabiński used the natural landscape not only for verisimilitude, but also to convey the change in atmosphere in Pushkin’s tale.

\textbf{Fig. 2.3.} \textit{Skazka o rybake i rybke}, man’s power over the sea.


\textsuperscript{35} The sets for the Khanzhonkov studio’s \textit{Rusalka} (The Water Nymph, 1910), which were designed by Fester, also play with exaggerated scales to convey a sense of magic. For example, in the scenes in which the water nymphs dance under the sea, shells and seaweed take on enormous proportions, emphasising the fairy-tale quality of this ‘underwater kingdom’ in comparison to the other spaces in the film. For a still from this sequence see, Cherchi Usaì et al., \textit{Silent Witnesses}, p. 113.
From 1911/1912, there was a noticeable decline in films with rural settings that were based upon traditional Russian folktales or verses. Rather, film-makers began to use the rural environment as a setting to explore contemporary everyday peasant life with an emphasis on its backwardness and deprivation. In 1912, the Khanzhonkov studio produced several films that focused on the hardships of rural life, including *Brat’ia-razboiniki* (The Brigand Brothers), *Krest’ianskaia dolia* (The Peasants’ Lot) and *Snokhach* (The Incestuous Father-in-Law). Although no *kino-khudozhnik* is credited with working on these films, the carefully composed landscapes and set design details are crucial to their representations of rural hardship. Indeed, Rachel Morley identifies *Snokhach* as remarkable among early Russian films for the way in which the film-makers exploited natural settings ‘to establish mood and atmosphere, to mirror the protagonists’ state of mind and to foreshadow their ultimate fates’.

*Brat’ia-razboiniki* is also notable for how the film-makers exploited the rural environment to convey meaning and to enhance visual expressivity in various ways. Goncharov worked as the director and the scenarist on the film alongside the camera operator Louis Forestier. Another adaptation of a Pushkin work, this time his 1821 poem of the same title, the film focuses on the chief of a group of bandits, who recounts to his followers, as they sit gathered on the banks of the Volga river, how he and his brother were left orphaned as children and eked out an existence in the countryside, first as beggars and then as highway robbers. The film’s diversity of terrains, ranging from flat plains to steep valleys and dense woodlands, forms a key element of its visual impact. As Neia Zorkaia demonstrates in her discussion of Drankov’s treatment of outdoor settings in *Sten’ka Razin*, since the earliest days of Russian cinema film-makers used the elements

and the textures of the natural world to heighten cinema’s expressive potential. In *Bat’ia-razboiniki*, the different terrains create variations in lighting effects: the flat and even light of the open plains contrasts with the intense shadows of the thicketed pathways and the dappled sunlight of the dense woodlands.

Natural settings are also one of the crucial means through which the film-makers convey the brothers’ misfortunes and pitiful existence. In an early sequence in which villagers haul the corpse of the brothers’ drowned mother from a river, water takes up the majority of the frame and the characters are marginalised in a corner, alluding to the river’s awesome power. As the brothers proceed on their journey through the countryside, they are forced to ascend a steep and rocky path, jump across deep ditches filled with giant boulders and traverse fields of long grass. Details such as scraggy branches, overgrown vegetation and trees gnarled with age work to convey the hostility of the rural environment. These scenes are similar to how in *Snokhach* the film-makers used natural settings to portray the distressed emotional state and wretched situation of the young peasant girl Lusha, who is raped by her father-in-law in accordance with the traditional Russian custom of snokhachestvo. In *Bat’ia-razboiniki*, as in *Snokhach*, the representation of the protagonists as oppressed by their natural environment alludes to the fact that their misfortunes are not self-inflicted, but result from circumstances of birth and the society they find themselves within.

In addition to the natural features of the rural landscape, the film-makers also exploited the infrastructure of rural settlements to convey the brothers’ hardships. Throughout the film, the brothers are pictured at a distance from rural settlements and are framed next to fences, alluding to their social isolation and marginal existence. As a notable example, in one scene the brothers are shown walking next to a town wall, which fills the entire height of the frame and dwarfs them; behind them stretches a faintly trodden path that eventually leads to a settlement, just visible on the distant horizon (Fig. 2.5). In another sequence in which one of the brothers embraces the village girl with whom he is in love, a broken fence dominates the foreground of the frame; its jagged stakes jut violently into the centre of the composition and create a sense of foreboding (Fig. 2.6.). This composition prefigures a sequence in the Libken studio’s *Doch’ kuptsa Bashkirova* (Merchant Bashkirov’s Daughter, 1913) in which, as the merchant’s daughter and her

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38 In this way, the sequence recalls the opening sequences of *Sten’ka Razin* (1908) in which the river dominates the frame, conveying the force that Mother Russia has over Sten’ka Razin and his men. For discussion of the significance of the river in *Sten’ka Razin*, see Morley, *Performing Femininity*, pp. 22-23.

39 For analysis of these scenes, see ibid., pp. 42-43. *Snokhachestvo* was a custom traditionally practiced in which a wife was pressured by her husband's family to engage in sexual relationships with her father-in-law as an act of submission to the patriarch.

40 Ibid., p. 43.
lover embrace, they are framed by a broken gate in the foreground. Such bleak landscapes closely relate to the Peredvozhniki (Itinerants) tradition of representing rural life, which emphasised its social backwardness. The landscape paintings of Vasili Perov and Aleksei Savrasov, for example, rejected pastoral imagery instead to linger on empty scrublands, eroded pathways and battered fences that convey the destitution of rural society.⁴¹

Fig. 2.5. Brat’ia-razhoiniki, fences and social exclusion.

Fig. 2.6. Brat’ia-razhoiniki, fences and a sense of foreboding.

In the early 1910s, the contemporary cinema press focused its praise of films depicting rural life on their expressive landscapes and their detailed and truthful recreation of provincial everyday life.\(^{42}\) As the decade progressed, however, very few films were produced which took as their subject the everyday life of rural inhabitants. Instead, film-makers began to focus on representing urban life. Additionally, some critics began to denounce films that they saw to be overly-concerned with precise ethnographic detail. In a 1916 article published in *Vestnik kinematograf*, an anonymous critic announced that in Russian cinema 'Время бытописания прошло' [The time for depicting everyday life has passed].\(^{43}\) According to the critic, films of rural life should not be mired in ethnographic detail; instead, scenery should function 'только как фоном для интересной жизненной драмы' [only as the background for an interesting, lively drama].\(^{44}\) The critic praised the Khanzhonkov studio’s *Kto zagubil?* (Who Spoilt It?, 1916) as a new departure in this direction, arguing that, ‘Все бытовые пьесы, бывавшие до сих пор на экране, страдают от обилия этнографических подробностей, перегружены бытом во вред драматическому содержанию’ [All everyday-life dramas previously shown on the screen, suffer from an abundance of ethnographic details and are overloaded with everyday life to the detriment of dramatic content].\(^{45}\)

As with the Khanzhonkov studio’s earlier rural dramas of 1912, no *kino-khudozhnik* is credited with designing the sets for *Kto zagubil?*. Nikandr Turkin worked as the director alongside the camera operator Mikhail Vladimirskii. The scenario, adapted by Zoia Barantsevich from her novella *Lesnia storozhka* (The Forest Lodge, 1916), follows a love affair between a young peasant girl and the son of a wealthy businessman, who owns a country estate near the girl’s village. According to the *Vestnik kinematograf* critic, the film broke from the typical mould of rural everyday life dramas in that, rather than attempting to recreate settings in precise detail, the film-makers portrayed only the ‘typical’.\(^{46}\) Indeed, *Kto zagubil?* is notable for its pared-down interiors. Apart from a single icon on the wall and patterned curtains and a tablecloth, the young peasant girl’s *izba* is devoid of decorative features (Fig. 2.7). The scenes which take place in the *izba* are filmed at a medium distance, emphasising the sparseness of the scenery. In *Kto zagubil?*, the film-makers’ main focus was to create a sense of atmosphere and psychological tension. This is achieved primarily through the effects of light in the outdoor settings. In contrast to the spartan interior of the *izba*, the outdoor scenes, as in *Brat’ia-razboiniki*, display a richness of textural and tonal contrasts, created by different types of foliage and vegetation (Fig. 2.8). Areas of dense woodlands are juxtaposed with open vistas, creating variations in lighting effects.

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\(^{42}\) See, for example, Anon., *Vestnik kinematograf* [1912] in Ivanova et al., *Veliki kinemo*, pp. 123-24 and Anon., *Vestnik kinematograf* [1912], ibid., p. 118.

\(^{43}\) Anon., *Vestnik kinematograf* [1916], ibid., pp. 324-25 (p. 324).

\(^{44}\) Ibid., pp. 324-25.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 325.
Although since the earliest days of Russian cinema, film-makers had considered the ways in which the rural landscape could heighten dramatic tension, in the mid- to late 1910s they began to devote more of their attention to developing specific methods towards achieving this goal.

Fig. 2.7. *Kto zagubil?*, peasant interior.

Fig. 2.8. *Kto zagubil?*, exterior scene.
II. Ethnographic and Psychological Realism

Throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s, critics continued to comment on the ethnographic authenticity of the settings of films that based their action in the rural provinces. In comparison to the reviewer writing in 1916 in Vestnik kinematograf, however, many critics considered that ethnographic accuracy and a wealth of naturalistic detail could heighten a film’s psychological intensity. This is evident in the reception of the Rus’ studio’s Polikushka, produced in 1919 but released only in 1922 due to the hardships of the Russian film industry during the civil war period. Contemporaneous critics and film historians alike have remarked on how the film combines a concern for authenticity with an interest in psychological fantasy. In a review published in 1923, the German critic A. Kepp argued that in Polikushka the film-makers ‘передают действительность с фантастической правдивостью и фантастику с правдивостью действительности’ [convey reality with fantastic veracity and fantasy with the truth of reality]. More recently, Denise J. Youngblood has described the film as ‘a fascinating combination of dreary naturalism, extreme theatricality and even a little supernaturalism’.

The film’s scenario was adapted by Fedor Otsep and Nikolai Efros from Lev Tolstoi’s 1863 novel of the same title, which presents a brutal exposé of the poverty of Russian rural life in the nineteenth century. The eponymous peasant Polikushka lives a downtrodden existence, committing petty theft to support his drinking habit while his family goes hungry. When a wealthy landlady entrusts him with delivering an envelope of money, he receives an opportunity to prove himself and rise above his disreputable lifestyle. During the journey, however, Polikushka loses the envelope; distressed at his sense of failure, he commits suicide. Polikushka was one of a series of films that Rus’ made in collaboration with the MKhT in 1918/1919, with the studio’s film-makers working alongside a cast of actors and theatre professionals from the MKhT and the Malyi theatre. For Polikushka, the kino-khudozhnik Sergei Kozlovskii and the camera operator Iurii Zheliabuzhskii collaborated with the theatre director Aleksandr Sanin. This continued the close and productive partnership that these three figures had established when, as we recall from Chapter One, they worked together on Dev’i gory (The Virgin Hills, 1919), the first joint production between Rus’ and the MKhT.

50 For discussion of the collaboration, see Moisei Aleinikov, Puti sovetskogo kino i MKhAT, Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1947, pp. 34-72.
51 Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’ [date unknown], Iz istorii kino, 7, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968, pp. 63-90 (pp. 68-69). See Chapter One of this thesis, p. 50.
Contemporary reviews of Polikushka focused on the naturalistic detail of Kozlovskii’s scenery. Writing in 1922 in Kino, the critic Veronin noted that Kozlovskii’s sets were made in the ethnographic tradition of the Malyi theatre. He even declared that the sets were too naturalistic and seemed as if they had been made to please a foreign audience who pined to see an ‘exotic’ Russia. Kepp also compared the film in terms of its level of naturalistic detail to the paintings of the sixteenth-century Netherlandish artist Hans Memling, whose dense compositions of religious subjects set against rural landscapes were intended to prolong and to intensify spiritual contemplation.

The level of detail in Kozlovskii’s sets is indeed remarkable, especially considering the limited resources available to the film-makers at the time. In their wealth of detail, Kozlovskii’s sets recall those that Simov created for the MKhT’s 1902 production of Maksim Gor’kii’s Na dne (The Lower Depths, 1901), which also represents the deprivation of Russian peasant life. As in Na dne and in Brat’ia-razboiniki, set details serve primarily to emphasise the protagonists’ impoverished existence. In the scenes set in Polikushka’s hovel, the composition is densely packed with dirty pots and pans, ragged textiles and overgrown foliage (Fig. 2.9). An enormous tree, with its rough bark clearly visible, cuts through the middle of the hut, and twigs and straw protrude from the ceiling, making the space appear more like an outdoor shelter than a domestic interior. The mass of vegetation that intrudes into the shack seems to restrain the movements of Polikushka and his family and conveys the constraints of their social situation, which they struggle to escape. Polikushka’s hut contrasts starkly with the wealthy landlady’s home, with its pristine white walls, high ceilings, elongated classical columns and crystal glassware. Here nature is tamed and appears only as a decorative motif, such as in the acanthus leaf capitals of the Corinthian columns and the curtains’ stylised floral patterning. Throughout the film, the repeated use of medium-distance camera shots works to highlight the set design details and, as Peter Rollberg argues, to heighten the film’s sense of verisimilitude.

Since the MKhT’s inception, Stanislavskii and Simov had used sets with an abundance of detail as a way to help actors identify with the inner emotional feelings of their characters. In contrast to other Russian theatres at the beginning of the twentieth century, where actors had very little interaction with sets and were usually only introduced to them immediately before a

52 Veronin, Kino [1922] in Ivanova et al., Velikiy kinem, p. 488.
53 Ibid.
54 Kepp, ibid., pp. 490-91.
55 For discussion of the resources available, see Moisei Aleinikov, Puti sovetskogo kino i MKhAT, pp. 62-63.
performance, at the MKhT Simov brought models of the sets to the rehearsals;\textsuperscript{57} he even, on occasion, constructed full-scale sets behind the theatre back-curtain so that actors could get into character before appearing on stage.\textsuperscript{58} In his memoirs, the Rus’ studio proprietor Moisei Aleinikov, notes that for Dev’i gory Simov drew on his experience at the MKhT and used set models as a strategy to help actors prepare before filming began and to stay in character during shooting breaks.\textsuperscript{59}

![Fig. 2.9. Polikushka, Polikushka’s home.](image)

![Fig. 2.10. Polikushka, Polikushka and the destitute building.](image)

\textsuperscript{57} Iu. I. Nekhoroshev, \textit{Dekorator Khudozhestvennogo teatra Viktor Andreievi\textprime{}ch Simov}, Moscow: Sovetskii khudozlnik, 1984, p. 49.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{59} Aleinikov, \textit{Puti sovetskogo kino i MKhAT}, p. 52.
Similarly, the details of Kozlovskii’s sets in Polikushka serve to convey the temperament and the psychological states of characters. Polikushka’s uncouth nature is visually expressed in the dirty rags and rubble that fill his dirty shack of a home. The house’s overgrown vegetation echoes Polikushka’s bedraggled appearance, with his long strands of uncombed hair, and alludes to his uncultivated nature. In several scenes, Polikushka stands next to a horse, his straggly hair echoing the creature’s matted mane and emphasising his primitive nature. In addition to conveying his crude character, Polikushka’s environment also evokes his frenzied state of mind.

In one scene, he crouches against the crumbling brickwork of a building, which reflects not only his destitute state, but also his distressed thoughts (Fig. 2.10). The building’s classical columns dwarf Polikushka, who huddles close to the ground, and convey his social insignificance. Moreover, in the sequence in which Polikushka discovers that he has lost the landlady’s money, he is framed against a bleak landscape of barren trees, whose skeletal forms hint ominously at his fate. In this sequence, Polikushka once again crouches in a marginalised position in the corner of the frame, indicating his insignificance. In the sequence in which he hangs himself, a mass of foliage obscures his face entirely, reducing his identity to an anonymous corpse.

The effectiveness of the film’s set designs was acknowledged at the time of its release and beyond. In his text ‘Der sichtbare Mensch’ (The Visible Man, 1924), which was reviewed in the Soviet press from 1925, the Hungarian formalist critic Béla Balázs marked out Polikushka for its ability to convey human emotions and psychology through the landscape. Balázs argued that in fiction films, such as Polikushka, landscape is not simply a background for action; instead, the physical features of the land reveal a person’s character and psychology. He describes landscape as a form of physiognomy, writing that topography acts as ‘a face of a particular place with a very definite expression of feeling’.

Despite the interest among contemporary film critics in the expressive potential of landscapes, very few Soviet fiction films of the early to mid-1920s exploited rural settings as a means to convey individual psychology. Instead, many films of the period set their action in urban environments and explored social and class issues. Lev Kuleshov’s Po zakonu (By the Law, 1926) is a notable exception, however, in terms of how the film-makers used the rural environment to convey the emotional states of characters. Indeed, the Assotsiatsiia revoliutionnykh kinematografistov (ARK, Association of Revolutionary Film-makers) identified the film as the first psychological drama in Soviet cinema and noted that its scenery played an important role in

61 Ibid., p. 53.
62 Ibid., p. 49.
conveying emotional tension. More recently, Philip Cavendish has claimed that `Po zakonu` is ‘one of the very first Soviet films to imbue the landscape, both interior and exterior, with a powerfully dramaturgical dimension’. According to Kuleshov, his main aim was to explore ‘zhizn´ po zakonu i zhizn´ po dyshe’ [life by the law and life by the soul], or how individuals are psychologically affected by the struggle between their primal anxieties and emotions and their sense of duty to uphold established ethical codes in the name of the church and the state. For Kuleshov, the focus on the psychological experiences of individuals was a marked departure from many early-Soviet films, which were preoccupied with crowd mentality and mass reaction.

In addition to taking on the position of director, Kuleshov worked on the sets alongside the kino-khudozhiik Isaak Maklits. He also co-authored the scenario with the formalist critic Viktor Shklovskii. The pair based `Po zakonu`’s scenario on Jack London's short story *The Unexpected* (1906), which follows a group of prospectors digging for gold in the Alaskan Yukon at the turn of the nineteenth century. The group’s drudge, an Irishman named Michael Dennin, is forced to perform domestic chores instead of being allowed to participate in the search for gold. In an attempt to overturn the inequality between him and his comrades, Michael murders two of the group’s members. The survivors, Hans and Edith Nelson, resist taking immediate bloodthirsty revenge on Michael and hold him captive as they seek to bring his crimes to trial. However, as winter sets in and they become trapped with Michael in the isolated cabin, Hans and Edith struggle with their feelings of compassion for their murdered comrades and their sense of ethical justice and civic duty to uphold the law.

As several scholars have argued, although `Po zakonu` is set in a time and place remote from contemporary Soviet life, Kuleshov and Shklovskii used the film as a metaphor for society caught on the brink of revolution. Cavendish notes that the prospectors’ cabin and its immediate surrounding environment represent two separate symbolic entities: the cabin, with its hierarchical pecking order and its ethical pretensions based on established codes, metaphorically represents bourgeois society; the surrounding wilderness, by contrast, stands for the primal human urges and emotions that threaten to undermine social order.

63 ‘Rezoliutsiia obshchego sobraniia proizvodstvennoi sektssi ARK k kartine “Po zakonu”’, *Kino-front*, 9-10, 1926, p. 31.
66 Ibid.
The film’s action takes place in the single environment of the cabin. The limited use of settings was partly a result of the film-makers’ desire to create an economical film. Shklovskii later exalted the fact that, in comparison to the high production costs of many other 1920s Soviet films – such as the historical drama Dekabristy (The Decembrists, 1927), which cost over 300,000 rubles – Po zakonu was made at a total expense of only 18,000 rubles. During the mid-1920s, film-makers and critics became concerned with ways to economise the production process, particularly in terms of set design. In a special feature dedicated to the tasks of kino-khudozhniki published in a 1925 edition of Kino-zhurnal ARK, both Kozlovskii and Makhlis contributed articles in which they called for maximum economy of materials and simplicity of expression in set design.

In Po zakonu, the film-makers’ concern for economy in set design was not, however, at the expense of visual authenticity and expressivity. For the exterior settings, they undertook various research expeditions to Moscow’s suburbs in search of a site that corresponded with their knowledge of the Yukon gained from American films, before they eventually settled on a location near Tsaritsynskii lake. Initially, the cabin was built on a spit that jutted into the Moscow River. When in the spring the ice melted, causing the water level to rise and the cabin to become flooded, the film-makers transferred filming to an artificial cabin constructed in the Goskino studio. Kuleshov notes how they took great care in constructing the artificial cabin so that the switch would not be apparent to viewers.

The film-makers decided to use a single environment not only for economic reasons, however. In his memoirs, Kuleshov claimed that the choice of a one-room cabin in the isolated countryside was essential to their aim of revealing the psychology of individuals. He stated that it is only within confined and private settings, away from social codes and expectations, that individuals expose their true emotions and anxieties. This concern can already be seen in the pre-revolutionary films that Kuleshov worked on as the kino-khudozhnik alongside Evgenii Bauer. In Ža schast´em (In Pursuit of Happiness, 1917), for example, the female protagonist Li abandons herself to her romantic feelings for her mother’s lover, the lawyer Dmitrii Gzhatskii, as she

69 Kuleshov, Selected Works: Fifty Years in Films, p. 228 and Youngblood, Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, p. 94.
70 Ibid.
71 For example, a special feature in Kino-front categorised films by their production costs. See Ippolit Sokolov, ‘Stoimost´ proizvodstva’, Kino-front, 1, 1926, pp. 11-12.
73 Kuleshov, Selected Works: Fifty Years in Films, p. 228.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Lev Kuleshov; ‘Mr West –Ray –By the Law’ [1926], ibid., pp. 66-67 (p. 67).
77 Ibid.
reclines on a secluded beach in a sheltered spot, surrounded by rocks.\textsuperscript{78}

In \textit{Po zakonu}, the cabin’s social isolation is made immediately apparent in the opening scenes. A series of establishing shots show the great expanse of the Yukon river and the cabin on an uninhabited bank, silhouetted against a desolate landscape (Figs. 2.11 and 2.12). Horizontal forms dominate the frame and are ruptured only by the skeletal body of a tree, which hints ominously towards its later function as a means for Hans and Edith’s attempted execution of Michael. Rosemari Baker notes how the film-makers’ emphasis on the cabin’s isolation in the opening sequences departs from London’s original narrative, which shows Edith performing domestic chores inside the cabin.\textsuperscript{79} Similarly, Evgenii Gromov argues that, while London’s text is relatively vague about the cabin’s setting, in \textit{Po zakonu} the film-makers devote considerable attention to establishing a sense of isolation.\textsuperscript{80} Indeed, in his memoirs Kuleshov notes that the film-makers carefully constructed compositions so as to exclude from the frame any existing infrastructure at the filming location.\textsuperscript{81}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Fig_2.11.png}
\caption{\textit{Po zakonu}, the Yukon River.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Fig_2.12.png}
\caption{\textit{Po zakonu}, the prospectors’ cabin.}
\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{78} For discussion of Li’s infatuation with Gzhatskii, see Rachel Morley, ‘Gender Relations in the Films of Evgenii Bauer’, \textit{Slavonic and East European Review}, 81, 2003, 1, pp. 32-69 (p. 46).
\textsuperscript{79} Baker, ‘Shklovsky in the Cinema, 1926-1932’, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{81} Kuleshov, \textit{Selected Works: Fifty Years in Films}, p. 228.
\end{flushleft}
As the film progresses, the landscape becomes increasingly hostile, conveying how, in their prolonged separation from civilised society, Hans and Edith’s primal emotions gradually erode their ethical pretensions. Initially, the land refuses to give itself up as a resource to the prospectors while they search for gold. As Edith pans for gold, the water reflects only her own face, which causes her to laugh in childlike amusement. Later in the film, the natural environment takes on a more active agency as it begins to resist acts of human intervention. Rain and snow submerge pathways and a gale overturns the prospectors’ sledge. In the sequence in which Hans attempts to dig a grave for his murdered comrades, the wind and rain lash him, frustrating his efforts, and the icy terrain refuses to yield to his pick-axe. As winter sets in and the cabin becomes increasingly cut off from its surrounding environment, tensions mount between the characters. Shots of the snow-covered cabin are intercut with close-ups of the faces of Hans and Edith contorted into anxious grimaces. In the spring that follows, the melting ice leaves the cabin clinging to a slither of land amid a flooded plain (Fig. 2.13). In several of the springtime sequences, the cabin is positioned off-centre of the composition or in a marginalised corner, emphasising its inhabitants’ existence on the fringes of civilised society.

![Fig. 2.13. Po zakou, the cabin in spring.](image)

As in *Polikushka*, the cabin’s primitive appearance also serves to demonstrate the inhabitants’ separation from civilised society. Its walls are made from logs of rough wood with the bark clearly visible; a tree trunk cuts through the centre of the interior; furs are draped over the walls and furniture; sawn tree trunks function as stools; and a fire pit built from rocks occupies the corner of the interior that in a peasant’s house is usually reserved for the stove (Fig. 2.14). For
Gromov, the cabin’s primitive appearance alludes to the brutish nature of human emotions.\textsuperscript{82} The shots that introduce the characters similarly work to convey their crude nature: Edith and her comrade Harky are introduced among a mound of furs, signalling their connection to the animal world. Their animal nature is emphasised in the scene that immediately follows, which shows a close up of Michael’s dog, with its long snout recalling Edith’s wide smile.\textsuperscript{83} Significantly, these scenes precede those that show Edith with a bible and a comb that she uses to brush her hair, indicating her desire to adhere to social expectations and codes. Humankind’s primitive nature is emphasised in a later sequence in which Hans and Edith are forced to crawl on all fours, like animals, as they attempt to drag the sledge across the snow.

![Fig. 2.14. Po zakonu, the cabin interior](image)

The prospectors’ attempts to impose established social codes and practices on their environment is demonstrated through their interventions in the cabin’s primitive interior. The centre of the cabin is dominated by a large sturdy table around which the inhabitants enact their daily routines. The table’s smooth surface contrasts starkly with the cabin’s rough walls. When Hans and Edith bring Michael to trial, they use the table to construct a mock court, covering it with a white cloth and placing on top of it a copy of the bible (Fig. 2.15). Hanging above the table is a portrait of Queen Victoria in her regal attire. As Gromov notes, Makhlin and Kuleshov’s inclusion of a portrait departed from London’s text.\textsuperscript{84} In his memoirs, Kuleshov stated that the portrait was intended as a symbol that encapsulated the law-abiding pretensions and

\textsuperscript{82} Gromov, \textit{Lev Vladimirovich Kuleshov}, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{83} Edith was played by Aleksandra Khokhlova, who was known for her distinctive appearance.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
Despite the prospectors’ endeavours to impose control on their environment, their efforts are futile. The gradual intrusion of the natural world into the cabin alludes to the way in which primal human emotions and anxieties gradually undermine established codes. As Cavendish notes, the natural elements intrude into the cabin at crucial moments in the narrative and influence the relationships between characters. During spring, the ice melts and water floods into the cabin, coinciding with a warming in relations between Hans and Michael. In a gesture of compassion, Hans gives a blanket to Michael, who shivers in his drenched clothes. Moreover, as winter thaws and spring emerges, signalled by shots of a singing bird and branches with fresh buds, the group gathers around a cake to celebrate Edith’s birthday and Michael gives his watch as a present to his comrade.

In his memoirs, Kuleshov notes that the film-makers used artificial methods to create natural effects that would heighten the sense of atmosphere: a fire hose created the impression of pouring rain and an airplane propeller gave the effect of wind. The actress Aleksandr Khokhlova, who played Edith, stated that these effects helped her ‘perezhivat’ [to live through/to experience] her character. As Gromov notes, Khokhlova’s use of the verb

85 Kuleshov, Selected Works: Fifty Years in Films, p. 229.
86 Cavendish, Soviet Mainstream Cinematography, p. 67.
87 Kuleshov, Selected Works: Fifty Years in Films, p. 229.
'perezhivat’ is interesting in so far as the term is connected with Stanislavskii’s acting method. Indeed, Aleinikov used the term to describe the form of acting that was used in Dev’i gory and Polikushka. The psychological and emotional intensity expressed in Po zakonu was not, however, well received by all contemporary critics. In a review in Kino, Mikhail Levidov attacked the film for its ‘instances of pathology and hysteria’, which he criticised as ‘a sick phenomenon’ that harms Soviet cinema. Similarly, writing in Kino-front, the critic A. Arsen denounced several scenes, such as those of Edith’s birthday, for expressing bourgeois rituals and mysticism. Youngblood notes that the criticism of Po zakonu was even more harsh among ARK, which condemned the film primarily on account of its ‘mysticism’.

III. Transforming the Rural Environment: The Enchantment of Infrastructure and Technology in Early-Soviet Fiction Films

While many Russian fiction films of the 1910s had celebrated the mystical practices and beliefs of rural peasant life as an essential part of Russian national identity, in Soviet cinema of the 1920s this mysticism came to signify rural society’s backwardness and was represented as an obstacle to social and technological transformation. A number of 1920s Soviet films pictured the rural environment as caught amid a struggle to replace religious mysticism with a new belief system rooted in technology’s promise to overcome hierarchical class divisions and to ensure social and economic progress. Through the technological and infrastructural transformation of the countryside, rural society would become a vital contributor to the state’s industrial development. Moreover, in contrast to Po zakonu, which represents the natural world as untameable, in many late 1920s Soviet films rural inhabitants are shown as able to assert control over the forces of nature and their surrounding material environment through using technology.

The issue of how the infrastructural transformation of the rural environment would contribute to social progress and industrial prosperity is directly addressed in Staroe i novoe (The Old and The New, 1929). Initially titled General’naia liniia (The General Line), the film originated as a social commission between the Party Central Committee and the Sovkino studio to demonstrate the urgency to modernise and to collectivise the Soviet countryside. Sovkino assigned Sergei Eizenshtein and Grigorii Aleksandrov to work as the film’s scenarists and directors alongside the camera operator Eduard Tisse and the kino-khudozhniki Vasilii Kovrigin and Vasilii Rakhal’s.

89 Aleinikov, Puti sovetskogo kino i MKhAT, p. 50.
92 Youngblood, Soviet Cinema in the Silent Era, pp. 93-94.
Production began in 1926 and by 1927 the film-makers had finished shooting a significant proportion of the film. However, Eizenshtein and Tisse’s involvement in 1927 on Oktiabr’ (October), to mark the anniversary of the 1917 Revolution, interrupted production work on Staroe i novoie. By the time the film-makers resumed work in June 1928, the party line on agriculture had shifted and a different ideological emphasis was required, as reflected in the film’s change of title to Staroe i novoie. While in the period between 1925 and 1927 agricultural policy had focused on increasing production through mechanised labour, the 15th Party Conference in December 1927 called for a focus on new ways of organising production and of socialising rural communities, identifying collectivisation as the main strategy for realising these goals.

Despite this shift in policy, in the final version of the film forms of mechanised agricultural production such as the tractor and the cream separator continue to occupy a central role. As Eizenshtein would later recall, rather than providing a social analysis of the transition to collective farming methods, the film-makers focused on ‘the pathos of the machine’, a term he used to describe the villagers’ affective response to forms of mechanisation. In this way, Staroe i novoie demonstrates a similar concern for the agency of objects as Eizenshtein and Rakhal’s previous collaboration, Bronenosets Potemkin (Battleship Potemkin, 1925). In contemporary reviews of Bronenosets Potemkin, several critics remarked on how objects and infrastructure, such as battleship machinery, jetties and bridges, incited desires for social and revolutionary change.

Writing in 1926 in Zhizn’ iskusstva, the critic Aleksei Gvozdev even claimed that in the film it is the objects, rather than the actors, that act and become the heroes. Likewise, several critics remarked on the role that objects played in Staroe i novoie, in particular focussing on agricultural infrastructure and machinery, such as fences, the collective dairy farm and tractors.

As with many Russian fiction films of the 1910s that were set in the rural provinces, Eizenshtein, Kovringin and Rakhal’s based the scenery for Staroe i novoie on intense ethnographic research,

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94 For discussion of the production process, see ‘General’naiia liniiia (beseda s S. M. Eizenshteinom), Kino-front, 4, 1927, pp. 29-30.
95 Cavendish, The Men with the Movie Camera, p. 105.
99 Aleksei Gvozdev, Zhizn’ iskusstva [1926], cited ibid., pp. 76-77.
100 For example, see Nikolai Lukhmanov, ‘Zhizn’ kak ona dolzhna byt’’, Sovetskii ekran, 15, 1928, p. 6 and his ‘Zhizn’ kak ona dolzhna byt’’, Kino i kul’tura, 1, 1929, pp. 29-37; Eduard Tisse, ‘Na s’emkah “General’noi”, Sovetskii ekran, 8, 1929, p. 13; and V. Kolomarov, ‘Veshchi’ v kino’, Kino i kul’tura, 9-10, 1929, pp. 29-37 (pp. 35-37).
which included reading newspaper reports on the condition of the countryside, conducting interviews at research institutes that specialised in agricultural matters and undertaking reconnaissance trips to villages and cooperatives outside Moscow.\textsuperscript{101} For the rural settings, the film-makers sought out a range of filming locations both in Moscow’s suburbs and in various Soviet republics. In a promotional article for \textit{Staroe i novoie} in \textit{Kino-front}, Eizenshtein noted that filming took place in the Mugan Steppe, a region south of Baku, at large-scale collective farms outside Moscow, at the Brunnitsa Meadows, situated by the Moscow River on the road to Riazan’, at the village of Mnevnik and at the Konstantinovo State Breeding Farm in Riazan’ province.\textsuperscript{102}

In the mid- to late 1920s, diverse and often far-flung, rural settings were used in a number of films such as \textit{Evrei na zemle} (Jews on the Land, 1927), which incorporated footage shot in Crimea, and \textit{Parizhskii sapozhnik} (The Parisian Cobbler, 1928), for which the film-makers travelled to Pskov.\textsuperscript{103} The cinema press avidly reported on these filming expeditions, with many articles extolling the merits of outdoor filming over studio work, which was criticised as extravagant despite the fact that it was usually more economical.\textsuperscript{104} A number of critics, among them Viktor Shklovskii, complained that the sets of rural provinces made in the studio were monotonous and ‘skuchnye’ [boring], and insisted that film-makers must make films of village life that depicted the local character of provinces.\textsuperscript{105} Indeed, Shklovskii denounced \textit{Staroe i novoie} for the way in which the film-makers combined material from a number of different rural provinces and created a picture of rural life that was too generic.\textsuperscript{106} Other critics encouraged film-makers to pursue location filming in order to capture an authentic representation of the natural world. In a 1925 article titled ‘Na naturu!’ (To Location Filming!), published in \textit{Sovetskii ekran}, an anonymous critic argued that film-makers should undertake expeditions to capture not only genuine life, but also the beauty of natural light.\textsuperscript{107} The critic claimed that the cinema industry should strive for 70\% of its productions to be filmed outdoors.\textsuperscript{108} The attention given to filming expeditions correlates with a general interest in ethnographic research during the mid-1920s.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[102]‘General’naia liniiia (beseda s S. M. Eizensheinom)’, pp. 29-30.
\item[103]Widdis, \textit{Socialist Senses}, p. 133.
\item[106]Shklovskii, ‘Sherst’, steklo i kruzheva’, p. 2.
\item[107]Anon., ‘Na naturu’, \textit{Sovetskii ekran}, 6, 1925, p. 3.
\item[108]Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
According to Widdis, between 1925 and 1926, 633 scientific expeditions were organised with the aim of gathering historical and ethnographic material.\footnote{Emma Widdis, \textit{Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War}, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 103.} In addition to participating in filming expeditions, Eizenshtein, Kovringin and Rakhal’s undertook research on agricultural technology and infrastructure for \textit{Staroe i novoe}. Anne Nesbet notes that the film-makers collected specialist articles on agricultural machinery, including milk coolers and cream separators.\footnote{Nesbet, \textit{Savage Junctures}, p. 99.} In particular, O. Davydov’s text \textit{Maklochanie} (1926), which traces the growth of Soviet collective farms, became a vital source of information on how technology could improve farming methods.\footnote{Ibid.} Davydov’s study paid particular attention to the cream separator as a device for transforming the countryside.\footnote{Ibid.} Besides analytical charts that demonstrated the separator’s role in increasing economic productivity, Davydov included anecdotes and interviews with peasants that revealed their psychological investment in the object as an agent of social change.

In \textit{Staroe i novoe}, Kovringin and Rakhal’s used agricultural technology and infrastructure in the sets to indicate the level of industrial development and social integration of rural society. Initially, before the peasant girl Marfa Lapkina embarks upon the task of transforming her rural community through introducing new farming methods, fences proliferate and serve as an impediment to agricultural productivity. In the sequence in which the viewer is introduced to Marfa, she sits on barren ground with her back to a fence, which separates her from an expanse of uncultivated land (Fig. 2.16). In several scenes, fences carve up the land into a patchwork of individual plots, too meagre for significant agricultural cultivation. One sequence shows how these fences result from the division of an estate between two brothers, who split their house in half and use its frame to create fences. The willowy and fractured wood used for the fences alludes to the land’s barrenness. These brittle branches are also used by the villagers to make ploughs, which struggle to carve furrows in the rocky soil. The narrow furrows visually echo the rib cage of an emaciated cow and contrast starkly with the bulging folds of fat in the wealthy kulak’s face.

\footnote{Emma Widdis, \textit{Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War}, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, p. 103.}
While in *Brat’ia-razboiniki* fences serve to indicate social exclusion and isolation, in *Staroe i novoe* they primarily convey social division and tension among a single, rural community. In a number of Soviet films made in the mid- to late 1920s that take place in the rural provinces, fences similarly appear as an impediment to social cohesion and economic prosperity. In Kozlovskii’s scenery for *Zemlia v plenu* (*The Captive Earth*, 1927), the landscape is repeatedly shot through metal grillwork, which conveys the landed gentry’s control over the countryside and the prohibition of the serfs to farm the land they are entitled to, while in *Don Diego i Palageia* (*Don Diego and Palageia*, 1928), for which Kozlovskii also designed the sets, fences act as a social barrier, which rural bureaucrats impose on the peasant peddlars to prevent them from trading with the prosperous middle-class clientèle who pass through the local station.

In *Staroe i novoe*, while fences cause division within the rural community, machinery such as the cream separator and the tractor serves as a means for social cohesion around the shared goal of industrial development. The cracked, lacklustre wood of the fences visually contrasts with the smooth and shiny funnel of the cream separator. In his reading of *Staroe i novoe*, Noël Carroll argues that machinery is associated with the concept of exponential growth.113 As Marfa sleeps in the presence of the separator, she dreams of overflowing streams of milk, vast production lines of milk bottles and rows of cattle harnessed to electrical milking units. Similarly, the tractor pulls a long line of carts through the rural settlement. Stretching from one edge of the frame to the other, the line of carts seems never to end. And, at the end of the film, scenes that show a

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113 Carroll, ‘Cinematic Nation Building’, p. 310.
group of tractors ploughing the earth in an enlarging circle are followed by those that display an abundance of grain sacks.

In its ability to induce exponential growth, machinery appears almost magical. This idea is conveyed through the film-makers’ use of religious imagery to represent technological devices. In the sequence in which the separator is introduced to the villagers, it is hidden under a veil in a corner of the room, such as that usually reserved for icons. As it is unveiled, the machine is shown out of focus, and its shimmering metallic body entrances the villagers. The reflective surface of the cream separator has a visual parallel in the gold and silver-plated icon art that feature in the preceding sequence, which shows a religious procession. Moreover, the milk that drips from the separator’s funnel visually echoes the drops of wax that fall from the candles during the religious procession. In his later analysis of the film, Eizenshtein drew on religious imagery to describe these scenes, writing that the separator appeared to be lit by an inner light as if it were an image of the Holy Grail. Similarly, he compared the fountains of milk that shoot from the separator to the rivers of water that Moses brings forth from the mountains in the Bible. Distortions in scale also work to accentuate the separator’s mystical quality. In the scenes set in the peasant hut, the separator and milk canisters take on gigantic proportions against the low-ceilinged interior with its minuscule windows. According to Eizenshtein, the perspectival distortions in the film were intended to convey how technological objects could defy the laws of nature, and ‘extend beyond’ themselves and ‘beyond their natural bounds’.

The film-makers drew on religious imagery and the idea of magical transformation to represent the cooperative dairy farm, also. Eizenshtein invited the architect Andrei Burov, a member of the Constructivist Ob‘edinenie sovremennykh arkhitkektorov (OSA, Union of Contemporary Architects), to construct a full-scale prototype of a collective dairy farm for the film. Burov created the dairy farm in an architectural style that closely resembles the buildings of the modernist architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret, known as Le Corbusier, with whom he was closely acquainted (Fig. 2.17). The pristine white walls of the dairy farm and the brilliant light that floods into the interior through elongated windows give the structure an ethereal quality. With its abundance of light and space, the cooperative dairy farm contrasts starkly with the peasants’ cramped and darkened huts, which provide the only other interiors in the film.

115 Ibid., pp. 50-53.
116 Ibid., p. 44.
119 The brilliant white surfaces of the dairy farm prefigure the hyperbolic use of white in Socialist Realist art and films of the 1930s, including Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg’s *Odna* (Alone, 1931), Eizenshtein’s *Aleksandr Nevskii* (1938) and Grigorii Aleksandrov’s *Svetlyi put* (1940).
Although Burov claimed that he approached the task of creating the dairy farm not as a ‘dekorator’ [decorator] but as an architect involved in constructing a real building that would continue to be used after filming had finished, the cooperative dairy farm appears as if a utopian vision.\textsuperscript{120} Occupying a remote space cut off by trees and a river from contiguous habitation, the dairy farm corresponds to descriptions of utopian space, such as that of Francis Bacon’s \textit{New Atlantis} (1627), which, as Katerina Clark demonstrates, became popular in Soviet Russia during the Cultural Revolution, from the late 1920s to the early 1930s.\textsuperscript{121} Moreover, in several scenes the dairy farm appears to lack any distinct meeting point with the land, but instead seems to hover weightlessly above the ground. Like Bacon’s utopia, the dairy farm is a space where technological marvel and high culture triumph over nature: baby chicks are hatched on experiment trays under artificial conditions; and images of slaughtered pigs, which hang heavily with their heads to the ground, are juxtaposed with those of porcelain pig figurines, which twirl around triumphantly with their snouts raised high in the air.

![Fig. 2.17. ‘Architectural frames from the film \textit{The General Line}. A Sovkino Production by S. M. Eizenshtein. Architecture by A. K. Burov), \textit{Sovremennaia arkhitektura}, 5-6, 1926, pp. 136-37.](image)

\textsuperscript{120} Burov, \textit{Arkhitektura i kino}, RGALI f. 1925, op. 1, ed. khr. 1862.
Burov’s architectural work in the 1920s was limited to utopian designs for civic spaces such as workers’ clubs, which never developed beyond paper. Indeed, the majority of architectural projects designed in Soviet Russia at this time were prospective visions that were utopian in their proposed scale and far beyond the state’s engineering capacities in terms of available resources.

The utopian nature of the cooperative dairy farm is further indicated by the fact that stills and photographs of the building were included in the Soviet architectural journal *Sovremennâia arkhitektura* alongside blueprints of utopian projects for workers’ clubs with a capacity of 5000 (Fig. 2. 17). Moreover, in two articles published in 1928 and 1929, both titled ‘Zhizn’ kak ona dolzhna byt’’ (Life as it Ought to Be), the architectural critic Nikolai Lukhmanov used photographs of the dairy farm as illustrations. In his more extensive 1929 article, Lukhmanov identified *Staroe i novoë* as one of the very few Soviet films that, rather than showing the underside of contemporary Soviet reality, presented an ideal vision of Soviet society that viewers could strive towards.

For Marfa and the rural community, the promise of social cohesion and economic prosperity offered by the cooperative dairy farm and the cream separator provides the foundations for an alternative belief system to religion. As such, *Staroe i novoë* corresponds to what Anthony Vanchu identifies as the presence of esoteric impulses in Soviet literary works of the mid-1920s that feature the representation of technology and infrastructure. Vanchu demonstrates how in works such as Andrei Platonov’s *Rodina elektricheska* (The Homeland of Electricity, 1926) ‘the aura of mystery’ and ‘the potential for magical transformation’ associated with the occult was shifted onto science and technology. As Vanchu argues, belief systems provide a means through which people can relate to their surrounding material environment. In *Staroe i novoë*, the new Soviet belief system of technology privileges people’s ability to shape their material environment and to overcome the blind forces of nature through individual initiative and inventiveness.

In his article ‘Pogranichnaia liniiia’ (The Border Line), published in 1927 in *Kino*, the formalist critic Viktor Shklovskii marked out *Staroe i novoë* as exemplary for conveying Soviet cinema’s transition to a ‘second phase’, in which articulating a person’s relationship to their material

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122 For discussion of Burov’s architectural practice, see Khan-Magomedov, *Andrei Burov*.
127 Ibid., p. 204.
environment became paramount. Shklovskii argued that the film-makers while working on *Staroe i novoe* will no longer be concerned with using objects only for their symbolic associations; rather, ‘[...] кино станет фабрикой отношения к вещам’ ([...] cinema will become a factory of our relationship with things). Several scholars have noted the ecstatic, and even erotic, encounter that Marfa and the villagers have with technology. In her reading of *Staroe i novoe*, Widdis claims that this relationship is articulated in terms of a harmonious interaction between human bodies and machines. She argues that in the sequence in which the tractor breaks down, Marfa experiences a ‘joyous’ and ‘embodied’ encounter with the tractor as she offers part of her underskirt to a local farmworker who is attempting to fix its engine.

This sequence can also be read in relation to what the anthropologists Penny Harvey and Hannah Knox describe as ‘the enchantments of infrastructure’. In their analysis of road construction in Peru, Harvey and Knox consider the affective responses of the people who live alongside roads or who are involved in their construction, and how these responses reveal an enchantment in infrastructure’s promise of social transformation and economic prosperity. They argue that it is precisely at moments when infrastructure seems to threaten to collapse or to fail that enchantment is generated and reinvigorated. As such, their analysis resonates with Bill Brown’s position in his seminal article ‘Thing Theory’ (2001) that people become aware of objects as independent entities only when they stop working or fail to perform in intended ways. In *Staroe i novoe*, in the sequence in which the tractor is demonstrated to the villagers, it initially falters; as the engine is ignited, sparks fly and smoke bellows; the tractor tentatively crawls over a mound of earth, as horses with carts gallop past; close ups focus in on the tractor’s tar-stained body and on its wheels trapped in heavy mounds of earth (Figs. 2.18 and 2.19). The tractor’s marginalised position in a corner of the frame, with its engine angled downwards, emphasises its vulnerability. Following Harvey and Knox, the deferral of the tractor’s promise of transformation and progress seems, however, to reinvigorate Marfa and the driver’s enchantment in the machine. Light glistens on the tractor’s body and reflects in their faces as they work to fix it. Once the engine begins to run, the tractor effortlessly pulls a line of carts across ditches and over hills. The posts of the carts stick up triumphantly, punctuating the

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129 Ibid., p. 111.
132 Ibid., p. 142.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid., p. 534.
skyline, and echo the celebratory banners erected for the tractor’s inauguration. In *Staroe i novoe*, the technological development of the countryside thus appears as a tale of achievement against the odds. As in *Po zakonu*, the rural environment is far from a passive force that offers itself up for transformation; rather, inhabitants are forced to do battle with the land.

Fig. 2.18. *Staroe i novoe*, broken-down tractor.

Fig. 2.19. *Staroe i novoe*, tractor wheels.

Instances when technology stalls or malfunctions are evident in a number of Soviet films in the late 1920s and early 1930s that represent the rural environment’s infrastructural transformation. In *Zemlia* (Earth, 1930), for example, when the tractor runs out of water, the farm workers urinate into its tank in order to restart it. Here the successful working of technology is dependent on human intervention. Similarly, the front cover of a 1929 edition of *Sovetski ekran* featured a still from the *kul’turfil’m Sovkhoz gigant* (*The Colossal State Farm*, 1929) that shows peasants...
repairing a tractor. In the image, the wheel of the tractor dominates the composition, dwarfing the peasants who are pushed to the margins of the frame. As in Staroe i novoe, this emphasises human determination in the face of technological failure.

While in the films mentioned above the introduction of new technology to the countryside leads to social cohesion and economic prosperity, in the Soyuzkino studio's Krupnaia nepriatnost’ (The Major Nuisance, 1930) the arrival of mechanised transport in a provincial village becomes the cause of confusion and tension among rural inhabitants. In the film, a new bus route is established in a village, symbolically named Otshib [the fringes], that connects it to a train station, which in turn links it to the city. The villagers’ reactions to the arrival of new technology is complex. The rural inhabitants are split into two opposing ideological camps, one that embraces the new Soviet way of life and another that remains rooted to their belief in traditional religious practice. Both camps take advantage of the new bus route: the Soviet pioneers invite a cultural worker to lecture at the local club, while the religious congregation request a preacher to give a church sermon. Krupnaia nepriatnost’ thus explores the various ways in which a community might respond to technology, as a means to advance a new Soviet lifestyle or as a device that facilitates the entrenchment of ways of life that are directly opposed to Soviet goals.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the state undertook major development of the Soviet transport network in an attempt to overcome what was seen as the isolation of rural communities by integrating various provincial localities into a single, inter-connected Soviet space. In its representation of automobile transport, Krupnaia nepriatnost’ departs from the majority of Soviet films of the 1920s, which pictured connections between the rural provinces and the city in terms of train travel. Interest in automobile travel grew during the early 1930s, prompted by the Soviet government’s approval in 1928 of the construction of a new Moscow automobile factory capable of producing thousands of vehicles a year. In 1930, the journal Automobizatsiia SSSR was launched, and the automobile society Avtodor’s membership peaked at around forty thousand.

137 See Sovetskii ekran, 26, 1929, front cover.
138 Widdis argues that the film represents this split in terms of younger and older generations and their different relationship with the world. See Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 117.
139 Widdis, Visions of a New Land, p. 40.
140 Examples of films that show train travel between the city and the provinces include Tret’ia Meshchevskaiia (Bed and Sofa, 1927), Deushka s korobkoi (The Girl with a Hatbox, 1927), Don Diego i Palaquia and Dom na Trubnoi (The House on Trubnaia, 1928).
142 Widdis, Visions of a New Land, pp. 51-52.
The scenario for *Krupnaia nepriatnost* was written by Aleksei Popov, who also worked as the director alongside M. Karostina and the camera operator Vladimir Solodovnikov. *Krupnaia nepriatnost* was the second film that Popov worked on after *Dva druga, model’ i podruga* (*Two Friends, a Model and a Girlfriend, 1927*), which was similarly set in the rural provinces and depicted its young inhabitants as eager to engage with technological developments. Like Kuleshov before him, Popov was closely involved in the preparation of the scenery for *Krupnaia nepriatnost*. Before coming to cinema, Popov had worked as a theatre set designer, first at the MKhT and subsequently at various Moscow theatres. In this role, he created scenery for a number of plays that were set in the rural provinces such as the MKhT production in the late 1910s of Nikolai Gogol’s *Vii* (1835). Surviving set design sketches show Popov’s interest in how village infrastructure, including fences and roads, could create visual impact. Similarly, in *Krupnaia nepriatnost* the village’s material environment became a main source of the film’s visual power. In the opening scene, the windows and wood fretwork of the various house fronts form a patchwork of contrasting geometric forms. In several scenes, layers of fences of different sizes and configurations fill the frame and create striking patterns of intersecting and diverging lines (Fig. 2.20). In the images of the village fire station, hoses snake across the wood banisters to create an intricate criss-crossing design (Fig. 2.21). And in scenes of the local church, the metal grillwork of the windows casts dramatic geometric shadows against the interior’s whitewashed walls.

Fig. 2.20. *Krupnaia nepriatnost*, village infrastructure, fences.

144 Ibid., p. 103. Zorkaia does not provide a precise date for the MKhT production of *Vii*.
145 Sketches are reprinted ibid.
Working alongside Popov on the scenery was the kino-khudozhnik Dmitrii Kolupaev, who designed the sets for several films set in the rural provinces in the 1920s. Initially, Kolupaev worked as a landscape painter and was closely associated with the Peredvizhniki artists. As we recall from Chapter One, from the mid-1920s he became a major advocate of filming expeditions and ethnographic research, which he promoted in several articles. In his 1925 article ‘O dekoratsiakh’ (On Set Design), Kolupaev denounced those ‘derevenskye’ [village-life] films which were made in studios for their monotonous depiction of izbas, barns and village details; rather, he argued, film-makers could achieve a more authentic representation of the provinces by engaging artistic and photographic commissions and undertaking filming expeditions.

Following this example, for Baby riazanskie (The Women of Riazan, 1927) Kolupaev created scenery in consultation with the anthropologist Olga Vishnevskaia, who advised on ethnographic matters relating to the Riazan’ community. In comparison to Baby riazanskie, however, which examines a specific provincial locale, Krupnaia nepriatnost’ presents an archetype of rural life. This corresponds with what Widdis identifies as a broader shift in focus in the early 1930s away from concerns about local identity to an interest in the typical. Material for the fictional village Otshib was shot at a number of locations, including Kaluga province, the historic town of Uglich and south of Novocherkassk in Rostov province. As Widdis notes, the...
film incorporates a number of typical motifs of provincial life: women wash clothes in a river, onion-domed church spires punctuate the horizon and houses are decorated with intricate wooden fretwork. Moreover, while Baby riazanske follows the tradition of the Peredvizhniki and of early Russian and Soviet films in revealing the social backwardness of rural society, Krupnaia nepriatnost’ represents the provinces in terms that are not entirely negative. In one sequence, the female protagonist Evgaliia and the bus driver embrace in a rowing boat against a backdrop of shimmering water. In another, as Evgaliia looks up from washing her clothes in the river as the bus hurtles into the village, light sparkles on the water behind her. These scenes mark a return to the myth of the provincial idyll that became increasingly apparent in Soviet fiction cinema of the 1930s and reached its height in films such as Traktoristy (Tractor Drivers, 1939).

The opening scenes of Krupnaia nepriatnost’ are marked by the inauguration of the new bus route. As in Staroe i novo, the villagers are not simply passive assimilators of new machinery; rather than displacing traditional culture with new technology, they integrate it into established practices and traditions. A group of villagers celebrate the new bus route in a ceremony that incorporates religious pomp. Initially, the bus is raised on a podium high above the villagers, who stare up, transfixed, at its veiled body. Church bells ring out as they remove the veil. The group then drives the bus around the village in a procession that takes it through a decorated arch and past the onion-domed spires of the local church, drawing more villagers along the way, before they park it outside the local club (Figs. 2.22 and 2.23). The building’s elaborate wooden fretwork contrasts starkly with the bus’s sleek body and provides an ornate frame for the community’s newest asset.

Fig. 2.22. Krupnaia nepriatnost’, the bus inauguration ceremony, decorative archway.

153 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 117.
This process of mystification is followed by one of demystification. In one sequence, the bus driver removes the exterior body of the bus in order to explain to Evgaliia how the engine works. As she studies the engine, diesel stains her face. The demonstration of the bus engine serves to emphasise technology’s status as a rational phenomenon that can be rendered comprehensible to the population.\(^{154}\) On two occasions, the bus breaks down and the villagers come to the rescue. After one of its tyres becomes trapped in a rift in the bridge, the villagers work together to free it. A series of close-up shots focus in on the wheel caught among splintered wood, showing it from dramatic diagonal angles. In a later sequence, the villagers unite together to push the broken-down bus up a steep hill and back to the village. According to Widdis, such scenes convey the bus as a shared project around which a number of villagers can collectively unite.\(^{155}\)

However, the bus’s potential to bring about social cohesion and collective unification remains limited. Several of the villagers embrace the arrival of the new bus route, but continue to live according to existing practices. In one sequence, a group of villagers, mainly of the old generation, bypass the traditional horse and carts and file into the bus, which brings them from the train station to their Sunday church service. The same social group subsequently takes advantage of the village’s new transport connection to invite a religious preacher to the local church. Although, as Widdis argues, throughout the film religion is subjected to ridicule,\(^{156}\) it continues, however, to possess agency. This is demonstrated in the sequence in which a group of Komsomol members participates in whitewashing the church interior. As one member poses the question of who is against new technology, the camera focuses in on the painted murals of God and the disciples, who are depicted with their hands raised. As the Komsomol member turns to

\(^{154}\)Widdis also argues that this sequence represents the demystification of the bus. Ibid.

\(^{155}\)Ibid. In *Putevka v zhizn´* (The Path to Life, 1931), the construction of a new railroad also functions as a collective project for a labour commune.

\(^{156}\)Ibid.
look outside, he is again confronted with a religious sculpture with its arm raised. Despite the introduction of new infrastructure and technology, old practices continue to survive and to have a voice among the rural community.

IV. Conclusion

As Widdis argues, *Krupnaia nepriatnost’* presents ‘a subtly different type of provincial space’ from that depicted in many Soviet films of the 1920s and early 1930s in so far as the provinces is inhabited by different generations with diverging values and lifestyles. That said, the way in which the film-makers represented the rural environment as deeply connected with mystic beliefs and feelings of enchantment has roots in early Russian fiction films such as *Skazka o rybake i rybke*. While many late-Imperial films celebrated mysticism as an essential part of national identity and provincial life, in early-Soviet films such as *Staroe i novoe* religious spirituality was negatively coded, functioning as an obstacle to national transformation and prosperity.

Moreover, Popov and Kolupaev’s interest in ethnography in *Krupnaia nepriatnost’* continued the concern for ethnographic authenticity demonstrated by the earliest Russian fiction films set in the rural environment. Drawing on the example of the MKhT, *kino-khudozhniki* such as Sabiński, and Kozlovskii undertook intense research on filming locations and particular props in their pursuit to achieve greater ethnographic authenticity in films. As the 1910s progressed, some film-makers and critics argued that ethnographic detail was important for creating a sense of atmosphere, while others believed that abundant detail distracted the viewer’s attention away from the psychological states and emotions of characters. Instead of an accumulation of set details, film-makers such as those working for the Kh Channelkov studio in the early 1910s and Kuleshov used the natural features of the land to create dramatic tension and to reveal the psychological states of characters.

Throughout the silent era of Russian cinema, film-makers represented the land and nature as an active, and often hostile, force. In *Skazka o rybake i rybke*, the protagonists’ fates are determined by nature, while in *Po zakonu* and in *Staroe i novoe* characters are forced to battle with nature and land is shown to be resistant, at least initially, to human intervention. The emphasis in *Staroe i novoe* and in *Krupnaia nepriatnost’* on the pressure to modernise and to transform old ways of everyday life was played out in many other early Russian fiction films, notably in those that were set in domestic interiors. The next chapter will explore the various ways in which representations of the domestic interior in late-Imperial Russian and early-Soviet fictions films manifest collisions between old and new ways of life.

157 Ibid., pp. 116-17.
Chapter Three
The Domestic Interior

While in the first years of Russian fiction cinema the majority of films were shot outdoors in rural locations, from around 1913 domestic interiors became increasingly popular as settings. Indeed, Richard Stites observes that from 1913 the domestic, bourgeois melodrama became the dominant genre in Russian cinema, accounting for almost half of the total films made in the pre-revolutionary era.\(^1\) Despite a brief lull during the period of the industry’s nationalisation and reconstruction from 1919 to 1923, when very few fiction films were produced and those that were tended to be on historical, revolutionary subjects, the popularity of films set in the domestic interior continued throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s.\(^2\)

The interest in representing interior space was in part due to the prominent position that concerns about domestic life and housing conditions occupied in social discourses in late-Imperial and early-Soviet Russia. During this period, the domestic sphere became the focal point for exploring a range of pressing social issues, including women’s role in society, the ethics of servant labour and Russia’s rapid urbanisation. This chapter will focus on how film-makers used representations of domestic space to explore contemporary attitudes towards marital and sexual relations and old and new ways of life, as well as changing attitudes to luxury and comfort.

The use of interiors in films also, however, corresponded to the growing sophistication of Russian studios and innovations in set technology, as well as to film-makers’ evolving understanding of cinema as a medium. From the mid-1910s, interior settings became the focus of a number of debates within the film-making community about the merits and the inadequacies of artificial studio sets, as opposed to real, outdoor locations, and the role of interior architecture, ornament and textile in structuring cinematic space. This chapter therefore also considers how film-makers harnessed elements of interior design to exploit cinema’s expressive potential. Each of the films considered here demonstrates a distinct approach to representing interior space. I discuss the films chronologically, but grouped according to three thematic sub-headings – the house as entrapment, the house as ornament, and the house as shelter – in order to explore how representations of domestic space evolved across the silent era and to consider how film-makers used sets in relation to contemporary discourses of domesticity.


\(^2\) Examples of historical revolutionary films made between 1919 and 1923 include, *Arsen Dzhordzhiashveli* (1921), *Slesar’ i Kantsler* (The Locksmith and the Chancellor, 1923) and *Dvorets i krepost’* (The Palace and the Fortress, 1923).
I. The House as Entrapment: The Domestic Interiors of Boris Mikhin and Evgenii Bauer

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Russia was a strict patriarchal society constructed around rigid social hierarchies and conventions. These codes governed the domestic sphere as much as public life. As Louise McReynolds writes, the domestic environment ‘re-created a microcosm of the patriarchal status quo’. Correspondingly, many late-Imperial and early-Soviet films set in the domestic environment represent the house as a space of entrapment which oppresses its inhabitants. In late-Imperial cinema, this idea is notably expressed in the interiors created by the *kino-khudozhniki* Boris Mikhin and Evgenii Bauer, both of whom worked extensively on films set in the domestic household. In their set designs, the interior’s various boundaries and thresholds come to hold particular significance, and they exploited them in order to explore notions of confinement, control and transgression in social and gender terms.

Mikhin used sets to explore these ideas in one of the first films that he worked on as a *kino-khudozhnik*: the Khanzhonkov studio’s *Domik v Kolomne* (The Little House in Kolomna, 1913), which was directed by Petr Chardynin and photographed by Władisław Starewicz. Released on 19 October 1913, the film is among the earliest Russian fiction films set predominately in a domestic interior. Categorised as a comedy, *Domik v Kolomne* is an adaptation of Aleksandr Pushkin’s narrative poem of the same title, which was published in 1833. Pushkin’s text was notable in its time for eschewing representations of aristocratic society to show instead the ordinary life of urban dwellers. Contemporary cinema critics praised both the film’s faithfulness to Pushkin’s original text, noting that there were very few anachronisms in its set design, and its comedic acting, especially Ivan Mozzhukhin’s performance as an officer posing as Mavrusha the housemaid. More recently, Denise Youngblood has also praised the film’s acting, but has

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7 See, for example, *Kine-zhurnal* [1913] and *Vestiik kinematograf* [1913] in Ivanova et al., *Velikii kinemot*, p. 153.
judged its aesthetics as ‘humdrum’.\(^8\) Although the film’s lighting and cinematography are relatively unremarkable, Mikhin’s mise-en-scène is sophisticated in terms of the way in which it is used to convey meaning about social hierarchies and conventions. Mikhin’s careful attention to the spatial arrangement of objects and actors betrays his previous experience working as a set designer and sculptor at the artistic department of the Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr (MKhT, Moscow Art Theatre), which was known for the way in which its designers used sets for their symbolic associations and to heighten dramatic tension.\(^9\) Mikhin’s sets for *Domik v Kolomne* thus exemplify the move towards more complex stagings, identified by Philip Cavendish as a characteristic that appears in Russian fiction films from 1913 onwards.\(^10\) According to Cavendish, such complex compositions demonstrate a growing awareness among film-makers of ‘the symbolic and metaphorical dynamic of film space’.\(^11\)

*Domik v Kolomne* is set in the household of a widow and her daughter, Parasha, in the petit-bourgeois Kolomna district of Saint Petersburg in the nineteenth century. Parasha is an adept housekeeper, but also secretly indulges in flirting with the officers who pass by the house. One day, the widow sends her daughter to find a new, and cheap, domestic servant. Capitalising on the opportunity, Parasha persuades an officer, of whom she is particularly fond, to pose as the housemaid Mavrusha so that they can pursue their romance. The issue of domestic servants was pertinent at the time. In 1912/1913, the women’s monthly magazine *Zhurnal’ dla khoziaek* included a number of articles that directly addressed the problem.\(^12\) Many of these texts focused on the tensions between housewives and domestic servants, resulting from the poor working conditions and limited rights experienced by servants. As Barbara Engel and Rebecca Spagnolo note, domestic service was one of the most common occupations for women in urban centres in early twentieth-century Russia.\(^13\) It was also among the most degrading: domestic servants endured long hours, limited freedom, demeaning treatment from employers and, frequently, sexual harassment.\(^14\) *Domik v Kolomne*’s portrayal of a male character in such a demeaning role would therefore have been particularly ironic for contemporary audiences. The issue of servants’

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11 Ibid.
12 See, for example, V. Iudina, ‘O domashnem rezhim (prisluga)’, *Zhurnal’ dla khoziaek*, 18, 1912, pp. 2-3; Anon., ‘O naime domashnii prislugi’, *Zhurnal’ dla khoziaek*, 14, 1913, p. 1; and P. Kalinina, ‘Prava i obiaznosti domashnei prislugi’, *Zhurnal’ dla khoziaek*, 14, 1913, p. 2.
14 Engel, *Between the Fields and the City*, pp. 141-42.
rights was addressed in many other late-Imperial films that were set mainly in domestic interiors, including Krest’ianskaia dolia (The Peasants’ Lot, 1912), Nemye svideteli (Silent Witnesses, 1914) and Gornichnaia Dzheni (The Maidservant Jenny, 1918), as well as in films of the 1920s such as Prostitutka (The Prostitute, 1926) and Dom na Trubnoi (The House on Trubnaia, 1928).

The main action of Domik v Kolomne takes place predominately in four interior settings: the living room, the bedroom and the kitchen of the widow’s house, and the officers’ quarters. Decorated with pot plants, an ornamental birdcage, floral-patterned wallpaper, a lace tablecloth and curtains and dark wood furniture in the empire style, the design of the living room – in which the film’s opening scenes are set – clearly establishes the social class of the widow and her daughter as petit-bourgeois (Fig. 3.1). As Catriona Kelly observes, pot plants, patterned wallpaper and birds in cages were among the components that domestic advice literature of the late-Imperial era outlined as requirements of the well-regulated household.\textsuperscript{15} Kino-khudozhniki would continue to use such furnishings as common signifiers of the petit-bourgeois lifestyle and its values up to the end of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{16} In Domik v Kolomne, the living room’s furnishings also serve to convey a sense of claustrophobia and to emphasise Parasha’s confinement within the domestic sphere. There is very little empty space in the frame; rather, it is filled with different surfaces and patterning. A high-backed sofa dominates the frame spatially and distances the widow and Parasha, who sit in the foreground, from the room’s single window, positioned in the background. The sturdy form of the sofa, on which the widow sits firmly ensconced, visually represents the immutability of petit-bourgeois values and conventions. Parasha is placed in opposition to the widow, shown sitting across the table and underneath a birdcage, which alludes to her confined status within the domestic environment.


The dense furnishing of the living room contrasts dramatically with the bare walls and simple, unvarnished wood table and benches of the officers’ quarters (Fig. 3.2). Such spartan interiors are typically associated with Soviet films of the mid- to late 1920s. The appearance of so stark an interior as early as 1913, however, suggests that from the mid-1910s film-makers were already aware of their formal and thematic potential. Indeed, the MKhT – where, we recall, Mikhin had worked as a set designer between 1910 and 1912 – began to use radically simplified

Fig. 3.1. Domik v Kolomne, the widow’s living room.

Fig. 3.2. Domik v Kolomne, the officers’ quarters.

17 Mikhin also uses a combination of densely furnished and spartan interiors in Diadiushkina kvartira (1913).
sets in performances from 1911 as a means to focus on the psychological states of characters.\textsuperscript{19} In \textit{Domik v Kolomne}, however, Mikhin uses stark sets mainly for their symbolic associations and visual impact. In addition to providing a visual contrast with the claustrophobic interior of the widow’s house, the sparse décor of the officers’ quarters works to highlight the few objects that are present in the frame, heightening their symbolic resonance. In the scenes set here, Parasha alters the officer’s appearance and deportment to that of a woman. As this takes place, a sword in its sheath hangs on the wall behind Parasha and the officer, alluding to the officer’s suppressed masculinity. The sheathed sword is emphasised further through the use of camera movement. A slow horizontal panning shot gradually brings the object into view and then leaves it at the edge of the frame, highlighting it through its position at the frame’s boundary.\textsuperscript{20}

Architectural features are also emphasised in this way. Doorways, for example, are strategically placed at the frame’s boundaries throughout the film. As Iurii Tsiv’ian notes, in early Russian cinema film-makers widely used the tactic of positioning doorways at the edge of the frame in order to provide a sense of narrative continuity between scenes.\textsuperscript{21} In \textit{Domik v Kolomne}, however, the positioning also emphasises the doorway’s function as a threshold to the house, and the ways in which different characters seek to obstruct or to transgress it. A striking example of this comes in the film’s opening sequence. Initially, the living room is shown without a doorway, casting it as a closed, hermetic space. Instead, the widow’s upright back is aligned with the edge of the frame, indicating her control over the household. In order to leave the room when the widow has dozed off, Parasha is forced to traverse the entire width of the frame. As she does so, a horizontal pan allows the camera to follow her while bringing a doorway into view. The doorway’s positioning at the very edge of the frame, directly behind the back of the widow, serves to emphasise the widow’s status as a gatekeeper to the domestic environment, and Parasha’s entrapment within her household.\textsuperscript{22} As Cavendish writes, horizontal panning shots were often used in early Russian films to highlight the boundaries of the frame and its tensions, through drawing the viewer’s attention to the space that lies beyond the frame.\textsuperscript{23}

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\item \textsuperscript{20} Philip Cavendish notes that since the 1900s Russian film-makers were aware of the frame boundaries and used them to emphasise aspects of the frame composition. Cavendish, ‘The Hand That Turns the Handle’, p. 213.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Similarly, in \textit{Doch’ kuptsa Baskhirova} (The Merchant Baskhirov’s Daughter, 1913) the male patriarch is positioned in front of the doorway to the living room, separating his daughter Nadia from the external world.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Cavendish, ‘The Hand That Turns the Handle’, p. 222.
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viewer. Only darkened space is visible behind the doorway, giving the appearance that the room is disconnected from the wider world. The widow's status as a gatekeeper who seeks to prevent characters from leaving the house is expressed again at the end of the film. On discovering Mavrusha shaving, the widow collapses from shock; her body lies slumped across the threshold of the open doorway, acting as a barrier that Mavrusha is forced to step over in order to flee the house.

While the widow is aligned with the architectural feature of the doorway, Parasha is associated with the open window. After she leaves the living room, Parasha is shown in the bedroom sitting alone, sewing, next to an open window, out of which she glances intermittently in the hope of catching sight of a passing officer (Fig. 3.3). As Julia Bekman Chadaga observes, in traditional Russian culture, the window in particular was perceived as the border with the hostile, external world.

This trope was common in films made in 1913 and 1914, such as Bauer’s Sumerki zhenskoi dushi (Twilight of a Woman’s Soul, 1913), in which the viewer sees Vera glimpsing at the outer world from her bedroom window, and his Ditia bol’shogo goroda (Child of the Big City, 1914), in which Mania observes the Moscow streets from the window of her sewing workshop and contemplates a better life. It also continued to be used in the 1920s, most notably in Tret’ia Meshchanskaya (Bed and Sofa, 1927), in which Liuda repeatedly gazes out the window from the confinement of her single-room semi-basement apartment.

In Domik v Kolomne, the sequences of Parasha looking out the window are shot in medium close-up, with the window filling the majority of the frame. After soliciting the attention of an officer, Parasha hauls herself up onto the ledge and leans out of the window, transgressing the boundary between the domestic household and the exterior world. It is notable that in the scenes shot in the bedroom, the spatial relations of the widow and the daughter are reversed from those in the

25 Graffy, Bed and Sofa, pp. 34-36.
27 Graffy, Bed and Sofa, pp. 34-36.
28 Chadaga confirms that anxiety around border crossing in relation to the window also existed in Russian culture more broadly and that it was similarly associated with social or moral transgressions of some kind. She cites as examples Evgenii Bazarov in Ivan Turgenev’s Ottsy i deti (Fathers and Sons, 1862) and the eponymous heroine in Lev Tolstoi’s Anna Karenina (1877). Chadaga, Optical Play, pp. 33-34.
living room. While in the living room the widow sits next to the interior’s threshold and Parasha is situated on the opposite side of the frame, in the bedroom it is Parasha who is seated next to the threshold of the window and the widow who is positioned on the opposite side of the frame, with her back to the window.

In addition to their positioning, the way in which characters move through space and within the set is revealing. For example, when the widow and Parasha go to Mass and leave Mavrusha alone in the house, his deportment and the way in which he inhabits space alters dramatically: he takes long strides across the full expanse of the kitchen and lifts his skirt to perform exercises, stretching his body across the entire frame; he is shown to be at ease and in full possession of the space, prefiguring the way in which in many 1920s films, such as Tret’ia Meshchanskaia and Devushka s korobkoi (The Girl with a Hatbox, 1927), male protagonists demonstrate their dominance over domestic living space through vigorous exercise. Mavrusha’s energetic manner of inhabiting space contrasts starkly with that of Parasha. In one sequence, while Parasha enters into the living room discreetly, squeezing herself through a half-open door, Mavrusha, who follows behind her, hurls the doors wide open. Throughout the film, Parasha and the widow are shown mainly standing stationary or sitting down engaged in reading or sewing. As Rachel Morley notes, sewing was a pervasive trope in nineteenth-century Russian literature and culture and was frequently used to express the moral and spiritual redemption of ‘the fallen woman’; when, in early Russian cinema, a female protagonist is shown to cast aside her sewing, it is, therefore, revealing. 29 Thus Parasha is quick to put aside her sewing in order to catch the

attention of a passing officer. As she flirts with Mavrusha in her bedroom, a piece of cloth covers her sewing frame and clothes are strewn carelessly over a chair and across the dressing table. The cultural historian Rozsika Parker identifies additional meanings of this traditional female activity, writing that historically sewing signifies women’s self-containment and submission and engenders in the viewer ‘an awareness of the extraordinary constraints of femininity, providing at times a means of negotiating them, and at other times provoking the desire to escape constraints’.\(^{30}\) In addition to interpreting Parasha’s disinterest in sewing as a marker of her unchaste nature, we can also read it as a sign of her desire to escape the constraints of domestic life, and the conventions this imposed on women during the period.

Mikhin continued to exploit in his set designs the boundaries and thresholds created by interior architectural features in order to convey ideas about confinement and control, most notably in Kreutzer sonata (The Kreutzer Sonata, 1914). Although produced just one year later than Domik v Kolome, the film is markedly more experimental in its set design and more complex in its spatial arrangements. Mikhin worked on the film alongside the director Vladimir Gardin and the camera operator Aleksandr Levitskii. It was made as part of the Thiemann and Reinhardt studio’s Russkaia zolotaia seriia (Russian Golden Series), which aimed to increase the cultural status of cinema through adapting classic Russian literary works for the screen. The elaborate set designs that characterise many of the series’ productions undoubtedly also contributed to this goal.\(^{31}\) The film was based on Lev Tolstoi’s 1889 novella of the same title, which explores the gradual disintegration of marital and amorous relations between a wife and husband and was intended as a denouncement of the institution of marriage and an argument for the ideal of sexual abstinence. As Susan K. Morrissey and Barbara Engle have both observed, narratives of marital dispute were a recurring trope in social discourse in late-Imperial Russia, reflecting the increasingly widespread calls to reform marriage laws to recognise the complex needs of individuals.\(^{32}\)

The disintegration of love and the protagonists’ growing sense of entrapment in married life is represented spatially in Mikhin’s sets through a shift from more open, exterior settings to enclosed, claustrophobic interiors. The initial scenes, in which the couple meet and fall in love, are set outdoors on a veranda and in parklands (Fig. 1.7 and Fig. 3.4). The veranda’s white walls, open glass doors, urns of flowers and water fountains evoke a sense of fecundity and


\(^{31}\) Examples of films in the Russkaia zolotaia seriia with elaborate sets include Anna Karenina (1914), Pikovaia dama (The Queen of Spades, 1916) and Ego glaza (His Eyes, 1916).

lightness. A darkened interior, visible through the open doorway further emphasises the luminosity of the veranda and also foreshadows the film’s exploration of the constraining nature of married life. Once the lovers are married, scenes take place predominately in enclosed, domestic interiors. As the husband and wife become more oppressed by married life, the interiors appear increasingly darkened, confined and cut off from the exterior world. The first interior in which we encounter the couple after they have married is brightly illuminated and decorated with lustrous silks (Fig. 3.5). Shot looking in through an outside window, the room maintains a close connection with the exterior world. In subsequent interiors, however, dark wood furniture dominates the space, heavy velvet drapery lines the walls, compartmentalising the room, and closed doorways restrict the viewer’s gaze.
Light is used to reinforce the change in atmosphere. As Cavendish argues, in comparison to earlier films that Mikhin had worked on such as *Domik v Kolomne*, in which flat and even lighting is used throughout, *Kreitserova sonata* demonstrates the film-makers’ developing understanding of the dramatic and expressive function of light. According to Cavendish, Levitskii was remarkable among pre-revolutionary camera operators for his creative approach to lighting. Cavendish observes that in the film’s parkland scenes *contre-jour* lighting creates a luminous glow around the couple that emphasises their innocence and purity. The ethereal contrasts of light and the shade of the dappled sunlight are also emblematic of their romantic love. Additionally, in the veranda scenes the flickering reflections of light in the fountains create a lyrical ambiance. In contrast, the interior scenes are severely darkened. Light is often directed at windows or doorways, which are placed in a marginalised position in the background of the frame. In addition to creating an illusion of deep cinematic space through drawing the viewer’s eye back into the frame, this also works to emphasise a sense of confinement and entrapment within interiors.

As in *Domik v Kolomne*, Mikhin strategically positions doorways and other thresholds, such as partition walls and drapery, for formal and thematic effect. In comparison to in *Domik v Kolomne*, however, in *Kreitserova sonata* he uses these elements extensively to create complex spatial compositions consisting of a series of interconnecting rooms. As we recall from Chapter One, the MKhT had pioneered the construction of interior sets with multiple interconnecting rooms in its productions of Anton Chekhov’s plays, such as *Vishneyi sad* (The Cherry Orchard) in 1903. The introduction of this technique to cinema was facilitated by the innovation of the *fundus* system, which Mikhin claims was used successfully for the first time in *Kreitserova sonata*. In several of the interior scenes, Mikhin employs doorways, drapery and partition walls to divide the frame into multiple vertical and horizontal planes, which enhance the impression of deep illusionistic space. Such complex spatial compositions also encourage a variety of movements from actors across the frame’s width and through spatial depth. As Iurii Tsiv’ian notes, this compositional tactic was used in many early Russian films. It also continued to be used throughout the 1910s and into the 1920s. In his memoirs, Lev Kuleshov recalls how, when he first came to work as a *kino-khudoznik* at the Khanzhonkov studio, he was instructed to create sets with a combination of landings, passages and stairwells in order to diversify actors’

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34 Ibid., p. 229.
35 Ibid., p. 231.
36 Ibid.
38 Mikhin, ‘Rozhdenie fundusa’, p. 152.
movements and to increase the visual dynamic of the frame.\textsuperscript{40}

On a thematic level, the compartmentalisation of the frame heightens the sense of claustrophobia and conveys the couple’s increasing separation from one another. An example of this is evident in the first sequence in which the couple are shown arguing (Fig. 3.6). A doorway and drapery divide the frame vertically into two adjoining rooms. First, the husband goes in search of his wife in the room on the right of the frame, only to find it empty. He then finds her in the adjacent room, in which she is isolated in the background gazing out of a window with her back to the viewer. He stands on the room’s threshold, unwilling to enter. As the couple begin to quarrel, the wife advances to the front of the frame and then pauses at the threshold. A curtain separates the wife from her husband, acting as a barrier, as they continue their argument. The wife then passes into the room on the right and closes the door behind her, creating a physical barrier between them.

Moreover, Mikhin uses elements of interior architecture and design as self-reflexive framing devices that draw the viewer’s attention to their position as a spectator and to the artificial nature of cinematic representation. As Rachel Morley observes, Bauer had already begun to

\textsuperscript{40} Kuleshov later employed this approach to set design extensively in the films he directed, including \textit{Neobykhlanye prikluchenia mistera Vesta v strane bol’shevikov} (The Extraordinary Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks, 1924); Lev Kuleshov, ‘Concerning Scenery’, \textit{The Art of Cinema} [1929] in Ronald Levaco (ed. and trans.), \textit{Kuleshov on Film: Writings}, Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 68-77 (p. 68).
employ this tactic at the end of 1913 in *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi*. Morley argues that in a number of his films Bauer uses elements of set design, such as curtains and the trope of the stage, to reveal the constructed nature both of the shot and of the female protagonist and to emphasise that such scenes are structured through the gaze of the male protagonist. This strategy is also evident in Mikhin’s set designs for *Kreitserova sonata*. Significantly, Tolstoi’s original text uses the literary technique of a frame narrative in which the husband Pozdnyshev recounts his story to another narrator. In the filmic adaptation, many elements of Mikhin’s set work to convey the notion that the viewer is being presented with Pozdnyshev’s perspective of events. As described above, one sequence is shot looking into an interior through a window (Fig. 3.5). The frame of the window repeats that of the film screen, while the curtains recall the stage curtains of the theatre. The use of lighting is also reminiscent of the theatre, in which the stage performers are illuminated by footlights while the audience remains in darkness. As another example, in the sequences set on the veranda in which Pozdnyshev courts his future wife, Mikhin places a balustrade in the extreme foreground of the frame (Fig. 1.7 and Fig. 3.4). As discussed in Chapter One, the tactic of placing architectural features or objects at the foot of the proscenium stage to rupture the illusion of the imaginary ‘fourth wall’ was introduced and widely used in productions at the MKhT. It is also notable that in these sequences the veranda is raised slightly, as if a stage. In Tolstoi’s text, Pozdnyshev attacks courtship and marriage as a mere social performance. Thus, Mikhin’s use of self-reflexive compositional devices both highlights the viewer’s position as an audience member watching events from Pozdnyshev’s viewpoint and conveys Pozdnyshev’s opinion that marriage is an artificial, social convention.

Mikhin’s extensive use of mirrors also serves to comment on the artificial nature of marriage. In one scene, the wife is shown contemplating her appearance in a mirror, alluding to the argument in Tolstoi’s text that in nineteenth-century Russian society women endeavour to present themselves as objects of desire for men (Fig. 3.7). Mirrors also have formal significance. Tsiv’ian notes that *kino-khudozhniki* began to incorporate mirrors into cinema set design around 1911, reflecting a growing recognition of the specificities of cinematic space in comparison to that of the theatre. According to Tsiv’ian, mirrors were initially employed to activate the backspace and to reveal new information to the viewer, thus aiding narrative economy by eliminating the need for additional scenes. Mikhin was already using mirrors for this purpose.

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42 Ibid.
43 See Chapter One of this thesis, pp. 45-47.
46 Ibid.
in 1913 in his earliest surviving film, Gore Sarry. Tsiv´ian argues that from 1912/1913, however, film-makers began to use mirrors as a way to increase the symbolic resonance of particular objects. This shift is evident in Kreitserova sonata. In one scene, a single chair is reflected in a mirror positioned near the married couple. The vacant chair alludes to the absence of love in the couple’s marriage. As another example, in the sequence in which the wife stands before a mirror contemplating her image, a white statuette of a couple embracing passionately is visible behind the wife’s reflection in the mirror (Fig. 3.7). On one level, the statuette is used for ironic effect to provide a contrast between the ideal of love and the oppressive reality of the married life which the couple experience.

Fig. 3.7. Kreitserova sonata, the wife and the mirror.

The iconography of this statuette also has particular diegetic significance, however. Sculptural figures began to be used in cinema set design around 1912, and are most commonly associated with the sets of Bauer. Mikhin’s training as a student of sculpture at the Saint Petersburg Academy of Art, where he gained a scholarship to study Auguste Rodin’s works in Paris, and his experience working as a sculptor at the MKhT meant that he would undoubtedly have been aware of the significance of particular sculptural compositions. Mikhin’s incorporation of sculptural figures into his sets is already evident in Gore Sarry, in which they decorate the lawyer’s office to convey his erudition. In Kreitserova sonata, statuettes are used extensively, and they acquire particular symbolic and narrative significance. It can be no coincidence that the aforementioned statuette of a couple embracing closely resembles Rodin’s Le Baiser (The Kiss, 1888-98). Rodin’s sculptural composition was inspired by an episode in Dante Alighieri’s Divina

48 For biographical information on Mikhin, see Mikhin, ‘Rozhdenie fundusa’, pp. 148-54.
Commedia (The Divine Comedy, 1308-1320) in which Paolo and Francesca embrace in a moment of reckless passion before Francesca’s husband kills them. Thus, the iconography of the statuette acts as a prelude for subsequent events in Kreitserova sonata. The statuette is positioned close to the wife in several scenes in the film, acting as a constant reminder of her fate. Its earliest appearance is in the scene of the couple’s first argument, when it stands near the window out of which the wife gazes (Fig. 3.6). Later, in the scene in which the violinist, who has an affair with Pozdnyshev’s wife, first comes to the house, the statuette appears behind the wife.

Mikhin repeats this strategic placement of statuettes and sculptural busts to comment on characters and their relationship with one another throughout the film. For example, a classical female portrait bust is positioned by the doorway to Pozdnyshev’s study. The idealised form of the bust alludes both to Pozdnyshev’s tendency to objectify women and to his fantasies of the perfect wife as passive and pure. This recalls Morley’s observation about the way that in Bauer’s Ditia bol’shogo goroda the classical statuettes in Viktor’s study reveal his attitude towards women. In several scenes, the bust is placed in direct opposition to Pozdnyshev’s real wife on the other side of a curtain. As in Ditia bol’shogo goroda, the comparison alludes to Pozdnyshev’s wife’s inability to live up to her husband’s naïve expectations. In one of the sequences in which the couple quarrel, Pozdnyshev moves to eclipse the bust with his body, suggesting that his idealised notion of marriage has now faded. In the sequence in which the couple argue in the husband’s study, Pozdnyshev stands framed between two classical busts of an erudite nobleman, which allude to both his social status and his image of himself as a rational man until he enters into wedlock. In a fit of rage, Pozdnyshev hurls one of the statuettes at his wife and the classical female portrait bust next to which she stands. This action conveys the corrupting effect that Pozdnyshev perceives marriage to have both on himself as a person and on society in general.

As will be clear from the discussion so far, the use of the domestic interior as a setting to explore ideas about marital and sexual relations is closely associated with the films of Evgenii Bauer, on which he acted as both the kino-khudozhnik and the director. In a number of Bauer’s melodramas, beginning with Sumerk zheiskoi dushi and continuing in Ditia bol’shogo goroda, Nemye svideteli, Deti veka (Children of the Age, 1915), Grezy (Daydreams, 1915), Zhizn za zhizn (A Life for a Life, 1916) and Nelli Raintseva (1916), the domestic interior appears as a space in which female protagonists are entrapped and oppressed either by social conventions or by male predators. This reflects the increased opposition in early twentieth-century Russia to the absolute authority that the male patriarch wielded over the household and the growing recognition of women as autonomous individuals with independent lives that extended beyond

49 Morley, Performing Femininity, p. 97.
50 For discussion of the theme of marriage in Bauer’s films, see Morley, ‘Gender Relations in the Films of Evgenii Bauer’, pp. 33-36.
the domestic sphere. Indeed, in her essay ‘Novaia zhenshchina’ (The New Woman, 1913), the female activist Aleksandra Kollontai identified the transformation of woman from a submissive housewife into an independent person who strives for her own career, lifestyle and interests, and emphasised the importance of cultural tropes in reflecting the social change in women’s roles. Following Kollontai’s writings, from 1913 Zhurnal’ dlia khoziaek incorporated a regular special feature on ‘Zhenskaia zhizn’ (Women’s Life) that addressed concerns about female independence. Several critics who contributed articles to the feature questioned whether these ‘new women’ were indulging in their independence at expense of their domestic and maternal duties.

Correspondingly, in Bauer’s Deti veka (Children of the Age, 1915) the idea of the house as a space of entrapment is addressed, and problematised, in both the film’s narrative and its aesthetics. Deti veka tells the story of how the prospect of wealth and increased social status gradually lures Mariia Nikolaeva away from her life as a mother and a housewife, married to a modest bank clerk. While out shopping in Moscow’s arcades, Mariia encounters an old friend, Lidiia Verkhovskaiia, who indulges in a glamorous lifestyle and moves in fashionable high society. Lidiia introduces Mariia into her social circle, and at several of her gatherings the rich businessman Lebedev pursues Mariia. Although at first Mariia resists, after Lebedev rapes her twice and engineers her husband’s firing, she eventually leaves her husband, taking their child and beginning a new life as Lebedev’s mistress.

Bauer had already worked on a number of films as the director and the kino-khudozhnik and had established himself as one of the leading film-makers of the era when he made Deti veka for the Khanzhonkov studio. He initially began his career in cinema in 1912 working as a kino-khudozhnik on Aleksandr Drankov and A. G. Taldykin’s commemorative historical film, Trekhsotletie tsarstvovaniia doma Romanovykh, 1613-1913 (The Tercentenary of the Rule of the House of Romanov, 1613-1913). Prior to entering the world of cinema, Bauer worked as an actor, a caricaturist, a satirical journalist, a portrait photographer and a theatre set designer. As Morley notes, Bauer was known in the theatre for his innovative and elaborate sets, and he quickly developed a distinctive approach to set design and the treatment of the mise-en-scène in his films. Indeed, both Alyssa DeBlasio and Emma Widdis claim that Bauer’s innovative sets

51 For example, see Barbara Engel, ‘Cultivating Domesticity’ in her Breaking the Ties That Bound, pp. 157-200.
53 For example, see A. S., ‘Novaia zhenshchina’, Zhurnal’ dlia khoziaek, 21, 1913, pp. 19-21 and N. Speranskaiia, ‘Samostoiatel’nost’ i zhenstvennost’’, Zhurnal’ dlia khoziaek, 24, 1913, pp. 19-20.
55 Morley, Performing Femininity, pp. 53-34.
distinguish his work from that of other film-makers of the late-Imperial era.36

As Morley argues, in addition to their remarkable aesthetics, Bauer’s films are also characterised by their refusal to moralise in simple positive and negative terms.37 Bauer’s rejection of straightforward binaries is evident in Deti veka in the way that the domestic environment is represented in relation to other spheres of social life. Mariia and her husband’s house is modest, especially when compared to the film’s other interiors or to the domestic interiors in many of Bauer’s other films, such as Mary’s room in Ditia bol’shogo goroda with its abundance of ‘things’. Mariia’s living room is sparsely decorated with only necessary furniture and a few ornaments to give a sense of comfort, including a single vase of flowers positioned discretely in the corner of the room and several modest-sized, traditional landscape paintings (Fig. 3.8). The simple lines and unadorned forms of the modern-style furniture and ceiling lamp allude to the honest values of traditional family life upheld by petit-bourgeois society. In the majority of the scenes shot in the living room Mariia is positioned at the centre of the composition and is shown in control of the space. An adept housewife, she busily engages in domestic chores and is quick to attend to her crying child. That said, it is notable that her worktable is marginalised, with only a small corner of it visible in the lower left edge of the frame. In contrast, a closed door is shown in full view in a central position directly behind Mariia. Unlike in Domik v Kolomne, however, Mariia’s access to the doorway remains unobstructed, and she freely comes and goes, despite her husband’s growing objections to her outings. These details reveal Mariia’s ambiguous relationship to her domestic life and suggest that although she has little interest in her role as a housewife and finds it confining, the domestic sphere by no means entraps her. This corresponds with what McReynolds describes as the ambivalent attitude towards changes in women’s roles in society during the period, in which women felt trapped by customs but also insecure about their liberation from them.38

In comparison to the living space of Mariia and her husband, the interiors of Lebedev’s house (which are the only other internal domestic spaces in the film) are characterised by luxury and excess. Lebedev’s study, for example, is filled with an abundance of furniture and objects, and its walls are decorated with ostentatious wallpaper, which is remarkably similar to the pattern of one of Lidia’s outfits (Fig. 3.9). Likewise, Lebedev’s drawing room is overwhelmed with people and things. The exaggerated size of an ornamental sculptural relief and the extreme height of the fireplace’s mantelpiece augment the sense of oppressive confinement. In contrast to her authoritative position in her own home, Mariia sits at the corner of the table, marginalised from

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38 McReynolds, ‘Home Was Never Where the Heart Was’, p. 129.
the rest of the party. As Morley argues, Mariia’s positioning alludes to her uneasiness about the
decision to leave her family and her discomfort within the new society in which she now finds
herself.\textsuperscript{59} The comparison between Mariia’s position in her own living room and that in
Lebedev’s drawing room is encouraged by the fact that the same tablecloth is used in both
spaces.

Fig. 3.8. \textit{Deti veka}, Mariia’s living room

Fig. 3.9. \textit{Deti veka}, Lebedev’s house.

\textsuperscript{59} Morley, \textit{Performing Femininity}, p. 126.
Moreover, the idea that the domestic environment is a sphere that oppresses and entraps Mariia is problematised when it is compared to the exterior settings in the film. It is notable that Lebedev’s amorous advances and his eventual rape of Mariia take place mainly outdoors. Each of Lebedev’s increasingly forceful attempts to seduce Mariia occurs in an ever more open and exposed exterior. The first time that Lebedev displays an interest in Mariia is when the couple are seated in a glass conservatory, after they are introduced by Lidiia at one of her glamorous parties. Although technically an interior space, the conservatory appears distinctly open with its expansive glass walls that fill nearly two-thirds of the frame and through which a background of dense foliage is visible. The next advance happens when Mariia and Lebedev are strolling in an urban park; the first time Lebedev rapes Mariia occurs during an afternoon gathering in woodlands; and the subsequent rape takes place while the couple are driving in the city streets.\(^{60}\) As such, it is the wider, exterior world that appears as a space in which women face sexual oppression and moral corruption. It is notable that, following Lebedev’s harassments, Mariia on two occasions flees directly to the sanctity of her home. Although the domestic environment may confine women, it also functions as a safe haven from the corrupting influence of modern, urban life. Thus, as Youngblood notes is the case in many of Bauer’s films, the home is cast as an ambiguous space where both negative and positive possibilities exist.\(^ {61}\)

The idea that places can have both positive and negative associations is also evident in the way in which Bauer represents the shopping arcade in *Deti veka*. The rise of the shopping arcade in the late-Imperial era as a new public sphere for women was seen as both a liberation and a liability: while it gave women new responsibility as consumers for the household, it also exposed them to the corrupting influence of materialism, dragging them away from their domestic chores.\(^ {62}\) Both possibilities are presented in *Deti veka*. Mariia is shown to be a conscious consumer, carefully inspecting items before selecting a doll as a gift for her child. On returning home, Mariia places her purchases next to the sewing machine, associating her act of consumption with her responsibilities as a housewife. By comparison, Lidiia is enticed by a shop-window display of elegant furniture and silverware, recalling the scene in Bauer’s *Ditta bol’shogo goroda* in which Mania gazes longingly at a jewellery shop’s window display. On meeting Mariia, Lidiia readily bestows on her reacquainted friend one of her recent purchases, with little

\(^{60}\) Although the rape is not depicted in the film, it is clear from Mariia’s reactions and appearance that it has occurred.

\(^{61}\) Examples of other Bauer films that express this duality include *Sumerki zhenskoi dushi* and *Za Schast’em* (In Pursuit of Happiness, 1917). Youngblood, *The Magic Mirror*, p. 130. Doch’ kupitsa Bashkirova also suggests this.

consideration for what the gift is.

Bauer reveals the moral qualities of Mariia and Lidiia not only through their relationship to commodities and the pursuit of consumption, but also through their relationship to the traditional female sphere of textiles and the activity of sewing. As Morley observes, in Deti veka a sewing machine acts as a dikovinka for Mariia. Translated as ‘a wonder’ or ‘a marvel’, dikovinka was the term that Lev Kuleshov used to describe the object that Bauer chose to characterise the set of a particular scene. As Morley writes, in Bauer’s films ‘the dikovinka assumes symbolic significance, highlighting aspects of character or theme’. Observing that, in Deti veka, Mariia gradually loses interest in sewing as she is co-opted into Lidiia’s social circle, Morley provides a close reading of the symbolic treatment of the sewing machine dikovinka as a marker of Mariia’s gradual corruption by Lidiia and Lebedev. As she notes, the first time that Lidiia visits Mariia at home, Mariia is sewing contentedly. On Lidiia’s arrival, however, she quickly abandons the activity and clears away her materials to make room for them to take tea together. During Lidiia’s next visit, the sewing machine is similarly abandoned. Mariia’s husband picks up a discarded piece of cloth and looks down sorrowfully at it, before placing it next to the sewing machine at the back of the room. In all subsequent sequences, the sewing machine lies neglected behind Mariia at the back of the living room, alluding to her condition as a ‘fallen woman’. When Mariia leaves her husband for Lebedev, she does not take her sewing machine with her. It is not only the sewing machine that signifies Mariia’s descent into infidelity, however. Bauer’s treatment of fabric is also significant in this respect. The luminous whiteness of the cloth that Mariia’s husband sorrowfully contemplates alludes to his yearning for Mariia to remain a pure and perfect housewife. Similarly, it is no accident that, as the maid packs Mariia’s belongings for her move to live with Lebedev, she folds Mariia’s white shawl but does not place it in her case.

Indeed, fabric plays an important role in the film in other ways. It is striking that both Lidiia and Lebedev occupy spaces that are enveloped in textiles. A close up shot of Lidiia while she is hatching a scheme to procure Mariia as Lebedev’s mistress shows her within a cocoon of fabric. The fabric’s stripes echo those of the wallpaper in Mariia’s nursery in the preceding scene. While the striped wallpaper of Mariia’s nursery provides a modest alternative to the densely patterned wallpaper of Lebedev’s study, the stripes of Lidiia’s cocoon, which undulate voluptuously as Lidiia rocks herself in a rocking chair, have a sensual quality. In another scene, Lidiia is shown sitting beside Mariia in a netted hammock, suggesting the idea that Mariia has

63 Morley, Performing Femininity, p. 123.
66 Morley, Performing Femininity, p. 123.
67 Ibid.
fallen victim to Lidiia’s trap. Again, Lidiia is shown gently rocking, alluding to her disruptive presence. Moreover, Lebedev’s bedroom is draped in layers of silks, satins and diaphanous tulles. The frills and soft folds of the drapery emphasise the sensual nature of the space (Fig. 3.10). And, in the final scene of the film, a close-up shot reveals the dead body of Mariia’s husband lying across a bed with lace coverings (Fig. 3.11). Within the established genre of deathbed painting, figures are typically depicted lying surrounded by plain white cloth to emphasise their purity and ethereality. The intricacy of the lacework in Deti veka, however, is striking, and serves to emphasise the female characters’ connection with Mariia’s husband’s suicide. Bauer thus presents a contrast between the productive act of sewing and its positive associations with the maintenance of the domestic household and the decorative and sensual qualities of fabric, which evoke ideas of lust, indulgence and deceit. This contrast corresponds to what Widdis describes in relation to 1920s Soviet films as the distinction between the resourceful homemaker, who participates in acts of rukodelie [handcraft] such as sewing, and ‘the indolent consumer of bourgeois luxury’.

Fig. 3.10. Deti veka, Lebedev’s bedroom

68 In Tret’ia Meshchanskaia, Kolia is also portrayed rocking in a chair, as is the exploitative petit-bourgeois woman in Dom v sugrobakh (House in the Snowdrifts, 1928), which casts them both as troublemakers for the alert viewer.

69 In Doch’ kaptsa Bashkirka, the young suitor is accidentally killed by the merchant’s daughter in a bed that also has elaborate lace sheets. Later, his body is dumped in the river and then retrieved by fisherman, who haul it onto a pile of ropes. The intricate twists of the ropes recall the patterns of the lace bedcovers, alluding to female culpability with respect to his death.

70 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 119.
Although contemporary critics generally praised the film, noting in particular the striking performance of Vera Kholodnaia as Mariia, an anonymous reviewer in Teatral’naiia gazeta criticised the opulent sets in some of the scenes, especially those of the boating party.\footnote{Anon., Teatral’naiia gazeta [1915] in Ivanova et al., Velikii kinemo, p. 239.} From the mid-1910s, criticism of Bauer’s tendency towards highly ornamental sets was common in the contemporary cinema press. Indeed, in a 1914 review of Ditia bol’shogo goroda, an anonymous critic wrote that ‘очень чувствуется, что картину ставил режиссер-декоратор, а не режиссер-артист’ [one very much feels that a director-decorator and not a director-actor put together the picture].\footnote{M. A. G, Kine-zhurnal [1914], ibid., pp. 194-95 (p. 194).} The typical attack against Bauer’s elaborate sets was that they overwhelmed the actors and thus the film’s psychological intensity, which was seen to be distinctive to Russian cinema. For example, in a review of Zhizn’ za zhiz’n’, a film that Tsiv’ian observes has particularly lavish interiors,\footnote{Tsivian, Early Cinema in Russia and its Cultural Reception, pp. 194-95.} an anonymous critic wrote that, ‘желание достигнуть возможно большего технического совершенства и внешней красоты […] ослабило в картине элементы, типичные для русского киноискусства: красоту внутреннюю, красоту психологической правды и душевых переживаний’ [in the picture, the desire to achieve greater technical sophistication and exterior beauty […] weakens those elements typical for Russian cinema: inner beauty, the beauty of psychological truth and spiritual experience].\footnote{Anon., Proektor [1916] in Ivanova et al., Velikii kinemo, p. 315.}
II. The House as Ornament: Excess and Visual Expressivity

Produced by the Khanzhonkov studio just a few months after *Deti Veka* at the end of 1915 and released in 1916, Bauer’s *Iurii Nagornyi* in many ways exemplifies the ornate scenery for which contemporary critics denounced his films. Like *Deti veka*, the film depicts in Morley’s words a new woman with ‘a career, a mind and a life of her own’.75 The scenario, written by Andrei Gromov, who also acted in the film, tells the story of a dancer (played by Bauer’s wife, Emma Bauer), whom the eponymous protagonist Iurii Nagornyi attempts to seduce, despite the fact that she is already married.76 Initially, the dancer seems to encourage Iurii’s advances. As the film progresses, however, it is revealed to the viewer that this is part of a plan to take revenge on Iurii, who had previously seduced and then abandoned the dancer’s younger sister, leading her to commit suicide. After inebriating Iurii, the dancer sets fire to his apartment. Although Iurii survives, he is left with severe facial scars.

A significant proportion of the film’s action takes place in the sumptuous interiors belonging to the dancer and to Iurii. Decorated with a wealth of art nouveau and rococo furnishings and ornaments, these interiors convey both the characters’ social position as part of an elite class and their fashionable lifestyle. As Lucy Fischer notes, in North American and European cinema of the 1910s and 1920s, the discourse of abundance and prosperity is specifically coded through the aesthetics of art nouveau.77 In particular, Iurii’s bedroom is furnished with a rich combination of patterned fabrics, velvets, furs and oriental style tables, alluding to his decadent lifestyle (Fig. 3.12). As in Lebedev’s bedroom, the many frills and soft folds of fabric emphasise the room’s sensual nature.

76 The film is preserved without inter-titles. For a synopsis of the scenario, see Ivanova et al., *Veliki kinemo*, p. 294.
Besides its associations with grandeur and debauchery, the décor of the protagonists’ interiors also has formal significance. In his discussion of the film, Cavendish argues that the film is primarily a technical experiment, in which Bauer explores the ‘significance for the diegesis of background detail and interior landscape’. \(^{78}\) Cavendish details the way in which Bauer’s use of lighting techniques in conjunction with scenery for formal effect is more radical than that employed by other Russian film-makers of the era, in particular in terms of constructing staging in depth. \(^{79}\) In the scenes in the dancer’s bedroom, for example, an illuminated doorway at the background of the frame works to create an impression of deep perspectival depth (Fig. 3.13). \(^{80}\) Directed lighting also highlights the stucco relief ornament on the doors and the rococo arabesques of the table lamp, creating pronounced shadows which endow these features with a sculptural quality. In the scenes in Iurii’s bedroom, the layers of fabrics of different opacities, from diaphanous tulles to heavy velvets, create a sense of receding space. This impression of perspectival depth is emphasised in one notable sequence, in which the dancer follows a drunken Iurii into his bedroom before setting the room alight: initially, the dancer stands against the opaque panels of a closed door, positioned in the extreme foreground of the frame; she then opens the door partially to reveal a view of the bedroom. The opaque panels of the closed door render part of the frame a flattened tableau, while emphasising, through contrast, the recession of space visible beyond the open doorway (Fig. 3.14). The technique of placing doorways in the extreme foreground to create perspectival depth has been popular in pictorial representations of

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79 Ibid., pp. 240-42.
80 Ibid., p. 240.
interiors since the renaissance.\textsuperscript{81} As Oksana Chefranova observes, it continued to be used by early-twentieth century Russia painters, such as Konstantin Somov in his interior painting \textit{Zima} (Winter, 1904).\textsuperscript{82} Bauer employed doorways as formal framing devices in a number of his films. In several scenes in \textit{Ditia bol’shogo goroda}, for example, the characters’ arrival at a nightclub is framed through a backlit glass door. As Chefranova argues, in scenes such as these the doorway seems to have little narrative significance, but is used primarily for visual impact.\textsuperscript{83} Thus, in contrast to Mikhin’s sets for \textit{Domik v Kolomne} and \textit{Kreitserova sonata}, Bauer uses doorways primarily as formal devices for the creation of spatial depth and evocative visual effects, rather than to convey narrative or symbolic meaning.

Fig. 3.13. \textit{Iurii Nagorny\i, the dancer’s bedroom.}

Fig. 3.14. \textit{Iurii Nagorny\i, framing devices.}

\textsuperscript{81} For discussion of this technique in European painting, see Victor I. Stoichita, \textit{The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting}, London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2015, pp. 44-55
\textsuperscript{82} Oksana Chefranova, ‘From Garden to Kino’, pp. 562-63.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 563.
The placement and movement of the actors within the frame also serve primarily to draw the viewers’ attention to the scenery rather than to convey narrative meaning. As Cavendish observes, in the sequence in which the dancer enters her room from the door in the background and moves to sit at her desk in the foreground, she switches on a lamp as she progresses towards the viewer, gradually revealing the spatial layout of the room, with its careful distribution of vertical lines, as well as its rich decoration.84 Throughout the film, the slow movements of the actors encourage the eye to roam and to consider the various ornaments that decorate the interior. In a sequence in which the dancer visits her husband in his study, she weaves slowly through a complex composition of furniture, inclined at diagonal angles. As she moves into full view, the checkered detail on her dress is revealed to be the same as that on the arms of the chairs and the fretwork of the bookcase. Bauer’s interiors thus become what Sarah Street describes in relation to Lazare Meerson’s sets of the 1930s as ‘performative arenas’.85 For Street, sets function as ‘performative arenas’ in sequences in which the body of actors become an essential feature of the mise-en-scène, creating ‘the illusion of expanded space’ and ‘drawing attention to the significance of particular elements of décor, architecture and furniture’.86 She argues that in such sequences it is ‘as if the entire construction of a sequence has been designed to display the set’ in a way that ‘exceeds the immediate demands of the narrative’.87

While many of the interiors in Iurii Nagornyj, such as the bedrooms of Iurii and the dancer, are decorated with elaborately patterned wallpaper, fabrics and objects, others display a stark reduction in ornament. In the dancer’s dining room, for example, only a couple of glass bottles stand on the table, which is framed against a completely dark background (Fig. 3.15). This contrasts notably with the scene that immediately follows, which depicts Iurii’s dining room, with its abundance of crystal glassware (Fig. 3.16). Instead of a plain dark background, an art nouveau glass window, with stylized floral motifs, takes up the majority of the back of the frame.88 The combination of a large glass window and flowers recalls the glass conservatory in Deti veka. Just as Lebedev had done with Mariia, Iurii attempts to seduce the dancer while sitting against this background. In addition to the juxtaposition of the two dining rooms, such intertextual references also emphasise Iurii’s decadent and lascivious nature.

86 Ibid., pp. 30-31.
87 Ibid.
88 The glass window resembles those designed by Fedor Shekhtel’, such as the one he created in 1900 for the Riabushinskii mansion in Moscow.
On other occasions, the stark reduction of objects works to draw the viewer’s attention to the *faktura* [texture] of different materials and surfaces. In one scene the dancer is framed running across a snowy street, with its cobbled terrain clearly visible, while in another Iurii stands in an empty corridor next to plinths made from marble with pronounced veins. In a number of scenes, Bauer juxtaposes objects of various *faktura*, including crystal glassware, glazed china and polished wood, so as to heighten the frame’s expressivity. As Cavendish observes, beyond their associations with wealth, Bauer’s motivation for the inclusion of certain ornaments is, however,
often unclear or appears tangential to the narrative of the film.\textsuperscript{89} Rather, it seems that Bauer approached the décor in \textit{Iurii Nagomyi} as a technical exercise in how various sets could be used to structure cinematic space and to heighten the visual expressivity of a frame.

The attack on elaborate sets was directed not only at Bauer’s films. From the mid-1910s in the contemporary cinema press, critics waged a campaign against ostentatious interiors with an excess of ornaments, in a similar way that, as we recall from Chapter Two, critics denounced films of the rural provinces that had an abundance of ethnographic details. In an article published in 1918 in \textit{Kinogazeta}, the critic A. Ostroumov argued that many contemporary films were cluttered with ‘desheyvm velikolepiem’ [cheap splendour] that ‘krichit’ [screams], overwhelming the narrative and distracting the viewer’s attention from the actors.\textsuperscript{90} In contrast to such films, Ostroumov praised \textit{Gornichnaia Dzhenni} (The Maidservant Jenny, 1918) for the way in which the film-makers rejected elaborate sets in order to focus instead on creating ‘otrazhenie zhizni, kakaia ona est´, bez urodlivykh vydumok’ [a reflection of life as it is, without ugly fabrications].\textsuperscript{91} Ostroumov’s review is puzzling, however, considering that the highly elaborate sets that Vladimir Balliuzek designed for \textit{Gornichnaia Dzhenni} drew on and developed many of Bauer’s techniques.

\textit{Gornichnaia Dzhenni} was produced by the Erm’olev studio, which was known for the artistic and technical quality of its films. Indeed, in the 1920s it became one of the principal targets among late-Imperial studios that critics denounced for their concern with aestheticism.\textsuperscript{92} For the film, Balliuzek worked alongside the director Iakov Protazanov and the camera operator Fedor Burgasov. It was the fourth occasion that Protazanov and Balliuzek had collaborated on a fiction film. In the years before the nationalisation of the Russian film industry in 1919, Balliuzek formed a close partnership with Protazanov.\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Gornichnaia Dzhenni}’s ostentatious scenery, whose formal significance often exceeds its narrative function, in many ways, exemplifies what Balliuzek describes in his memoirs as the unrestricted creative freedom that Protazanov allowed \textit{kino-khudozhniki}, as discussed in Chapter One of this thesis.\textsuperscript{94}

The film is set within aristocratic society in an unspecified European country. After the death of Count Chamberaud [Shambero], his wife and his daughter, the eponymous Jenny [Dzhenni],

\textsuperscript{89} Cavendish, ‘The Hand That Turns the Handle’, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} For example, see Bl. F., ‘Rol´ khudozhnika v kino-proizvodstve’, \textit{Sovetskii ekran}, 10, 1925, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{93} Balliuzek also collaborated with Protazanov on \textit{Andrei Tobol’tsev} (1915), \textit{Pikovaia dama} (The Queen of Spades, 1916), \textit{Otets Sergeii} (Father Sergius, 1917), \textit{Malutka Elli} (Little Ellie, 1918) and \textit{Taina Korolevy} (The Queen’s Secret, 1919, non-extant).
are left with scant financial means. Despite this, the Countess objects to her daughter entering employment. Jenny therefore secretly moves to the city to search for work. Without any previous experience or recommendation, she at first struggles, but eventually she secures a job as a governess in the household of Baroness Angers [Anzher]. The Baroness’s son returns from service, and he and Jenny fall in love. Eventually, Jenny’s ancestry is revealed, the couple marry and Jenny and her mother regain their privileged lifestyle.

On one level, Balliuzek’s elaborate sets represent the affluent lifestyle of aristocratic society. Opulent details, such as intricate carvings on doors and mantelpieces, combinations of fabrics of different patterns and textures and large-scale hereditary crests, serve as indicators of privilege and class. As in Iurii Nagornyi, the interiors in Gornichnaia Dzhenni are decorated in a style that mixes rococo ornament with elements of art nouveau, including geometric patterning, black and white floor tiles and strong tonal contrasts. In Gornichnaia Dzhenni, however, ornament acts chiefly as an indicator of social status rather than of material wealth. Despite being forced to downgrade their elite lifestyle, the Countess and Jenny continue to live among exquisitely designed furniture: the armoire in their new lodgings has elaborately carved feet, and the screen that they use to separate the room into different areas for eating and sleeping bears the same striking art deco oval pattern as a window in their former mansion (Fig. 3.17). Similarly, the room in the boarding house that Jenny moves into while attempting to find work is furnished with chairs with ornate wood frames. Light is directed to highlight the chairs’ intricate carvings, which have a visual echo in the tight curls of Jenny’s hair. Rather than a reduction in ornament, then, it is a reduction in scale that indicates the Countess and Jenny’s impoverished position. Their surroundings reflect the characters’ continued view of themselves as part of an elite class.

Fig. 3.17. Gornichnaia Dzhenni, Jenny and her mother in their new lodgings.

95 Such features also appear in the aristocratic interiors that Balliuzek and Vladimir Egorov designed for Dzhentl’men i petukh (The Gentleman and the Cockerel, 1928), a film which tells the story of a Count who lives on a country estate on the Soviet and Polish border in the Civil War years.
In addition to rococo and art deco, Balliuzek’s décor reveals a number of diverse artistic influences. The linear forms and the monochrome contrasts of art deco elements betrays Balliuzek’s interest in illustration, which he continued to practise throughout the 1910s alongside designing sets for the theatre and cinema.\footnote{Miasnikov,  Ocherki istorii  svetskogo  kinodekoratsionnogo  iskusstva,  1918-1930,  pp. 87-88.} In several scenes, areas that display a stark art deco aesthetic are juxtaposed with those of dense patterning (Fig. 3.18). The contrasting patterns of fabric and wallpaper work to create a range of tones in the orthochromatic scale. This strategy was widely employed across Russian and European cinema in the 1910s and 1920s.\footnote{Widdis, ‘Faktura’, p. 23.} As Emma Widdis notes, the French film-maker Louis Delluc in his influential book  _Photogénie_ (1920), which was published in Russian in 1924, included patterned textiles with a dark background in a list of objects that he deemed innately photogenic.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 13-14.} The use of pattern to create a lively visual dynamic was a technique also employed in the set designs of the  _Ballets russes_ (1909-1928).

Balliuzek had studied art in Paris and designed sets for several Parisian theatres in the late 1900s at a time when the  _Ballets russes_ was at the height of its popularity.\footnote{For information on Balliuzek’s former training, see Miasnikov,  _Ocherki istorii  svetskogo  kinodekoratsionnogo  iskusstva,  1918-1930_,  pp. 87-88.} Moreover, Widdis argues that the use of excessive foreground patterning in cinema set design is ‘painterly in feel’, in so far as it renders the screen ‘a flat, pictorial surface’.\footnote{Widdis, ‘Faktura’, p. 9.} This corresponds to Balliuzek’s conception of set design as a pictorial process that drew on conventions from the tradition of painting, an idea that he promoted in his 1948 manual on set design, significantly titled  _Zhivopisno-maliarnye raboty na kinoproizvodstve: Posobie dlia rabochikh otdelochnogo tsekha kinostudii_ (Painterly Work in Film Production: A Manual for Workers of the Veneer Workshop of a Film Studio).\footnote{Vladimir Balliuzek,  _Zhivopisno-maliarnye raboty na kinoproizvodstve: Posobie dlia rabochikh otdelochnogo tsekha kinostudii_, Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1948.} Balliuzek’s use of various aesthetic styles can therefore be interpreted as a formal experiment in the potential of set aesthetics to heighten a film’s visual impact.

![Fig. 3.18. Gornichnaia Dzhenni, art deco and patterning.](image)
Like Bauer before him, Balliuzez also experimented with the cinematic potential of different materials and how their various opacities create contrasts in lighting effects. In several scenes, heavy velvets that absorb light are placed alongside diaphanous tulles that are illuminated by backlighting. Deeply carved woodwork, fluted columns and stucco relief decoration create pronounced contrasts between light and dark. Moreover, several scenes incorporate opaque doorways and windows that serve as screens against which figures appear silhouetted by a strong backlight (Fig. 3.19). On the one hand, these create different layers of action within the frame; on the other, they function as a self-reflexive device that draws the viewer’s attention to the act of looking at the surface of a screen, rather than back into illusionistic space.

Balliuzez also plays with different types of cinematic space through the use of patterned textiles. In several scenes, doorways and partition walls split the frame in two; while one side of the frame is filled with patterning, the other opens onto an interior that recedes into illusionistic space (Fig. 3.20). As Widdis argues in relation to kino-khudozhniki working in the 1920s, the incorporation in sets of foregrounded patterns appears ‘to flatten the screen, drawing attention to its surface’. Following Antonia Lant’s reading of Alois Riegel’s notion of different modes of perception, Widdis argues that the play with flattened space and depth of field creates variations in haptic and optical models of perception. Thus, the way in which Balliuzez uses set design in Gornichnaia Dzhenni not only to convey thematic and symbolic meanings, but also to exploit the expressive potential of cinematic space prefigures early-Soviet film-makers’ experimentation with scenery, such as Sergei Iutkevich’s work on Predatel’ (The Traitor, 1926).


103 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 69.

104 Ibid., pp. 69-70.

In Iutkevich’s scenery for *Predatel’*, what Widdis describes as the self-conscious play between two-dimensional and three-dimensional space that creates variations in haptic and optical forms of perception is undoubtedly more pronounced than in the sets of Bauer or Balliuze in the 1910s.\(^{106}\) Similarly, he incorporates a more diverse range of textures and shows a greater interest in how these can be intensified through lighting than either Bauer or Balliuze do in their approach to scenery. Indeed, in publicity material for *Predatel’* Iutkevich referred to the film as an experiment in using ‘объемы и фактуры поверхности, шероховатые, блестящие,\(^{106}\)
лакированные’ [[t]he volumes and textures of surfaces rough, shiny and lacquered].

However, many of Iutkevich’s set techniques – such as the use of pattern textiles for tonal variation, screens to segregate the frame and to create variation in depth of field and fabrics with different opacities to construct multiple layers of action – draw on those that were developed by Bauer and later Balliuzech in their representations of interior space. Moreover, the film is littered with references to set elements frequently found in Bauer’s films: the *russkii modern* entrance gates reference those used in films such as *Ditia bol’shogo goroda*, *Deti veka* and *Iurii Nagornyi*; the diaphanous tulle curtains of Madame Giuio’s brothel recall those in both Lebedev’s and Iurii’s bedrooms; and the bear rug also resembles that found in *Ditia bol’shogo goroda*, as well as in *Zhizn’ za zhizn’* and in several of the interiors in *Iurii Nagornyi*. Considering the fact that Iutkevich was assisted with the set design by Vasilii Rakhal’s, who had previously worked alongside Bauer at the Khanzhonkov studio, these references can be no coincidence.

Like Bauer’s films, *Predatel’* received largely negative criticism for its extravagant aesthetics: ‘Под видом этого быта в фильме показаны легкомысленные пикники, “шикарные” неуплотненные квартиры, изысканные безделушки, элегантные дамские пижамы и элегические фонтаны’ [Under the guise of this way of life, the film shows frivolous picnics, chic and spacious apartments, refined knick-knacks, elegant ladies’ pyjamas and elegiac fountains], wrote an anonymous reviewer in 1926 in *Sovetskoe kino*. The critic’s use of the adjective ‘neplotnennye’ is significant in that it referred to surplus living space, which was defined as that with a greater number of rooms than its inhabitants. In Russia during the first decades of the twentieth century, the question of sufficient living space was of particular importance. As Graffy notes, in 1917 just weeks after the Revolution, Lenin outlined a project for requisitioning ‘flats of the rich to relieve the needs of the poor’. This issue was the subject of one of the first Soviet films to be made, Aleksandr Pantaleeev’s *Uplotnenie* (*The Consolidation of Living Space*), which was released on the anniversary of the Revolution on 7 November 1918.

In addition to attacking Iutkevich’s sets on ideological grounds, critics also denounced them for their cinematic shortcomings. Like the critics of elaborate sets in late-Imperial cinema, several reviewers argued that Iutkevich’s scenery overwhelmed the narrative and the actors. Indeed, a reviewer writing in 1926 in *Vecherniaia Moskva* claimed that the sets had even become ‘a participant in the action’. There was, however, a notable and revealing shift in the focus of criticism away from set design’s effect on the psychological intensity of the film, which had been

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110 Ibid.
III. The House as Shelter: Representations of Material and Psychological Comfort in 1920s Soviet Cinema

In their search for a more economical model of film-making, during the 1920s a number of critics and film-makers denounced artificial studio sets and instead promoted location filming. As Widdis notes, while this posed a particular problem for kino-khudozhniki in terms of how they might represent the domestic interior, even the most vociferous opponents of studio scenery recognised that interior settings in films could not be discarded entirely. Indeed, Leo Mur, a major advocate of outdoor filming, wrote in the article ‘Sъёмки на nature i v atelё’ (Filming Outdoors and in the Studio):

Кінокиїмейть своїй raison d’être, пренебрежительно фыркая на “канарейчные кино-павильоны”, но жизнь не ограничивается только улицей. Большая часть жизни человека проходит не под небом, а под потолком. И вот кино-аппарату пришлось обзавестись своим “домом” — ателье, где без пятен и протуберанцев ярко светит электро-солница вольтовых дуг и где кино-аппарат может в упор брать “на мушку” двухстенные комнаты, открывающие все тайны “домашних очагов”.

114 As Widdis notes, the film-makers used thirty specially constructed sets, which was a large number for contemporary films, Widdis, ‘Faktura’, p. 20.
116 Widdis, Socialist Senses, pp. 85-86.
Kinoki have their own raison d’être for grunting with contempt at “canary cinema studios”, but life is not confined only to the streets. A great part of a person’s life takes place not under the sky, but under a ceiling. And thus the film-camera had to acquire its own “home” — the studio, where, free from patches and protuberances, the electric sun’s volt arcs shine brightly and where the film-camera can shoot at “point-blank” range two-walled rooms, revealing all the secrets of the hearth].

As the criticism of the interior scenery in Predatel’ demonstrates, the question of how to represent interior space posed a challenge to kino-khudozniki on not only aesthetic, but also ideological grounds. During the 1920s, the domestic sphere became the focus of the battle against the entrenchment of bourgeois values and pre-revolutionary ways of life. This battle was seen to be both a physical one against the material comforts of the bourgeois household and a psychological one against the emotional attachment to bourgeois dwelling habits. For many critics, the entrenchment of bourgeois values was exacerbated by the state’s adoption of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1921-1927), which permitted limited market capitalism. The NEP era also witnessed an exacerbation of the problem of sufficient housing, brought about by mass urban migration and the devastation of the Civil War years. A lack of available living space meant that many city dwellers were forced to live in cramped, overcrowded conditions alongside strangers.

Devushka s korobkoi (The Girl with a Hatbox, 1927) was one of a number of films made between 1926 and 1928 that explicitly addressed the Soviet housing problem. According to production records, the film was made under the remit of engaging with the issues ‘zhilposkhodadi v Moske, vzaimotnocheniia [sic] novoi burzhuazii i ei podchinennykh liudei, vzaimootnocheniia polov i pod bytovye voprosi’ [of living space in Moscow, the relationship between the new bourgeoisie and their subordinates, the relationship between different genders and questions about everyday life]. In the film, Natasha works as a milliner for Madame Irène’s Moscow boutique. Although Natasha lives with her grandfather in a cottage outside Moscow, Madame Irène keeps a room in her apartment in Natasha’s name, which allows her and her husband, Trager, to hold onto extra living space. The issue of lodging rights was acute at the time. In the same year that the film was produced the state introduced the non-voluntary policy of ‘samouplotnenie’ [self-compression], which required that surplus living space be offered to lodgers. One day, while travelling to Moscow by train, Natasha meets the student Il’ia.

117 Leo Mur, ‘S’emki na nature i v atel’e’, Kino-front, 2, 1926, pp. 2-7 (p. 2).
118 For discussion of NEP housing conditions, see Lynne Attwood, Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 40-61.
119 Others include Aelita (1924), Kat’ka – bumazhnii ranet (Kat’ka’s Reinette Apples, 1926), Tre’tia Meshchanskata, V bol’shom gorode (In the Big City, 1927) and Dom na Trubnoi.
120 Gosfil’mo Fond Rossii. 1. 2. 1. 228, p. 116.
121 Attwood, Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia, p. 47.
Eventually taking pity on Il’ia’s homeless condition, she proposes that they marry so that he has the right to live in ‘her’ room at Madame Irène’s. In the original screenplay, Il’ia initially seeks a room in student dormitories, but the conditions there are so bad that he chooses instead to wander homeless among Moscow’s streets. At the end of the film, Natasha gives her state lottery winnings to improve the student dormitories. This sub-plot about the student dormitories was axed from the final version of the film, presumably for portraying a form of communal housing in a negative light.

*Deushka s korobki* was the first of a number of films, which included *Dom na Trubnoi* and *Okraina* (Outskirts, 1933), on which the *kino-khudozhnik* Sergei Kozlovskii collaborated with the director Boris Barnet. Widdis identifies the films of Barnet and Kozlovskii as notable examples of the “everyday” style in Soviet set design. Indeed, Kozlovskii was a major proponent of an economical approach to set design, in terms of both aesthetics and the production process. Devushka s korobki is notable for its spartan interiors. In several scenes, Natasha’s room in Madame Irène’s apartment appears bare except for a light switch and a crystal chandelier (Fig. 3.21). Even Madame Irène’s bourgeois apartment is more sparsely decorated than the petit-bourgeois interiors in other films of the period, such as *Kat’ka – bumazhnyi ranet* (Kat’ka’s Reinette Apples, 1926) or *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia*. The living room is furnished with a grand sofa with an ornate wood frame and a few decorative vases.

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122 The original screenplay is housed at Gosfilmofond Rossii. 1. 2. 1. 228, pp. 13-42.
123 Gosfilmofond Rossii. 1. 2. 1. 228, p. 92.
125 For example, see Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Prava i obiazannosti kino-khudozhnika’, *Kino-zhurnal ARK*, 11-12, 1925, pp. 16-17 and his ‘Tekhnika kinouatel’c’, *Kino i kul’tura*, 5, 1925, pp. 57-59.
In the manual he co-authored on set design, Kozlovskii argued that \textit{kino-khudozhniki} could convey a character’s identity or the atmosphere of a place to the viewer more expeditiously and forcefully with a few carefully selected objects, rather than with an accumulation of detail.\footnote{Nikolai Kolin and Sergei Kozlovskii, \textit{Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino} [1930], \textit{Kinovedcheskie zapiski}, 99, 2009, pp. 378-422 (pp. 389-92).} In other words, according to Kozlovskii, sparse sets heighten the rhetorical power of individual objects, as we saw with the officers’ quarters in \textit{Domik v Kolomne}.\footnote{Ibid.} In \textit{Devushka s korobkoi}, objects carry particular symbolic significance. Each character is introduced to the viewer through specific objects that act as markers of their identity: Il’ia is shown with his stack of books and patched-up \textit{valenki}, alluding to his status as a student and a native of the provinces; Natasha is never without her hatbox; a shot of Trager with a silver tea service indicates his adherence to bourgeois customs; and Madame Irène decorates Natasha’s room with a crystal chandelier, which at a time when the State was embarking on a campaign to bring electricity to the masses, alludes to how she privileges her own luxurious lifestyle over collective responsibility.

The rejection of excess to focus on individual details was an aesthetic approach that gained widespread appeal in a number of artistic circles from the mid-1920s. Notably among the Soviet avant-garde, Osip Brik in his 1927 manifesto of factography, ‘\textit{Fiksatsiia fakta}’ (The Fixation of the Fact), campaigned for an approach to film and literature based on individual details.\footnote{Osip Brik, ‘\textit{Fiksatsiia fakta}’, \textit{Novyi lef}, 11-12, 1927, pp. 44-50.} In his article ‘\textit{Khudozhnik i material’ naia sreda v igrovoi fil’me}’ (The Artist and the Material Environment in Fiction Film), also published in 1927, Aleksandr Rodchenko declared that: ‘В кино важно уметь убрать неработающие вещи, кино не терпит реализа “как в жизнь” […] Кино не терпит, чтобы на экране было 11 бутылок, когда пьют из 2-х, все равно остальных зритель не увидит’ [In cinema it is important to be able to get rid of things that do not work; cinema cannot stand realism “as in life” […] Cinema cannot put up with eleven bottles on the screen when people only drink from two; the viewer does not see the others anyway].\footnote{Aleksandr Rodchenko, ‘\textit{Khudozhnik i material’ naia sreda v igrovoi fil’me}’, \textit{Sovetskoe kino}, 5-6, 1927, pp. 14-15 (p. 14).} Likewise, as Alina Payne argues, the individual element became a focus of much modernist artistic discourse.\footnote{Cited ibid., p. 243.} In his article ‘\textit{Actualités}’ (1928), the French avant-garde artist and film-maker Fernand Léger declared that fragments when isolated take on a life of their own;\footnote{Cited ibid., p. 257.} and in his treatise \textit{L’Art decoratif d’aujourd’hui} (The Decorative Art of Today, 1925), Le Corbusier argued that in bare interiors objects become more visible and exert a greater rhetorical force.\footnote{Alina Payne, \textit{From Ornament to Object: Genealogies of Architectural Modernism}, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012, p. 197.}
These artistic discourses mirrored contemporary social debates: a campaign against cluttered interiors dominated the discussion of living standards in the 1920s. As Victor Buchli observes, many Soviet domestic guidebooks advised against unnecessary ornament as it reduced light and space, harboured dust that was detrimental to the health and increased housework, leaving women with less time to pursue social work outside the home.\[133\]

However, despite the widespread support across the 1920s for the cleansing of superfluous ornament from domestic space, vacant interiors also held negative connotations. Buchli notes how one of the first Soviet domestic guidebooks Svety proletarskoi khoziaike (Advice for the Proletarian Housewife, 1924) emphasised that ‘decorative elements should not be displayed with museum- or monastery-like austerity but gaily, lively, dynamically and with variety’.\[134\] Walter Benjamin in his writings on the interior, which were closely informed by his experience of living in Moscow in the winter of 1926-27, saw the removal of superfluous ornament as emancipatory, but also argued that empty interiors impeded the formation of habits, which were essential to a dweller’s sense of belonging.\[135\] Thus, as Widdis argues, many could not reject decoration wholesale.\[136\]

The ambiguous attitude towards the decorative is evident in Kozlovskii’s sets for Devushka s korobkoi. As Widdis observes, Kozlovskii creates several different interiors: Natasha and her grandfather’s provincial home; the petit-bourgeois room of the station clerk Fogelev; Madame Irène’s and Trager’s Moscow apartment; and Natasha’s room in which Il’ia eventually lives.\[137\] Alongside the stark interiors of Madame Irène’s apartment and Natasha’s room, Kozlovskii also created heavily-ornamented interiors. Fogelev’s room is decorated with floral patterned wallpaper and an array of knick-knacks adorns the shelves (Fig. 3.22). Similarly, Natasha and her grandfather’s home displays many of the trappings of the comfortable bourgeois interior: a patterned wool rug lines the walls and heavy wood furniture and a plump armchair dominate the room (Fig. 3.23). The scenes set here are mainly framed in medium close-up, which highlights the soft texture of the wool rug and the snug folds of the armchair. Moreover, Widdis demonstrates how the complex attitude towards decoration is reflected in the film’s production process: archival records state that Il’ia’s room cannot be entirely vacant, but must be furnished with a table and chairs, a cupboard, a commode and a bed.\[138\] The film thus refuses to make a


\[134\] Ibid., p. 44.


\[137\] Widdis, ‘Cinema and the Art of Being’, p. 325.

\[138\] Ibid., p. 328.
clear ideological distinction between different lifestyles based on design aesthetics alone. Cluttered interiors and sparsely furnished interiors can be both positively and negatively coded. How then is the film’s social message about living space to be understood?

According to Buchli, during the late 1920s, as the NEP era drew to a close and the state initiated the Cultural Revolution (1928-1932), there was a growing resistance to denotive understandings of material culture and to the idea that objects and aesthetic styles represented unambiguously a particular set of values. Buchli argues that this was replaced by a contextual understanding, in

139 Buchli, *An Archaeology of Socialism*, pp. 56-57.
which it was a person’s relationship to their surrounding material environment that mattered.\textsuperscript{140} A growing interest in material relations is also evident among contemporary film-makers. In a 1926 statement outlining his intentions for \textit{Tret‘ia Meshchanskaia}, the director Abram Room argued that in cinema close attention must be paid to things, which ‘live, breathe, interfere in people’s lives and keep them in close captivity’.\textsuperscript{141} And, as we recall from Chapter Two of this thesis, in his article ‘Pogranichnaia liniiia’ (The Border Line), published the same year that \\textit{Devushka s korobkoi} was released, Viktor Shklovskii wrote that cinema was entering a second phase in which it would become a factory of the relationship with things.\textsuperscript{142}

Correspondingly, in \textit{Devushka s korobkoi} it is a protagonist’s relationship with their surrounding material environment that serves as an indicator of their social and moral qualities. In the way that they use their possessions for multiple functions, Natasha and Il’ia are shown to be resourceful. While homeless in Moscow’s icy streets, Il’ia uses his books as a stool to perch on and as a screen to block a draught coming through some railings (Fig. 3.24). Similarly, when he moves into Natasha’s unfurnished room, he constructs a makeshift bed from his books and \textit{valenki} felt boots. Likewise, when, after missing her train, Natasha is forced to stay the night in her Moscow room together with Il’ia, she uses Il’ia’s books and her hatbox as a screen to partition a sleeping space for herself separate from where Il’ia rests (Fig. 3.25). Natasha and Il’ia’s intelligent use of objects contrasts with Trager and Fogelev’s clumsiness with them. In one sequence Natasha successfully stays on her feet as a rug is pulled out from underneath her, while Trager is tripped up and breaks one of Madame Irène’s figurines.\textsuperscript{143} In another, Natasha confidently crosses the narrow bridge that connects her house to the train station, but Fogelev slips on its icy planks.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Cited and translated in Graffy, \textit{Bed and Sofa}, p. 11.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Pogranichnaia liniiia’ [1927] in his \textit{Za 60 let. Raboty o kino}, Moscow, 1985, pp. 110-13. See also Chapter Two of this thesis, p. 105.
\item \textsuperscript{143} The sequences that depict Trager’s clumsiness with objects recall Iurii Olesha’s novel \textit{Zavist’} (Envy, 1927), published the same year that \textit{Devushka s korobkoi} was released. In the novel, various pieces of furniture rebel against the petit-bourgeois Nikolai Kavalerev, who refuses to accept new socialist ways of life, and try to trip him up, bite him and laugh at his expense.
\end{itemize}
The idea of material intelligence was popular among Soviet cultural theorists of the 1920s. In his influential text ‘Byt i kul’tura veshchi’ (Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing, 1925), Boris Arvatov envisions that an active and creative relationship with things will separate the new Soviet collective from bourgeois society.\footnote{Boris Arvatov, ‘Byt i kul’tura veshchi’ [1925], translated by Christina Kiaer as, ‘Everyday Life and the Culture of the Thing’, \textit{October}, 81, 1997, pp. 119-28.} According to Arvatov, the bourgeoisie apprehends
things only in terms of material display. By contrast, in the future Soviet collective the thing will become ‘connected like a co-worker with human practice’. For Arvatov, the distinction between bourgeois society and the new Soviet collective’s relationship with things is evident in living practices. While the bourgeois individual does not go beyond rearranging things, changing only their distribution in space and not their form, the new Soviet person engages directly in the act of making, transforming the thing into a working instrument. Likewise, the cultural theorist Sergei Tret’iakov differentiates between the bourgeois and the new Soviet person’s relationship to things in terms of ‘priobreteli’ [acquirers] and ‘izobreteli’ [inventors].

A similar distinction in living practices is evident in Devushka s korobkoi. In contrast to Il’ia and Natasha’s acts of homemaking, in which they transform their things and give them various new purposes, Trager and Madame Irène use their possessions merely as decorative furnishings; accordingly, they are shown to simply redistribute them between spaces, as described by Arvatov. When Trager and Madame Irène are forced to vacate Natasha’s room midway through a dinner party, they move all their furniture with them. In a subsequent sequence, in which Trager seeks to reassert his claim over Natasha’s room, he moves his wardrobe back in. Moreover, Madame Irène’s boutique is shown exclusively as a place of material display. The boutique is bare except for its large glass shop windows and a cashier desk display. Against a background of opaque rectangular frames, the hats appear abstracted, with their form rather than their function emphasised. By contrast, it is Natasha’s home that functions as a space of creation. The original screenplay states that in the first act of the film Natasha and her grandfather make hats together at the kitchen table. The screenplay details how Natasha assists her grandfather with sewing, passing him material which he feeds through the machine. Although these scenes do not feature in the final version of the film, the home that Natasha shares with her grandfather remains associated with making: the kitchen table serves as a workspace for assembling hats and a sewing machine with a ribbon draped across it rests by the window (Fig. 3.26). In the original screenplay, Natasha is again shown as a maker at the end of the film, when she uses her state lottery winnings to refurbish the student dormitories.

145 Ibid., p. 123.
146 Ibid., p. 126.
147 Ibid., p. 127.
149 For discussion of the significance of acts of homemaking in Soviet cinema, see Widdis, Socialist Senses, pp. 109-19.
150 Gosfilmofond Rossii. 1. 2. 1. 228, pp. 13-14.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., pp. 13-42.
For Arvatov, the new Soviet collective would become motivated through their creative engagement with things, while the bourgeoisie’s passive relationship with their possessions hindered activity, constrained the body and led to social apathy. Similarly, in *Devushka s korobkoi* things interfere with the lives of Trager and Madame Irène, whereas they mobilise Il’ia. While in one sequence Madame Irène is shown entangled in laundry, in another Il’ia adeptly weaves his way through a maze of clothing lines to find a sink to wash. Moreover, Il’ia is shown vigorously exercising in Natasha’s room. Using his stack of books as weights, he extends his whole body across the entire width of the frame. Trager watches Il’ia through a keyhole and mimics his movements; however, the cramped bedroom means that he hits Madame Irène in the stomach. This is not the only instance when Trager imitates others unsuccessfully. In the sequence in which he is introduced to the viewer, he gazes at a picture of Madame Irène dancing and copies her hand gestures. He thus appears as a character who is unable to act consciously and is only capable of imitating others, but ineffectively. The activities that he does engage in are typically asocial, solitary and inactive. He slumps in a leather sofa, detached from the real world, absorbed in listening to his personal radio through headphones. This recalls the sequence in *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia* in which Volodia listens to his personal radio in an attempt to shut out his surrounding environment. Thus, while domestic spaces impel Il’ia to action, for Trager they insulate him from Soviet everyday life.

The extent to which living space could empower individuals or reinforce old habits of everyday life is directly addressed in *Oblomok imperii* (Fragment of an Empire, 1929). The film tells the story of the non-commissioned officer Ivan Filimonov, who suffers amnesia as a result of an injury sustained while fighting during the First World War. He regains his memory to find himself in

1928 in post-revolutionary Soviet Russia. Determined to track down his wife, Filimonov travels to Leningrad, formerly Saint Petersburg, where he had previously lived, only to discover that the city has changed dramatically. His former employer, a factory manager, has been replaced by a committee and his wife is now remarried to a cultural worker. Initially Filimonov is disorientated and alienated in revolutionary Leningrad, but gradually he learns to appreciate the new way of life. He eventually locates his wife, who lives with her oppressive husband according to prerevolutionary conventions. Filimonov offers his wife a means to escape her retrograde lifestyle, but she chooses instead the material comfort of her familiar life.

_Oblomok imperii_ was the third film that the _kino-khudozhnik_ Evgenii Enei and the director Fridrikh Ermler collaborated on after _Kat’ka – bumazhnyi ranet_ and _Dom v sugrobakh_ (The House in the Snowdrifts, 1928). These films also addressed the theme of social alienation in revolutionary society. During the 1920s, Enei typically worked with the Fabrika Ekstsentricheskogo Aktera (FEKS, Factory of the Eccentric Actor) directors Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, and he developed a distinct approach to set design that exploited the play of light and shadow for atmospheric and psychological effect. In _Oblomok imperii_, this approach became key in revealing the psychological states of characters and expressing the conflict between retrograde and revolutionary lifestyles and their respective associations with ignorance and oppression and enlightenment and empowerment.

The domestic interiors that Enei created for _Oblomok imperii_ are dark and confined spaces, cut off from the outside world. Pierced by only a narrow ray of sunlight from its sole window, Filimonov’s room in the provincial railway station, where at the beginning of the film he works as a stationmaster, is shrouded in darkness (Fig. 3.27). Objects appear as indistinct, shadowy masses, reflecting Filimonov’s confused mind. The rough texture of the walls and the wood floorboards, which are highlighted by the use of directed lighting, make the space seem cave-like and recall the war shelter in which Filimonov is introduced to the viewer; it is also similar to the kulak-bai’s hut, which Enei later created for _Odna_ (Alone, 1931). Additionally, in the domestic interior of Filimonov’s previous employer, the forms of dark wood furniture seem to coalesce amid the shadows. As in other films of the 1920s such as _Tret’ia Meshchanskaiia_, the feeling of enclosed interior space is heightened through its contrast with expansive exteriors.154 In the Leningrad scenes, the plain, white facades of the Constructivist-style offices and housing units gleam in brilliant sunlight. The office block is shot at a diagonal angle from a low viewpoint to emphasise the structure’s soaring height and angular form. Likewise, the communal dining room and the recreational spaces of the workers’ club, with their large glass windows and doors,

lack of ornament and simple furniture, are bright and spacious.  

Fig. 3.27. Oblomok imperii, Filimonov’s room.

Enei’s darkened domestic interiors function as enclaves in which their inhabitants harbour pre-revolutionary ways of life. In the interiors of both Filimonov’s wife and his former employer, space is divided according to bourgeois conventions of room usage. In many of the sequences shot in these interiors, the kitchen table dominates the frame visually, suggesting that the household continues to revolve around traditional domestic practices. Indeed, Filimonov’s wife is largely confined to her role as a housewife. The one time in the film when the viewer sees her outside the domestic sphere she is crouching in the corner of a train wagon; her husband’s coat separates her from the window, acting as a buffer to the exterior world. Similarly, the former factory owner’s wife barricades herself in a corner of the living room behind a screen (Fig. 3.28). Refusing to apprehend the world around her directly, she views her surroundings exclusively through a mirror and buries her face deep into the bedcovers as her husband informs Filimonov about current circumstances. Likewise, the former factory owner, dressed in pyjamas and clutching a German newspaper, appears detached from present-day Soviet life. In contrast to these characters’ rootedness in the domestic sphere and their concomitant social isolation, Filimonov is able to transcend the home, and in so doing he becomes empowered.

155 See Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 212.
In the domestic interior of Filimonov’s wife and the cultural worker, material traces of their adherence to pre-revolutionary conventions are placed alongside objects with revolutionary connotations (Fig. 3.29). While a collection of Lenin’s works lines the living-room bookshelf, knick-knacks and religious ornaments clutter the top of the bedroom dressing table. On the coat-stand hangs both a trilby hat and a workers’ cap. Although the cultural worker addresses workers in a communal dining room, he eats alone with his wife at home. The wife makes simple sheki [cabbage soup] in a utilitarian tin pot, but serves it in traditional chinaware. And on
the kitchen table a booklet on revolutionary culture rests among crystal glassware. In an article entitled ‘Veshch´ v kino’ (The Thing in Cinema), published in 1929 in Kino i kul´tura, the critic V. Kolomarov argued that the unexpected juxtapositions of objects in Oblomok imperii work to disrupt conventional modes of perception and force the viewer to see the material environment in a new, unfamiliar light. According to Kolomarov, this induces greater aesthetic appreciation and increased social awareness among viewers. In his writings of the 1920s, Sergei Tret´iakov argued that the battle against bourgeois comfort and taste was psychological. He claimed that the bourgeoisie transfer fetishisms and memories onto their surrounding material environment; this emotional attachment leads to the entrenchment of habits to the extent that they become automatic. For Tret´iakov, familiar habits could be broken down through the process of ostranenie [defamiliarisation].

In Oblomok imperii, the technique of ostranenie is used not only to heighten the viewer’s awareness, but also to aid the reconstitution of Filimonov’s memory. In one sequence before Filimonov regains his memory, he stumbles upon a paper boat. Unable to comprehend what the object is, Filimonov presses his head down next to the floorboards to peer at it from a different vantage point. While the paper boat yields no further meaning, a cigarette packet thrown from a train window serves as a memory trigger for Filimonov. As he touches the object, his mind begins to form connections based on perceived formal and aural associations. This initiates a process in which Filimonov’s handling of various objects in his room causes memories of his former life to resurface. Turning the wheel of the sewing machine sets in motion the movement of the needle against the metal plate, which, for Filimonov, recalls the clanking machinery at the factory where he worked formerly. Similarly, the spool of the sewing machine running across the floorboards triggers a flashback consisting of various images relating to Saint Petersburg and his wife in her wedding dress. It is notable that the process through which Filimonov’s memory is reconstituted is triggered by objects associated with sewing. On one level, sewing is associated with the joining of fragments into a seamless whole. In the context of the Soviet 1920s, however,

Widdis argues that sewing and other forms of rukodelie had ideological significance and expressed ‘the validation of labour’ that was central to Soviet ideology. Like Natasha and Il’ia in Devushka s korobkoi, Filimonov – through his identification with making – is shown as a productive member of Soviet society.

IV. Conclusion

In his later reflections on film-making, Ermler referred to Oblomok imperii as a ‘problem film’ that posed questions rather than provided answers. Although, as Widdis observes, Kolomarov praised the film’s depiction of the communal dining room and the hostel as examples of a new Soviet approach to living, in general the film does not offer solutions about how to restructure life according to a Soviet model. Indeed, Widdis notes that very few films in the 1920s did show new socialist interiors or offer positive guidelines about inhabiting domestic space. This continues the tradition observed in late-Imperial fiction films of representing the domestic interior in a negative light, using motifs of entrapment to convey ideas about the repressive patriarchal structure of early twentieth-century Russia. In the 1929 version of his article ‘Zhizn´ kak ona dolzhna byt´’ (Life As it Ought To Be), Nikolai Lukhmanov lamented the fact that up to that point Soviet cinema had only presented a social critique of contemporary life and had failed to offer models for its improvement. The only film that Lukhmanov praised in terms of its positive depiction of Soviet domestic space was the non-extant kul´turfl´m Kak ty zhivesh´ (How You Live, 1927), directed by G. Shirokov and with sets created by the architect Gleb Glushchenko. The film stills that illustrate the article show an open-plan apartment with high ceilings, large windows, plain walls and simple geometric-frame furniture. Widdis argues that while interiors in Soviet fiction films continued to reflect models of bourgeois domesticity, it was the factory floor and the collective farm that offered a more positive model of socialist life. Accordingly, the next chapter will address how representations of the workplace in late-Imperial and early-Soviet fiction cinema engaged with questions about the material environment.

163 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 119.
164 Denise J. Youngblood, Movies for the Masses: Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 92. A number of other films set in the domestic environment were conceived as problem films, including Tret’iia Meshchanskaya.
165 See Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 212.
166 Ibid., p. 205. An exception to this is V bol’shom gorode (In the Big City, 1927), which shows both a traditional bourgeois and a new Soviet model of interior. The film’s representation of these spaces is closely tied to questions about different forms of creative production; it will therefore be discussed in Chapter Six.
168 Ibid.
169 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 205.
Chapter Four
The Workplace

In Russia, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of intense industrialisation and commercial expansion. Against this climate, ideas about restructuring the workplace, labour conditions and professional relations naturally came to occupy a prominent position in social discourses. Equally, working life became a popular subject for artistic and literary representation. Existing scholarship on artistic responses to working life typically focuses on the spaces of industrial and proto-industrial production, and their representation as emblems of rationality and efficiency.¹ This chapter, however, considers how early Russian and Soviet film-makers represented the private study or office – a space associated with intellectual labour over practical work, imaginative speculation over manual production and individual desires over collective responsibilities. As such, the chapter seeks to explore the place of imagination and pleasure in discourses about work. Specifically, it focuses on how film-makers used elements of set design to foreground imagination and pleasure within the workplace. For, as Mark Steinberg argues in his study of proletarian imagination in late-Imperial and early-Soviet Russia, imagination was seen to be constitutive of the individual no less than practical work, and workers’ fantasies expressed many of the dominant anxieties of the time, most notably about class mobility, the efficacy of labour rights reform and the subordination of the individual to the state.²

The chapter first explores the representation of private studies in Evgenii Bauer’s films. Bauer used the space of the study repeatedly, exploring its function not as a locus of work, but as a realm of individual fantasy and imagination. In particular, I consider two films made at the beginning and at the end of Bauer’s cinema career: Nemye svideteli (Silent Witnesses, 1914), which was designed by Bauer himself, and Nabat (The Alarm, 1917), which was designed by Lev Kuleshov. The chapter next examines the ways in which fantasy and desire were made manifest in the representation of private studies in two films of the mid-1920s, Aelita (1924) and Shinel’ (The Overcoat, 1926), whose sets were created by Sergei Kozlovskii, with the assistance of Viktor Simov, and Evgenii Enei respectively. Finally, the chapter explores the place of desire in films of the early-Soviet era that featured industrial settings, focusing on the comparison

between the private office and the factory work floor in Kuleshov’s sets for Proekt inzhenera Praita (Engineer Prait’s Project, 1918), Vasili Rakhal’s sets for Stachka (Strike, 1925), Rakhal’s and Aleksandr Rodchenko’s sets for Vasha znakomaia (Your Acquaintance, 1927) and Nikolai Suvorov’s sets for Zlatye gory (Golden Mountains, 1931).

I. Private Studies in Evgenii Bauer’s Films: Individual Desires and Power Relations

Although since the late nineteenth century Russia had experienced the large-scale industrialisation and the rapid expansion of the commercial sector, very few late-Imperial fiction films depicted spaces associated with industry and corporate enterprise. Portrayals of working life were mainly restricted to domestic service, as discussed in Chapter Three, or to agricultural activity in rural communities such as in the Khazhnokov studio’s Krest’ianskaia dolia (The Peasants’ Lot, 1912) and Snoskhach (The Incestuous Father-in-Law, 1912). The limited interest in representing working life in late-Imperial fiction cinema was partly a result of the popularity of psychological urban melodramas.

Despite the lack of interest in working life, many of the films of the director and the kino-khudozhnik Evgenii Bauer incorporate private studies. As Victoria Rosner argues in relation to American and Western European modernist culture, the secluded nature of the study – a space removed from the domestic and the entertaining spaces of a household and the social customs demanded of housewives – meant that it was an exclusively masculine realm. Moreover, as a single-occupant room, the study was frequently associated with clandestine activity and the harbouring of secret desires. Correspondingly, in Bauer’s films the study is predominantly a space belonging to male protagonists. Often reclusive romantics and fantasists, Bauer’s male protagonists use their studies not for conducting business affairs or for intellectual study, but rather to excuse themselves from social formalities and to indulge in personal fantasies. These fantasies often relate to the idealisation and objectification of women; consequently, Bauer uses the study as a key space to explore gender concerns. This differentiates the function of the study

3 This contrasts with Russian avant-garde painting in the 1910s and 1920s; a number of artists, such as Kazimir Malevich and Natal’ia Goncharova, incorporated elements of industrial environments and working practices in their pictures.


6 Ibid., p. 94.

7 An exception to this is Zhizn’ za zhizn’ (A Life for a Life, 1916), in which the wealthy widowed businesswoman Khromova is shown to occupy a study.

in Bauer’s films from that in other late-Imperial films, such as the Khazhzhonkov studio’s Gory Sarry (The Sorrows of Sarra, 1913) and Diadiushkina kvarshina (Uncle’s Apartment, 1913), in which it is primarily associated with business transactions.

One of the earliest examples of Bauer’s use of the private study to explore gender and class relations comes in the Khazhzhonkov studio’s Nemye svideteli (Silent Witnesses, 1914), which he worked on as both the director and the kino-khudozhnik. In the film, Nastia, the granddaughter of the porter to an upper-class family, takes the place of the housemaid Variusha, who wishes to visit her children in the countryside. Nastia soon attracts the attentions of the son of the household, Pavel Kostyritsyn, who seduces her. However, when Pavel’s marriage proposal to the socialite Ellen is accepted, he loses interest in Nastia and treats her only as a maid. As a critic writing in 1914 in Vestnik kinematograf identified, the film’s main theme is ‘Ta grani, kotorya rezkoj chertoy razdelja soslovja i kladet prichynnu spravedlivu v otnosheniyakh ljudey vyshego i nizhego rangra’ [That border, which sharply separates social ranks and places strong barriers between people of the higher and the lower class].

According to Rachel Morley, Nemye svideteli is remarkable among Bauer’s extant films for consistently foregrounding class concerns over issues of gender and for dividing the protagonists into ‘good’ and ‘bad’ based on their class associations.

Bauer conveys the protagonists’ class status primarily through the spatial layout of the Kostyritsyn household, which is organised according to the conventional downstairs/upstairs social hierarchy. The importance of spatial hierarchies is made apparent in the film’s opening scene, set in the vestibule of the Kostyritsyn house, in which an ornate staircase leading up to Pavel’s room dominates the space, taking up over half of the frame (Fig. 4.1). While Pavel’s room is located upstairs, the kitchen in which the servants socialise is situated downstairs, at the bottom of another staircase. The simple wooden banister of the downstairs staircase contrasts starkly with the marble pilasters and the intricate rococo ironwork of the staircase leading to

9 Bauer had also used the private study to explore gender and class relations in Ditja bol’shogo goroda (Child of the Big City, 1914), which was released one month earlier than Nemye svideteli. See Rachel Morley, “Crime without Punishment”: Reworkings of Nineteenth-century Russian Literary Sources in Evgenii Bauer’s Child of the Big City’ in Stephen Hutchings and Anat Vernitski (eds), Russian and Soviet Film Adaptations of Literature, 1900-2001: Screening the Word, London and New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 27-43.


12 Sabine Hake notes that Weimar films of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Metropolis (1927) and Der Tunnel (The Tunnel, 1933), also used spatial hierarchies to convey power relations, with workers located underground and patriarchal figures occupying ‘the upper world of privilege’. Sabine Hake, ‘Cinema, Set Design and the Domestication of Modernism’ in her Popular Cinema of the Third Reich, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001, pp. 46-57 (p. 56).
Pavel’s room (Fig. 4.2). Bauer also uses staircases to imply class status in the scenes which take place in the social club, positioning it, like Pavel's room, at the top of a staircase. Indeed, Bauer incorporates staircases into his set designs to indicate a change in a character's social ranking in a number of his films. As Morley notes, in *Ditaia bol’shogo goroda* (Child of the Big City, 1914) as Mary accompanies the aristocrat Viktor to a fashionable nightclub, a low-angle shot shows her ascending a huge art nouveau staircase, suggesting her rising social status.13 Similarly, in *Deti veka* (Children of the Age, 1915), when Mariia moves into the house of the wealthy Lebedev, she immediately climbs a staircase to his room. The same tactic is repeated in *Grezy* (Daydreams), which was released only one week after *Deti veka*, on 10 October 1915: the ballerina Tina is shown ascending the stairs to visit the reclusive aristocrat Sergei Nedelin in his study. In *Nemye svideteli*, while Nastia is depicted in Pavel's room, we do not at first see her ascending the staircase to reach it. It is only in a sequence at the end of the film, once Pavel and Ellen are engaged, that Nastia is shown crying against the staircase’s marble pilasters. Wearing her work uniform, she climbs the stairs alone, suggesting her inability to improve her social position and to be perceived by Pavel as anything other than a maid.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig. 4.1. Nemye svideteli, Kostyritsyn house vestibule.**

On several occasions in the film, Pavel retreats to the comfort of his study, where he pines for Ellen. As Alyssa DeBlasio notes, Bauer conveys the study’s seclusion by combining a wide-angle shot and a tracking shot, which follows Pavel from a distance as he wanders alone through the large, uninhabited expanse of the room. The framing and the mobile camerawork enable Bauer to make a connection between the secluded nature of the study and Pavel’s psychological state, deep in thought about the object of his desire. As the camera weaves through the multiple layers of furniture and decorative objects, it also draws the viewer’s attention to the study’s set design, which further conveys Pavel’s self-absorbed nature and his amorous yearnings.

The room’s elaborate art nouveau décor gives the impression of a space of pleasure and entertainment. Indeed, in the scenes in which the viewer is introduced to the study, when Nastia helps put a lovesick Pavel to rest, the foreground of the frame is dominated by a divan, which alludes to Pavel’s later seduction of Nastia (Fig. 4.3). The divan also works to divide the frame in two. One side of the room is decorated with an ornate, art nouveau lamp, a bouquet of flowers and a classical white marble statuette of a female nude, which combine to indicate Pavel’s romantic temperament. By contrast, on the other side of Pavel’s room, a writing desk is placed in a marginalised position, with only a small corner of it visible at the edge of the frame. While throughout the film Pavel rarely uses his desk, he repeatedly reaches over to a side table covered with bottles of alcohol and pours himself another drink. In the sequences set in Ellen’s room,

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her desk is also marginalised, placed in an alcove at the very back of the frame, while the foreground is dominated by large armchairs and a full-length mirror, in front of which she spends her time adjusting her appearance, recalling the way in which in Kreitserova sonata the wife contemplates herself in a mirror (Fig. 4.4). Similarly, in a number of his studies in other films, Bauer positions writing desks in a marginalised position. In Posle smerti (After Death, 1915), for example, Andrei sits with his back turned to the desk, which is only just visible in the corner of the frame, and instead interests himself in the artefacts relating to his dead mother that rest on the mantlepiece and her portrait that hangs above it. The marginalisation of desks in Bauer’s films conveys the fantasist nature of characters, who are preoccupied with their individual desires at the expense of their wider social responsibilities.

Fig. 4.3. Nemye svideteli, Pavel’s room.

Fig. 4.4. Nemye svideteli, Ellen’s room.
In the very few sequences in *Nemye svïdeteli* in which characters are shown at their writing desks, they busy themselves not with work but with arranging romantic affairs. Baron von Rehren composes a letter to Ellen’s father breaking off his engagement to his daughter at a desk under the light of a lamp decorated with cupid figurines. In another sequence, a split screen shows Ellen and Pavel sitting at their respective desks while on the telephone to one another, arranging a rendez-vous. In a number of Bauer’s films, characters pursue romantic affairs from their writing desks. In *Ditia bol’šogo goroda*, Viktor sits at his desk leafing through a photograph album of potential female suitors. Love affairs and marriage proposals are thus conducted as if business transactions.

As with many of the desks in Bauer’s films, Viktor’s desk is decorated with a combination of work appliances, including a telephone, writing equipment and weighty books, and personal artefacts, such as classical statuettes of female nudes. As in Pozdnychev’s study in *Kreitserova sonata*, discussed in Chapter Three, the statuettes convey Viktor’s idealisation and objectification of women. The combination of the statuettes and professional equipment also conveys what Louise McReynolds identifies as a tension between social demands and sexual desire that exists in many of Bauer’s film in which romantic liaisons take place. She argues that Bauer shows that men, just as much as women, were oppressed by late-Imperial Russia’s patriarchal order, which required them to establish a position of authority in the professional and the social spheres of their life.

Bauer continued to associate marriage proposals with business affairs in one of the last films that he worked on as a director before his death, *Nabat*. Adapted by Bauer from Elizabeth Verner’s novel *On the Open Road* (*Vol’noi dorogi*, date unknown) to contemporary Russia, the film follows the entanglement of the upper class in romantic intrigues as workers’ unrest grows in Saint Petersburg at the beginning of 1917. A significant proportion of the film’s action takes place in the private studies of the various aristocratic characters. The studies were designed by the young Lev Kuleshov and are the earliest surviving examples of his work as a *kino-khudozhnik*. In comparison to the ‘surovyi realizm’ [severe realism] of the set design in *Nemye svïdeteli*, the sets in *Nabat* are constructed around monumental and highly stylised architectural forms.

Contemporary critics remarked on the film’s aesthetics, with V. Akhramovich writing in *Teatral’naiá gazeta* that Bauer had mobilised ‘свои художественные и материальные силы для создания монументальной картины’ [his artistic and material strength to create a monumental painting].

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16 Ibid., p. 147.
17 A number of contemporary critics commented on the realist aesthetics of *Nemye svïdeteli*. See Anon., *Vestnik kinematograf* [1914] in Ivanova et al., *Velikii kinemo*, p. 211.
monumental picture]. The film-maker Ivan Perestiani noted that Bauer endeavoured to create the entire film using only studio sets. More recently, David Bordwell has argued that Bauer, Kuleshov and the camera operator Boris Zavelev introduced a number of design innovations, including using black backgrounds and reverse camera shots to highlight the décor.

The various studies featured in *Nabat* are constructed according to distinct decorative styles, which reflect their occupants’ temperament and attitudes towards romance. As in Pavel’s room in *Nemye svideteli*, in the study of the lazy romantic Viktor, the desk is barely visible, marginalised in a corner, while a divan occupies the central foreground. In several scenes, Viktor slumps over the side of his desk as he flirts with Zheleznov’s daughter, Zoia. Similarly, in the room of Magda Orlovskaia, who spends her time planning her engagement to the wealthy Zheleznov, clothes are strewn across the writing desk, which is pushed to a corner at the back of the room. Above the desk hangs a rococo-style painting of a girl on a swing, which closely resembles the pictures of the eighteenth-century painters Jean-Antoine Watteau and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, who frequently employed the motif in their works to convey ideas about lust and unchaste desires.

In comparison to the silk and velvet drapes, the gilded furnishings and the rococo arabesques in Magda’s room, Zheleznov’s office is decorated in a stark gothic style, with dark turreted forms (Fig. 4.5). The room is almost bare except for a couple of high-backed chairs and a large desk, which dominates the foreground. Going against the convention in Bauer’s films, Zheleznov does use his office for work, conducting business meetings about his factory’s fate as the workers’ movement grows in strength. Instead, he retreats to his private library when contemplating his daughter’s disadvantageous marriage to Viktor (Fig. 4.6). In contrast to the study’s cavernous ceilings and monumental forms, the library is constructed around a more intimate, human scale. Drapery works to soften its gothic décor and a plump, leather armchair takes the place of the study’s high-backed gothic chairs.

18 V. Akhramovich, *Teatr’ naia gazeta* [1917], ibid., p. 390.
19 Ivan Perestiani, *75 let zhizn’ v iskusstve* [1962], ibid., p. 392.
Fig. 4.5. Nabat, Zheleznov’s office.

Fig. 4.6. Nabat, Zheleznov’s private library.

*Nabat* is one of the first Russian fiction films to include images of industry and workers’ unrest, which became a frequent feature of fiction films made from the mid-1920s and into the 1930s.\(^2\)

In the scenes set in the factory, Bauer again uses spatial hierarchies to demonstrate class, positioning the work floor at the bottom of a series of staircases (Fig. 4.7). The factory scenes are also notable for the use of dramatic contrasts of light and shadow to create a sense of tension, which is heightened by billowing clouds of smoke. Factory machinery is barely noticeable amid the shadows and the smoke, contrasting with 1920s Soviet films set on the factory work floor in which machines feature prominently, such as in *Stachka* (Strike 1925), *Kruzheva* (Lace, 1928) and *Oblomok imperii* (Fragment of an Empire, 1929). In *Nabat*, the focus is on conveying an atmosphere of instability and unrest. It is notable that in comparison to the scenes exposing

\(^{2}\) Examples include *Stachka* (Strike, 1925), *Mat* (Mother, 1926), *Konets Sankt-Peterburga* (The End of Saint Petersburg, 1927) *Vstrechyi* (Counterplan, 1932), *Okraina* (Outskirts, 1933) and *Iunost’ Maksima* (The Youth of Maksim, 1934).
upper-class romantic intrigue which take place around interiors, the majority of the scenes showing workers plotting against industrialists are set outdoors against bleak landscapes. In one scene, workers conspire in secret amid a secluded quarry; its jagged rocks create a feeling of discord and tension. In another, they rally on a barren, snow-covered plain. The film thus presents an opposition between individual aspirations and social responsibility in terms of interior and exterior settings.25

Contemporary reviews of Nabat mainly focused on its social theme, with one critic even referring to it as a ‘socialist drama’.24 Several reviews criticised the fact that the theme of the workers’ movement was not developed further and that it seemed incompatible with a plot about romantic intrigues.25 Indeed, Bauer’s combination of aristocratic romances and a workers’ uprising in one scenario does initially seem disjointed. His representation of the Russian aristocracy as absorbed with their own love affairs while social unrest brews can, however, be read as a condemnation of the heedlessness of the upper-class to wider social issues. Images of the workers’ unrest also serve to reflect the unstable nature of romantic affairs that are negotiated according to social rank and wealth. It is significant that in the film the one romance which does end in a happy marriage is that between Zheleznov’s daughter and Viktor, which is founded on true affection. Thus, in Nabat Bauer provides a critique not only of the aristocracy’s negligence of workers’ reforms, but also of the social conventions which position marriage as a commercial affair.

23 As we recall from Chapter Two, in the 1920s Kuleshov continued to use interior and exterior settings to explore the contradiction between human urges and desires and social responsibility, for example in Po zakonu (By the Law, 1926). See Chapter Two, pp. 91-98.
25 See ibid. and Anon., Artist i zritel’ [1917], ibid., p. 391.
II. Fantasy and the Everyday Reality of Labour: *Aelita* (1924) and *Shinel’* (1926)

The private study continued to be associated with the personal desires and fantasies of male protagonists in Soviet fictions films of the 1920s, most notably in *Aelita* (1924) and *Shinel’* (The Overcoat, 1926). In contrast to Bauer’s films, however, in *Aelita* and *Shinel’* the male protagonists are not wealthy aristocrats absorbed in romantic musings; rather, they are defined by their professions – in *Aelita* Los’ is an engineer and in *Shinel’* Akakii is a copyist – and are shown to delight in personal fantasies so as to transcend the mundane nature of their everyday working lives. In both films, the *kino-khudozhniki* exploited fantastical elements in their set designs to create imaginary realms that contrasted sharply with everyday reality.

The Mezhrabprom-rus’ studio’s *Aelita* was one of the first Soviet films to draw on the science-fiction genre, which became popular in the 1920s for capturing the scientific and technological utopianism of the era and providing a form of escapist entertainment that allowed audiences to distract themselves from the hardships of everyday life.26 The film was based on Aleksei Tolstoi’s 1923 novel of the same title about a Soviet engineer, who travels to Mars and incites revolution against the planet’s ruling despots. The scenarists Fedor Otsep and Aleksei Faiko retained little of Tolstoi’s original text, however, except for the title and the protagonists.27 The film follows the engineer Los’, whose fascination with space travel encourages him to daydream about life on Mars. For Los’, the boundary between his fantasy world and the real world becomes increasingly blurred, with his imagination convincing him that his wife Natasha is pursuing an affair with the speculator Viktor Erlikh, who lodges in the same apartment.

The futuristic Mars sequences offered the film-makers the opportunity to use exuberant sets and to create a film that in terms of its striking aesthetics could rival those on the international market such as the German *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, 1920). During the early to mid-1920s, Mezhrabprom-rus’ was concerned with making films of ‘an international quality’ that would generate a profit and increase the reputation of Soviet films abroad.28 In addition to hiring in leading actors from the theatre, including Iuliia Solntseva, Nikolai Batalov and Vera Orlova, the film’s director Iakov Protazanov sought out high-calibre artists and theatre designers to work on the film’s costumes, props and sets. The Cubo-Futurist artist Aleksandra Ekster, who had experience designing scenery for Aleksandr Tairov’s

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Kamernyi teatr (Chamber Theatre), was commissioned to design the Mars people’s futuristic costumes, which were then manufactured by Nadezhda Lamanova’s eminent costume studio.29 Sergei Kozlovskii, who was working as the head kino-khudozhnik at Mezhrabpom-rus’ at the time, recalls in his memoirs how Protazanov invited various artists to submit proposals for the Mars sets.30 Initially, the grandiose models of Mars produced by the theatre designer Isaak Rabinovich impressed Protazanov and he selected them for inclusion in the film.31 The German branch of Mezhrabpom-rus’, Prometheus Film, offered to provide resources and studio space in Berlin to facilitate the construction of Rabinovich’s ambitious sets in return for exclusive rights to the film’s international distribution.32 Mezhrabpom-rus’ declined, however, preferring instead to retain independent control over the film’s export.33 As a result, Rabinovich’s involvement on the film was limited to the creation of abstract sculptures in the Mars sequence. The task of creating the Mars sets fell instead to Kozlovskii and Viktor Simov, who were already working on the scenery for the Soviet everyday life sequences.34 Once again, Kozlovskii and Simov worked alongside the camera operator Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, with whom, as we recall from Chapters One and Two, they had formed a productive working partnership in 1919 when making the Rus’ studio’s Dev’i gory (The Virgin Hills) and Polikushka.35

Although Kozlovskii and Simov scaled back Rabinovich’s original design for Mars considerably, critics nevertheless commented on the film’s grandiose and elaborate scenery.36 An article published in 1924 in Kino-nedelia was even dedicated to the workforce required to make the sets, noting that the Mezhrabpom-rus’ studio had enlisted fifty veteran craftsmen, who had worked in cinema during the pre-revolutionary years for the Pathé and Ermol’ev studios.37 The majority of critics were disparaging about the film’s extravagant scenery.38 An anonymous reviewer writing in Pravda even compared it to ‘Aida at the Bol’shoi theatre’ in terms of its opulence.39 Rather than rejecting the film’s stylised aesthetics outright, several critics argued that the fantastical design of the Mars sets was meant to convey the fact that it represented a figment of Los’

29 ‘Aelita’, Kino-nedelia, 35, 1924, pp. 12-13 (p. 12). For clarity, I cite the article and journal title in future references to this source.
30 Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Smysl moei zhizni’ [date unknown], Iz istorii kino, 7, Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1968, pp. 63-90 (pp. 78-79).
31 ‘Aelita’, Kino-nedelia, p. 12. Rabinovich was known for his abstract modernist theatre sets. The Aelita models were displayed in an exhibition of Rabinovich’s work in Moscow in 1924.
32 Ibid.
35 See Chapter One of this thesis, p. 50. The German camera operator Emil Schünemann was also hired to assist Zheliabuzhskii.
36 Moisei Aleinikov notes that the original sets had to be reduced in scale and cost. Mosei Aleinikov, Isakov Protazanov: Shornik statei i materialov, Moscow: Goskinokzdat, 1948, p. 40.
38 For example, see the various reviews in ‘Chto govoriat i chto pishut ob “Aelite”’, Kino-nedelia, 38, 1924, pp. 12-13.
imagination. Writing in 1924 in *Novyi zritel*, an anonymous reviewer claimed that the filmmakers had depicted the whole trip to Mars as part of Los’s imagination in order to correct the weak ideological content of the scenario. The foreign critic P. Rotha later observed that the set was designed in a fantastic style in order to express an imaginary idea of the planet Mars and not, as in *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, to emphasise the characters’ distorted minds. More recently, Ian Christie has drawn on Mikhail Bakhtin’s writings on Menippean satire to argue that the abstract Mars scenes are an example of an extraordinary situation, which a person’s imagination dreams up to allow the mind to play out internally motivated desires.

Indeed, Kozlovskii and Simov employ a number of strategies in their futuristic Mars sets which indicate that the scenes that take place here depict not only a parallel extra-terrestrial world, but also a fantastical realm that exists in Los’s imagination. The Mars scenes are constructed around an entirely different spatial paradigm from those that represent contemporary life. The sets are comprised of an assortment of abstract geometric and architectural forms, which have little correlation to any built landmarks found in the real world (Fig. 4.8). Intertwining passages, stairways and landings seem to lead nowhere, but double back on themselves, producing an irrational spatial logic. Framed against a dark background, these structures appear to exist in an abstract, artificial space. Unnaturally stark contrasts between dark and light also serve to heighten the artificial nature of the space. Modern industrial materials, such as aluminium, Perspex and glass, abound, and assemble themselves unaided into new technological devices. Mars thus appears as a technologically advanced society that corresponds to Los’s utopian engineering ambitions.

Fig. 4.8. *Aelita*, Mars sets.

40 Anon., ‘*Aelita*, *Novyi zritel*’, 39, 1924, p. 5.
41 Cited in Christie, ‘*Down to Earth*’, p. 85.
42 Ibid., pp. 100-01.
Los’s fantasies of a technologically advanced Mars are juxtaposed with real feats of human engineering in the scenes of everyday urban life, many of which used documentary footage shot in the early to mid-1920s in New York and Moscow. It is notable that many of the contemporary life scenes depict modern constructions, including electric billboards, tramways, cast-iron bridges and the machinery of battleships. In one striking scene, Los´ jots down his engineering fantasies in a notebook as he sits framed against a background of a mass-scale construction site (Fig. 4.9). Mechanical cranes excavate large mounds of earth and rubble, and workers carrying building materials scurry along a vast network of scaffolding. The extreme physical labour evident in the construction site contrasts starkly with Los’s pursuit of engineering as a conceptual practice.

![Aelita, Los’ and the Moscow construction site.](image)

The predominantly conceptual nature of Los’s engineering work is also conveyed through the sets of his study, the space in which he most often indulges in his interplanetary fantasies. Secluded from the rest of the apartment behind a door and up a narrow staircase, his study is a distinctly private realm. Its secluded nature is also conveyed through the low-ceilings, dim lighting and single, sunken window, on which Los’ draws or out of which he gazes (Fig. 4.10). The shadows created by the window’s frame recall the abstract geometric configurations of Aelita’s court. Similarly, the contrasting linear and geometric forms of Los’s chemistry set and model rocket resemble in miniature scale the Mars sets.

The presence of a number of models in the study is revealing about Los’s attitude towards his practice. As Robert Bird argues, models and model-making had deep roots in Marxist thought and held particular significance in early-Soviet culture.\(^{44}\) In *Das Kapital* (Capital, 1867), Karl Marx argued that modelling, in so far as it is associated with imagination, is a distinctive feature of human labour that separates humankind from other species.\(^{45}\) A number of early-Soviet theorists also viewed modelling as characteristic of human, materialist societies. In a 1923 issue of the journal *Levy front iskusstva* (LEF, Left Front of Arts), the theorist Nikolai Chuzak argued that model-making was an essential aspect of materialist societies that demonstrated their strivings to achieve scientific and technological progress.\(^{46}\) In addition to their ideological appeal, the interest in models reflected the limited resources available in the 1920s. The founding curriculum of Vysshie khudozhestvenno-teknicheskie masterskie (VKhUTEMAS, Higher Artistic and Technical Studios) developed in the early 1920s, emphasised the importance of modelling, with several courses encouraging students to make three-dimensional models of abstract concepts, such as space, time and motion.\(^{47}\) During the early 1920s, models became a prominent feature of exhibitions and were incorporated in revolutionary festivals. Famously in

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\(^{46}\) Nikolai Chuzhak, ‘Pod znakom zhiznestroeniia’, *LeF*, 1, 1923, p. 35.

1921, Vladimir Tatlin’s *Pamiatnik III Internatsionala* (Monument to the Third International) was paraded through the streets of Petrograd as a utopian symbol of the hope of leaping into a future, more advanced socialist society. By the mid-1920s, however, a number of critics and theorists had begun to criticise the prominence of models in contemporary culture, claiming that they reflected artists’ preoccupation with conceptual and formal issues at expense of engaging in real, practical work in tackling the problems of Soviet everyday life.

Made in 1924, but set in 1921-23, *Aelita* also used models to comment on the utopian fantasising that some critics felt dominated the early-Soviet years at the expense of real, practical work. In one scene, Los’ and his colleague Spiridonov carefully appraise a schematic blueprint, which is surrounded by a number of mechanical tools that remain unused (Fig. 4.11). Throughout the film, Los’ rarely engages in physical labour. By contrast, Natasha is involved in a number of manual tasks. In one scene, she is depicted, with her sleeves rolled up, practising various household chores, while in others she is involved in the practical organisation of social work, giving out food to the homeless, caring for children at an orphanage and registering peasants at the Evacuation Centre. The gendered division of work is notable throughout the film. In a scene which shows Gusev and his fiancée Masha in their apartment in a requisitioned former private mansion, Gusev slouches in a chair with his feet up, while Masha is pictured working at her sewing machine. Furnished with high-backed gothic chairs and a classical white marble statuette, the interior closely resembles the studies in Bauer’s films. The same statuette also appears in Los’’s apartment, where it is placed surreptitiously on top of a dresser that is pushed to the back of the bedroom. On one level, the inclusion of the statuette in such a marginalised position represents the replacement of a traditional form of modelling with a new Soviet one. On another level, however, the statuette’s presence serves to comment on Los’’s nature, who, much like Bauer’s male protagonists, is absorbed in his personal fantasies. The triumph of a new society founded on practical work over old orders based around intellectual speculation is depicted in one of the final sequences in which a bare-chested worker hammers miniature models of classical architecture into a sickle. Moreover, at the end of the film, Los’ abandons his extra-terrestrial fantasies, removing his plans to build a rocket from their hiding place in the living room’s mantlepiece and throwing them onto the fire, before announcing to Natasha ‘Довольно мечтать, всех нас ждет другая, настоящая работа!’ [Enough dreaming! Different work – real work – awaits us all!].

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49 As we recall from the symbolic significance of sewing in Chapter Three, Masha’s association with this activity casts her as a productive member of society. See Chapter Three, pp. 121-22 and p. 161.
The conflict between a person’s everyday working life and their fantasy dreamworld is also a key theme of the Leningradkino studio’s 1926 adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s short story *Shinel’* (The Overcoat, 1842), which was made by members of the Fabrika Ekstsentricheskogo Aktera (FEKS, Factory of the Eccentric Actor) collective, including the directors Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, the camera operators Evgenii Mikhailov and Andrei Moskvin, and the kino-khudozhnik Evgenii Enei. Gogol’s story tells the tale of Akakii Akakievich Bashmachkin, who lives a demeaning existence as a copyist until he allows himself to dream of acquiring a new overcoat. As a number of scholars have noted, Iurii Tynianov’s film scenario deviated significantly from the original narrative and incorporated episodes from a number of Gogol’s texts, as reflected in the film’s full title *Shinel’, kino-p’esa v manere Gogolia* (The Overcoat, a Film-Play in the Manner of Gogol’). Tynianov’s creative reworking of Gogol’s writings recalls the way in which, as Rachel Morley notes, Bauer drew on and adapted nineteenth-century Russian literary sources in his films. Most notably, Tynianov made use of Gogol’s short story *Nevskii prospekt* (Nevskii Prospect, 1831-1834), which tells of a romantic young artist who becomes obsessed with a woman whom he once glimpsed on Saint Petersburg’s streets. Indeed, the film’s opening scenes are directly based on an episode in *Nevskii prospekt* in which the artist pursues the woman of his dreams, only to discover that she is a prostitute. Thus, from the outset, the film foregrounds both the theme of fantasy and Akakii’s nature as a dreamer over his profession as a copyist. The film-makers employed a number of innovative techniques to represent the

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51 Rachel Morley, “‘Crime without punishment’”.

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Fig. 4.11. *Aelita*, Los’ and Spiridonov study a blueprint.
phantasmagorical nature of Akakii’s visions. In particular, Enei’s surreal sets of Saint Petersburg, with their distortions of scale and stylised forms, play a crucial role in establishing a dream-like atmosphere and in conveying Akakii’s anxieties and desires.52

The conflict between Akakii’s wretched existence as a copyist and his fantastic desires is played out through the different sets of the two spaces directly associated with his working life: the bureaucrats’ office and his private study. The office scenes emphasise the inconsequence of both Akakii himself and his bureaucratic work. Establishing shots of the office show rats gnawing neglected paperwork and a nondescript room with employees, heads bent and faces hidden, arranged around identical rows of desks (Fig. 4.12). Seated behind a desk that is separated from his colleagues and marginalised to one side of the room, Akakii is hardly visible. His face is obscured by a high stack of papers, to which his colleagues continually add. As he leaves the office at the end of the day, he appears as a minuscule silhouette, barely identifiable, standing at the end of a vast corridor. Throughout the film, Enei exploits exaggerations in scale in his sets to emphasise Akakii’s impotence and insignificance. In the sequences set in the Saint Petersburg streets, for example, Akakii is dwarfed by towering fences, buildings and statues.

Fig. 4.12. Shinel’, the bureaucrats’ office.

52 This notably departs from Bauer’s representation of the city in Ditja bol’shogo goroda, which focuses on the allure of materialism that was also a theme of Gogol’s Nevskiĭ prospekt. For analysis of Bauer’s representation of the city in relation to literary sources, see ibid., pp. 29-30.
In contrast to the banality and anonymity of his office existence, Akakii’s personality as an individual is expressed in the décor of his private room. It is here that his emotional and psychological states are also revealed to the viewer. The focus is on the pleasure he gains both from his work and his fantasies. Recalling Los’s study in *Aelita*, Akakii’s room, with its single, sunken window and claustrophobic dimensions, which are emphasised by the use of medium and close-up shots, is a private, intimate realm (Fig. 4.13). Despite its small dimensions, the study is not, however, a space of discomfort. A curtain and a small vase of flowers adorn the window and a high stack of pillows rests on the bed, conveying, as Emma Widdis notes, Akakii’s pleasure in simple comforts.\(^{53}\) In contrast to the bureaucrats’ office, in Akakii’s study his desk assumes a prominent position in the centre of the composition, reflecting Akakii’s perception of the importance of his work and its centrality to his life. In one sequence, he sits at his desk copying a document and strokes his face sensually with a quill. Directly behind his head, a surreal teapot of exaggerated proportions appears to hover in mid-air, resembling an apparition more than a tangible object. Dense clouds of steam emanate from its spout and engulf the room, signalling the transference into Akakii’s dream world.

![Fig. 4.13. Shinel', Akakii’s room.](image)

A significant part of Akakii’s dream takes place in the bureaucrats’ office. In Akakii’s fantasy, the rows of desks have been replaced with an absurd combination of people and objects, including circus performers, water fountains and a harp player (Fig. 4.14). These serve to communicate not only the fantastic nature of the sequence, but also the artifice of the bureaucratic system.

Soft-focus cinematography and various lens effects, achieved through methods such as applying lubricant to the edges of the lens, are used to blur objects and to heighten their surreal quality. Akakii’s dream world also has erotic overtones. At the centre of the room, lying on an enormous mattress is the woman who has occupied Akakii’s imagination from the opening scenes of the film. Although the office has become emphatically a place of pleasure, Akakii’s desk now occupies a prominent position in the foreground of the frame. This detail serves to remind the viewer of the pleasure that Akakii takes in his work, which acts as a stimulus to his dream. As the dream develops, it takes on a sinister dimension, however. The work instruments, which Akakii had previously fetishised in the comfort of his study, are turned against him. Akakii’s colleagues throw sword-like quills at his body, which is trapped under their sheer mass, vividly symbolising the central theme of Gogol’s story: the crushing of the ‘little man’ at the hands of bureaucracy.

A number of films of the mid- to late 1920s attacked the ludicrous pretensions and overbearing weight of Soviet bureaucracy through using hyperbole and exaggeration in their set design. In Staroe i novoе (The Old and the New, 1929), for example, in the scenes that take place in the agricultural ministry, objects are shot at extreme close-up and take on gigantic proportions: the giant spool of a typewriter appears to jut violently towards the viewer and a hefty book of legislation dominates the frame (Figs. 4.15 and 4.16). Similarly, in Don Diego i Palageia (Don Diego and Palageia, 1928), work desks and regulation books acquire enormous dimensions. It is notable that in both films the bureaucrats’ office is decorated with statue busts, figurines and paintings of individuals in positions of power. Just as Bauer used statuettes to convey the...

54 For discussion of the cinematography and different lens effects used in this sequence, see Cavendish, *The Men with the Movie Camera*, pp. 214-15.
extravagant lifestyles of his male protagonists, the inclusion of highbrow artworks alludes to the decadence and artifice of the bureaucratic system.

Fig. 4.15. Staroe i nowoe, the bureaucrats’ office.

Statues are also a recurring feature of Enei’s sets for Shinel’. As Akakii wanders the streets of Saint Petersburg, he encounters a number of statues (Fig. 4.16). Shot in close-up and from a low-angle, they tower over Akakii, conveying his impotence in the face of power structures. As Valentina Kuznetsova notes, the scene in which the Bronze Horseman statue of Saint Petersburg looms over Akakii has distinct visual parallels to Aleksandr Benua’s [Benois] 1905 illustrations of Aleksandr Pushkin’s poema Mednyi vsadnik (The Bronze Horseman, 1837), which depict the horseman, silhouetted by the night, rearing over an individual, doubtless the ‘bednyi’ [poor] Evgenii, another example of the ‘little man’ trope in nineteenth-century Russian literature. In addition to the Bronze Horseman, Enei portrays statues from a range of historical and cultural traditions, including an Egyptian sphinx and a classical emperor, in a generic pose of power. Thus, the statues serve to critique not only Imperial Russia, but also overarching power systems in general. In contrast to the model in Aelita, which symbolises the agency of individuals in creating a new future society, the statues in Shinel’ reveal their impotence against existing power structures.

55 A number of 1920s Soviet films incorporated statues to symbolise authoritarian power. As Mikhail Lamp’ol’skii notes, in Vasilii Kovringin’s designs for Sergei Eizenshtein’s Oktiabr’ (October, 1928) images showing the destruction of imperial monuments symbolise that of the pre-revolutionary social and political order. See Mikhail Lamp’ol’skii, ‘Razbityi pamyatnik’, Kinovedcheskie zapiski, 1, 1968, pp. 6-11.
III. Industrial Settings and Cinematic Expressivity: *Proekt inzhenera Prait* (1918) and *Stachka* (1925)

The clash between ordinary working-class citizens and authoritarian systems of control was a consistent theme in Soviet films of the mid- to late 1920s that were set around the industrial workplace and portrayed *rabochii byt* [workers’ life]. One of the ways in which film-makers effectively conveyed these social tensions was by juxtaposing the space of the factory work floor with that of the industrialists’ private office. In contrast to the studies analysed earlier in this chapter, the offices of factory managers were designed principally to convey notions of authoritarian control. The private office also continued to be associated with individual desires. Pleasure was not solely identified with the private office, however. Many films set against industrial backdrops portrayed pleasure as an essential aspect of workers’ experience.

One of the first Russian fiction films to make use of industrial settings was the Khanzhonkov studio’s *Proekt inzhenera Prait* (Engineer Prait’s Project, 1918), on which Lev Kuleshov worked as the director and the *kino-khudozhnik*, alongside the camera operator Mark Naletnyi. Kuleshov also co-wrote the film’s scenario with his brother Boris Kuleshov, who drew directly on his experience as an electrical engineer.\(^{57}\) The film tells the story of the American engineer Mark Prait, who develops a plan to turn peat into a cheap and readily available energy source to fuel a Soviet power plant. As Robert Bird notes, the theme of peat production as a means for advancing the electrical capacity of Russia featured in a number of artistic and literary works of the early-

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Soviet period. According to Bird, many of them glamorised peat production, representing ‘peat and its associated lifestyle as objects of social and individual desire’. Similarly, the scenario of Proekt inzhenera Praita dramatised peat production, turning it into a romantic thriller, which, as Kuleshov recalls in his memoirs, combined car chases, accidents, intrigue and ‘a simple love story with a happy ending’. The film’s visual aesthetics and set design equally served to glamorise peat production through focusing on the opulent lifestyle that industrialisation enabled.

Proekt inzhenera Praita was Kuleshov’s directorial debut, which he seized on as an opportunity to experiment with various cinematographic and editing techniques. As a number of scholars have noted, the film showcased several innovations, including rapid editing and the dynamic use of an iris. Additionally, Kuleshov experimented with the mise-en-scène and set design. His use of location filming at industrial sites and the attention he gave to factory machinery and technology were also novel. By combining different locations with particular infrastructure and people, he created what he described as a ‘new cinematic terrain’.

Despite these innovations, however, Kuleshov’s approach to set design, for the most part, continues to follow the distinct method that Bauer had developed and that he had trained in. His use of architectural forms to create a sense of deep perspectival space, for example, is closely derived from Bauer’s set design approach. In the scenes that take place on the platform of a railway station, a series of steel pillars recede far into the background to create a sense of never-ending space, recalling how Bauer used classical columns in films, including, most notably, Zhizn ‘za zhizn’ (Fig. 4.17). Kuleshov also continues to use dikoviniki for their narrative and symbolic significance. In the interiors of the oil magnate’s home, a statuette of a female nude, elevated on a pedestal, dominates the foreground of the frame, conveying the decadence and the dissolute values of aristocrat industrialists. In another scene in which the industrialist Gem attempts to court the sister of the wealthy oil magnate, a large vase of flowers occupies the foreground,

59 Ibid., p. 594. Bird argues that the representation of peat production had a political and economic objective. Cut off from the main supply of coal and oil in the post-revolutionary years, the Soviet government promoted peat as a resource for generating electricity and its production as a means for transforming the rural peasantry into a working class.
61 Ibid.
62 Cavendish, Soviet Mainstream Cinematography, p. 51.
63 Kuleshov, Fifty Years in Films, p. 209.
64 Ibid., pp. 208-09.
alluding to his romantic intentions. In addition to these typical Bauer objects, Kuleshov also uses mechanical devices as *dikovinki*. In one scene which takes place in Prait’s office, the keys to the peat processing plant act as *dikovinki*, serving to emphasise Prait’s technical expertise. Like Bauer had previously used floral and decorative textiles, Kuleshov exploits industrial material, such as the overlapping grid-work of electricity cables, to create visual patterning (Fig. 4.18). Close-up shots and the use of an iris serve to highlight industrial objects and to emphasise their cinematic potential. Thus, Kuleshov draws on many of the same techniques that Bauer had developed in his films, but adapts them to the new context of industry.

Fig. 4.17. *Proekt inzhenera Prait*a, train platform.

Fig. 4.18. *Proekt inzhenera Prait*a, industrial patterning.
Despite Kuleshov’s concern to harness the cinematic potential of industrial material, very few scenes in *Proekt inzhenera Praita* portray actual industrial production. Instead, the focus is on the result of peat production, represented through various images of electricity pylons. For the most part, they are placed discreetly in pastoral landscapes among forests of silver birches. With their dappled sunlight, these exterior scenes display clear pictorialist tendencies, reflecting the camera operator Naletnyi’s experience as a landscape photographer. Moreover, a number of scenes portray the countryside as a space of leisure, rather than as a potential site for industrialisation, including images of glamorous country estates, where residents play tennis, go hunting or drive modern cars aimlessly across pastoral landscapes. The film thus highlights the luxurious lifestyle and accumulation of wealth that peat production enables.

*Proekt inzhenera Praita* in many ways provided a prototype for early-Soviet production dramas set in the industrial workplace. Kuleshov’s exploitation of industrial material as an expressive cinematic element would be adapted and developed by a number of *kino-khudozhniki* working in the 1920s, including most notably Vasilii Rakahl’s in his sets for the Goskino studio’s *Stachka* (Strike, 1925). As the first feature film that Sergei Eizenshtein directed, *Stachka* is typically analysed as an example of his early montage theory. As Cavendish argues, however, it is also remarkable from an aesthetic viewpoint in terms of the cinematography and the mise-en-scène. The film also displays a number of innovations in its set design and use of industrial settings. Indeed, contemporary critics and film-makers celebrated *Stachka* as an example of a new Soviet approach to set design that was untainted by foreign and pre-revolutionary influences. For the film-maker Sergei Iutkevich, Rakhal’s sets inaugurated a new form of ‘kino-konstruktivistizm’ to replace the ‘stilizovannuiu mishuru’ [stylised tinsel] of *Aelita* and the ‘kartonnyi ekspressionizm’ [cardboard expressionism] of the Weimar film *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*. In his 1925 article ‘Rol’ khudozhnika v kino-proizvodstve’ (The Role of the Artist in Film Production), the critic Bl. F similarly praised Rakahl’s use of real objects and structures for providing a new design approach that contrasted with the ‘absurdnost’ khudozhestvenno-dekorativnoi storony [absurdity of the artistic-decorative aspect] of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* and the ‘esteticheskii konstruktivism’ [aesthetic Constructivism] of *Aelita*. He also argued that Rakhal’s stark sets departed from the decadent use of objects that characterised the pre-revolutionary films of the Ermol’ev and the Khanzhonkov studios.

70 Ibid.
Although critics praised *Stachka* for providing a new, and specifically Soviet, approach to design, a blend of pre-revolutionary and early-Soviet influences deriving from various artistic fields informs its set aesthetics. As we recall from Chapter Three, Rakhal’s had begun his career as a *kino-khudozhnik* in 1915 working for the Khanzhonkov studio under Bauer and alongside Kuleshov. This early cinema experience is discernible in his treatment of cinematic space. Drawing on the lessons he learnt from Bauer, Rakhal’s employs architectural structures such as glass-panelled doorways, columns and monumental staircases to frame the action. In several scenes, backlighting renders these structures as silhouettes and creates the impression of a frame within a frame, which serves as a self-referential device that draws the viewer’s attention to the act of looking at a constructed image. In one notable scene, workers’ bodies and mechanical apparatus appear silhouetted against the factory’s glass wall, which fills the entire frame, recalling Vladimir Balliuzezk’s use of glass windows in *Gornichnnaia Dzhenii* (The Maid servant Jenny, 1918), as discussed in Chapter Three (Fig. 4.19). In comparison to the scene in *Gornichnnaia Dzhenii*, the glass wall in *Stachka* has a stark grid structure and human activity is compartmentalised into discreet zones, alluding to the regulation of working life under the oppressive bourgeois industrialists.

![Fig. 4.19. Stachka, factory wall.](image)

Rakhal’s also drew on Bauer’s approach of employing architectural features and multiple planes of action to create an impression of deep perspectival space on screen. In a number of scenes, diminishing arcades, city walls or metal railings lead the eye towards the back of the frame. In contrast to Bauer, however, Rakhal’s also employs strategies that confuse the sense of deep perspectival space. In one scene in the factory corridor, for example, a series of open doors
disrupts the impression of receding depth provided by a long shot of a corridor (Fig. 4.20). Later in the film, paper is strewn across the corridor floor, functioning in a similar way to the doors by attracting the viewer’s attention and distorting the sense of perspective (Fig. 4.21). As Widdis observes, in the 1920s a number of Soviet film-makers played with models of spatial depth, resonating with a widespread artistic interest of the 1910s and 1920s in investigating space as a pictorial construct. For example, from 1919, El’ Lisitskii began to create axonometric compositions of two- and three-dimensional architectonic forms, which he referred to as Prouns, an acronym for Proekt utverzhdenia novogo (Project of the Affirmation of the New). As in Stachka, the ambiguous sense of perspective in Lisitskii’s Prouns works to disorientate the viewer and to defamiliarise conventional ways of looking.

Fig. 4.20. Stachka, corridor doors.

Fig. 4.21. Stachka, corridor and paper.

71 Widdis, Socialist Senses, pp. 63-70. For example, many of the works exhibited by Constructivist artists at the 1921 5x5=25 exhibition in Moscow explored pictorial understandings of space, line and form. See Gough, The Artist as Producer, pp. 61-101.

A number of set techniques in *Stachka* also have notable visual parallels in those found in Soviet performance design. The incorporation of industrial scaffolding distinctly recalls Liubov Popova’s open-lathe constructions for Vsevolod Meierkhol’d’s 1922 production of *Velikodushnyi rogonosets* (*The Magnificent Cuckold*) (Fig. 4.22). Popova developed these structures in order to facilitate more diverse movements from actors. In *Stachka*, industrial scaffolding similarly works to fragment human bodies and objects and to enhance movement across the frame. In a number of scenes, workers are shown descending from industrial structures, their bodies intertwining with the metal framework. As in Bauer’s films, spatial hierarchies convey differences in social class. Here, however, it is the workers who are repeatedly portrayed occupying high points, while spaces belonging to the wealthy industrialists are positioned at the bottom of staircases, suggesting a reversal of power relations.

Fig. 4. 22. *Stachka*, industrial scaffolding.

While Rakhal’s’ sets draw on a number of pre-revolutionary and theatrical techniques, they are novel in terms of the ways in which industrial settings are used to show *rabochii byt* as photogenic and to convey a socialist ideological message about labour. Building on Kuleshov’s work in *Proekt inzhenera Praita*, Rakhal’s exploited industrial infrastructure to create striking visual patterns.

73 In the early 1920s, Eizenshtein studied under Meierkhol’d at the Gosudarstvenne vysshie rezhisserskie masterskie (GVYRM, State Advanced Workshops for Directors) and was named the chief set designer of the Proletkul’t theatre in 1921. For discussion of Eizenshtein’s practice as a theatre set designer, see Robert Leach, ‘Eisenstein’s theatre work’ in Ian Christie and Richard Taylor (eds), *Eisenstein Rediscovered*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 105-19.

Perforated steel grilles and the metal struts of electricity pylons dissect the frame into geometric configurations. In one scene, a curtain of thick ropes fills the frame, transforming it into an abstract linear canvas. In another, a mound of enormous steel wheels creates an abstract circular composition (Fig. 4.23). Indeed, Kuleshov remarked on the striking pictorial compositions of Stachka’s frames, and referred to Eizenshtein as a director of the individual frame.75 Throughout the film, geometric patterns are repeated across frames in varying scales and configurations to provide a sense of visual cohesion. The circular form of a mechanical wheel, for example, reappears in the image of a dynamo, a clock-face, wooden barrels and an arched-trapeze. It is notable that circular forms recur in those scenes associated with the striking factory workers, serving to convey ideas of motion and change. By contrast, strict linear formations, such as grids and vertical bars, dominate the scenes depicting the industrialists, expressing their authoritarian control and restriction of workers’ rights. In the industrialists’ offices and meeting rooms, for example, vertical lines appear in the form of fluted columns and the stacks of books. Similarly, a diamond, grid pattern is repeated in the parquet floor, the fabric of the chairs, the embossed surface of glassware, the banisters of a staircase and a map.

Fig. 4.23. Stachka, industrial patterning.

Rakhals’ approach to set design in Stachka is also novel in terms of the ways in which he uses intangible elements such as movement and light reflections to create visual impact and to convey an atmosphere of workers’ unrest.76 In several scenes, industrial infrastructure, such as cooling towers and electricity pylons, are captured as reflections in glass or on the surface of water (Fig. 4.24). The way in which these reflections subtly distort industrial structures creates an

76 Kozlovskii also incorporated intangible elements into his sets for Konets Sankt-Peterburga to convey a sense of instability.
impression of instability and imminent change. Doorways, staircases and landings facilitate the flow of movement, giving rise to a sense of volatility. Whirling machinery and jets of water fragment bodies and objects into an array of splintered forms. As several scholars have noted, this approach recalls Natal’ia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov’s Rayonist paintings of the 1910s, in which bodies and objects are rendered as dynamic, intersecting rays of vivid colour.\footnote{Nesbet, \textit{Savage Junctures}, p. 25 and Cavendish, \textit{The Men with the Movie Camera}, p. 73.} In these works, Goncharova and Larionov attempted to capture the energy that emanates from living organisms.\footnote{For discussion of Goncharova and Larionov’s Rayonist works, see Tim Harte, \textit{Fast Forward: The Aesthetics and Ideology of Speed in Russian Avant-Garde Culture, 1910-1930}, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009, pp. 101-09.} Similarly, in \textit{Stachka} the emphasis on the power of machinery and of workers conveys the force of labour. Throughout the film, there is a distinct focus on labour as a collective workforce, rather than a form of industrial production to create a specific output. This perhaps reflects a response to the challenge that the film-makers faced in representing the pre-revolutionary factory from a post-revolutionary perspective. As Anne Nesbet notes, the film-makers could not depict labour conditions or industrial production in negative terms, as these had changed little since the 1917 Revolution.\footnote{Nesbet, \textit{Savage Junctures}, p. 41.} Through highlighting the force of labour, however, the film-makers could emphasise the power of workers to incite change without displaying the demeaning conditions of factory life. Eizenshtein and Rakhal’s’ focus on the photogenic quality of the industrial workplace served a similar goal of presenting labour conditions in a desirable light.

![Fig. 4.24. Stachka, glass reflections.](image)
Rakhal’s’ designs for the Sovkino studio’s *Vasha znakomaia* (Your Acquaintance, 1927), originally titled *Zhurnalistka* (The Female Journalist), employed many of the techniques that he had previously used in *Stachka* and demonstrated a similar interest in the cinematic potential of the material environment of the workplace. On this film, Rakhal’s worked alongside the director Lev Kuleshov, the camera operator Konstantin Kuznetsov, and the Constructivist artist Aleksandr Rodchenko, who assisted with designing the sets and the costumes and framing the scenes.\(^{80}\) As with *Stachka*, the sets designed for *Vasha znakomaia* generated considerable interest in the contemporary cinema press.\(^{81}\) Kuleshov and Rodchenko’s writings also attest to the importance that the film-makers themselves attached to the film as a formal experiment.\(^{82}\) In his *Iskusstvo kino* (The Art of Cinema, 1929), Kuleshov later claimed that *Vasha znakomaia* served primarily as an ‘[...] опыт создания фильмы на бытовом современном материале’ [an experiment in creating a film based on contemporary, everyday life material].\(^{83}\) He even described it as an ‘anti-film’, which rejected the conventional narrative format of fiction cinema: ‘In essence, it’s as if nothing happens in the film. The actors (principally Khokhlova) just live, and the camera carefully follows what happens with meticulous attention to detail’.\(^{84}\) According to Kuleshov, the film provided an opportunity to continue to explore many of the techniques that he had developed in *Po zakonu* (By the Law, 1926), including using a spartan approach to set design, based on maximum economy of objects and simplicity of expression.\(^{85}\)

Surviving production records demonstrate the film-makers’ concern to create an economical film, detailing that they spent just 3,763 rubles on props and studio sets.\(^{86}\) They also illustrate the attention that the film-makers paid to set details.\(^{87}\) As Widdis notes, the wealth of information documenting the sets is far greater than that which survives for other fiction films of the era.\(^{88}\) Lengthy expense receipts itemise the amount spent on each of the various props, while shooting plans reveal that the film-makers devoted a considerable amount of time to preparing and

\(^{80}\) Kuleshov notes that Rodchenko was involved in the framing of scenes. See ‘Vasha znakomaia: beseda s L. V. Kuleshovym’, *Sovetskoe kino*, 2, 1927, p. 6.

\(^{81}\) Emma Widdis also notes the attention given to *Vasha znakomaia* in the contemporary cinema press. See Emma Widdis, ‘*Faktura*: Depth and Surface in Early Soviet Set Design’, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 3, 2009, 1, pp. 5-32 (p. 24).


\(^{83}\) Lev Kuleshov, ‘Vasha znakomaia’ in his *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 2, pp. 397-98 (p. 397).

\(^{84}\) Cited in Widdis, ‘*Faktura*’, p. 24.

\(^{85}\) Widdis, ‘*Faktura*’, p. 24.

\(^{86}\) Production records for *Vasha znakomaia* are held at Gosfil’mofond Rossii. 1.2.1.86.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.

\(^{88}\) Ibid.
shooting certain sets, such as the newspaper editor’s study and the reporters’ office, which required nineteen and twenty days of work respectively.  

Although the film does not survive in its entirety, extant footage demonstrates the film-makers’ interest in experimenting with the formal properties of sets and their cinematic expressivity. This is evident in what Widdis describes as the film’s ‘play with the specificity of cinematic space’ (Fig 4.25). In her reading of the film, Widdis details the various strategies which the film-makers used in order to create both scenes that enhance the sense of spatial depth and those that draw the viewer’s attention to the surface of the screen. Many of these techniques have a clear precedent in the approach to set design that Rakhal’s adopted in Stachka, and highlight the importance of his involvement on Vasha znakomaya. As a striking example, in the scenes that take place in the journalists’ office, paper strewn across the floor shines brilliantly in the light, attracting the viewer’s attention and disrupting the impression of receding spatial depth, recalling the way in which Rakhal’s used sheets of white paper in the corridor scenes in Stachka. For Widdis, such scenes create ‘a different kind of sensory spectatorial engagement’ by drawing the viewers’ eye to the faktura of the material environment on screen.

Fig. 4.25. Vasha znakomaya, the journalists’ office.

89 Gosfil’mofond Rossii. 1.2.1.86.
90 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 216.
92 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 219.
It is precisely in this close attention to the material properties of objects and structures that *Vasha znakomaia* departs from Rakhal’s work on *Stachka*. As Widdis argues, ‘the faktura of sets, props and costume remains a consistent preoccupation’ in the film.\(^{93}\) Kuleshov himself admits that when he again came to concentrate on set décor in the late 1920s, following his earlier experiments with montage, his former concern for creating perspective was superseded by one for revealing and enhancing the material quality of objects and surfaces.\(^{94}\) In his writings on set design, Kuleshov argued that ‘the better the surface finish of the set, the better and more genuine the effect’.\(^{95}\) He explained how in *Vasha znakomaia* the film-makers experimented with a number of techniques to make the properties of various materials appear more pronounced: different waxes, paints and varnishes were applied to objects and structures to accentuate their textures and create a variety of smooth, regular and coarse surfaces.\(^{96}\) Several sequences in the film seem to have little, if any, narrative importance, but rather are designed to exploit the cinematic potential of various materials. Widdis describes one notable sequence in which, after Khokhlova has been fired, she takes a final tour of the newspaper reporters’ office, touching its different surfaces and objects – some metal scissors, a glass decanter, a scrunched-up paper note and discarded cigarette butts (Fig. 4.26).\(^{97}\) Here, the set becomes what Sarah Street terms a ‘performative arena’, as discussed in Chapter Three in relation to Bauer’s interiors in *Iurii Nagornyi* (1916);\(^{98}\) Khokhlova’s body is an essential feature of the mise-en-scène, drawing the viewer’s attention to particular elements of the décor in a way that exceeds the immediate demands of the narrative.

![Vasha znakomaia, office faktura.](image)

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93 Widdis, ‘*Faktura*’, p. 25.
94 Kuleshov, ‘*Iskusstvo kino*’, pp. 161-227 (p. 149).
95 Ibid., p. 151.
96 Ibid.
During the mid- to late 1920s, a number of artists and critics proclaimed an interest in the photographic potential of the material environment. In 1928, Rodchenko began taking a series of experimental photographs that focussed on the play of light on glass surfaces. In the same year, in an article titled ‘Veshch’ na ekrane’ (The Thing on the Screen), the critic N. Kaufman marked out Vasha znakomaiia, in addition to Abram Room’s Tre’tia Meshchanskaia (Bed and Sofa, 1927) and Leonid Trauberg’s Leningrad segodnia (Leningrad Today, 1927), for their attention to the material objects of everyday life. Drawing on the writings of the French Impressionist film-maker Louis Delluc, Kaufman argued that the film-maker’s task was to reveal aspects of the material world which normally go unnoticed by the human eye. Kaufman’s pronouncement echoes Viktor Shklovskii’s calls for film-makers to show rabochii byt as photogenic. In a 1927 article titled ‘Sherst’, steklo i kruzheva’ (Wool, Glass and Lace), Shklovskii praised films of contemporary workers’ life in which material was clearly expressed and ‘реальный быт показал реальную фотогеничность’ [real life displayed real photogenicity]. The interest in the photogenic quality of rabochii byt was associated with a belief, widely held among Soviet artists, that altering a person’s perception of the material world would lead to a new appreciation of and heightened engagement with their surrounding environment. Rodchenko explicitly addressed this idea in his article ‘Khudozhiik i material’naia sreda v igrovom fil’me’ (The Artist and the Material Environment in Fiction Cinema), which he wrote in the same year as he worked on Vasha znakomaiia, declaring that the kino-khudozhnik’s task is ‘[...] показать обычную вещь с новой точки зрения так, как ее ещё не показали’ [to show an ordinary thing from a new point of view, as it has not been shown before]. The photographs that he used to illustrate the article act as visual manifestos of this idea, portraying the glass walls and steel girders of the Sovkino studio from unusual vantage points. Thus, Widdis argues that in Vasha znakomaiia the formal strategies of set design were linked to an ideological agenda to produce a new relationship between Soviet subjects and their surrounding material environment.

Vasha znakomaiia was remarkable not only because of the formal properties of its sets, however. In a report written in 1926, Shklovskii praised the film-makers for depicting a sphere of work –

101 Ibid.
104 These photographs are similar to those that Rodchenko took from the mid-1920s of Soviet everyday life. See Margarita Tupitsyn (ed.), Aleksandr Rodchenko: The New Moscow: Photographs from the L. and G. Tatunz Collection, Munich: Schirmer Art Books, 2000.
105 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 216.
journalism and the press industry—that was rarely portrayed in Soviet fiction films. Moreover, as Nikolai Lukhmanov later noted, in the 1929 version of his article ‘Zhizn’ kak ona dolzhna byt’ (Life As It Ought To Be), Vasha znakomiaia was one of the few fiction films which provided a model of the Soviet workplace that was informed by principles of rationalisation. Lukhmanov’s article even juxtaposed a still of the newspaper reporters’ office with a photograph of a typists’ office at the Glavnoe ekonomicheskoe upravlenie (GEU VSNKh, Chief Economic Administration) to illustrate how the contemporary workplace could be rationalised further (Fig. 4.27). Critics also praised Rodchenko’s designs for the journalist’s private study, which, according to Aleksandr Lavrent’ev, included a bed that folded up into a cupboard, a work desk with a built-in radio, a photo-card index and a light table for viewing slides and negatives. As the head of the metal and the woodwork departments at VKhUTE MAS, Rodchenko promoted the creation of multi-functional furniture. Indeed, foldable beds and tables were among the most popular objects designed by his students. In the workers’ club interior that he constructed for the Soviet display at L’Exposition internationale des arts décoratifs et industriels modernes (The International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts), held in Paris in 1925, Rodchenko incorporated a number of multi-functional objects and open-lath structures, including folding screens for projecting films and for displaying agitational material.

106 Shklovskii, ‘Sherst’, steiko i kruzheva’, p. 2. Other Soviet fiction films that represented the press industry include Parizhskii sapo znik (The Parisian Cobbler, 1927) and Amerikanka (The American Woman, 1930). For discussion of these films see, Widdis, Socialist Senses, pp. 132-39 and pp. 142-44 respectively.


108 Ibid., pp. 32-33.


Rodchenko’s interest in ideas about rationalising the workplace extended beyond furniture designs, however. During the mid- to late 1920s, he also worked to popularise the principles of the scientific organisation of labour by collaborating with a number of publications: he designed the cover for the 1925 Russian edition of Frederick W. Taylor’s *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911); he co-edited the journal *Vremia* (Time) of the Nauchnaia organizatsiia truda (NOT, Scientific Organisation of Labour); and he contributed articles and designed covers for *Daesh’!* (Let’s Produce!, 1929). In many of his designs, Rodchenko used grid-like structures, similar to the open-lath partitions in *Vasha znakomaia*, that, with their regular and geometric form, symbolised the rationalisation of working life promoted by NOT. The open grid also appears in the partition he created for the bathing room in *Kukla s millionami* (A Doll with Millions, 1928), in which it served a utilitarian purpose to organise everyday routines.

In light of Rodchenko’s commitment to the goal of rationalising everyday life, Lavrent’ev has argued that the sets for *Vasha znakomaia* present ‘Rodchenko’s dream of a high-tech living space’.112 Widdis also interprets them as ‘a celebration of the revolutionary ideas of Soviet modernism, providing prototypical models of the “exemplary” (obraztsovyi) life that had not yet

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taken real form in Soviet Russia’. However, a close examination of the film’s design suggests that its message about Soviet everyday life is more ambiguous than these scholars propose. The surviving scenes of the newspaper reporters’ office depict it empty of workers. Disused worksheets and cigarette papers are strewn across the floor, while small bundles of refuse paper nestle in corners and around the base of tables and chairs (Fig. 4.28). Production records reveal that the film-makers spent a considerable amount of money on the waste paper, suggesting that they deemed its inclusion significant. As the critic V. Kolomarov noted, the office mess stood in stark contrast to Rodchenko’s modern, streamlined furniture. He argued that the film-makers continued to present everyday working life in all its typical chaos and disorder. More recently, Oksana Bulgakowa has argued that Khokhlova’s movements in this space are awkward, chaotic and clumsy: ‘Героиня не умеет двигаться в этом организованном, конструктивистском пространстве, и фильм построен на ее неумелом обращении с вещами [...]. Ее моторика нарушена, ее быт хаотичен, и она заражает этим хаосом других.’ [The heroine does not know how to move in this organised, Constructivist space, and the film is built on her unskillful handling of things [...]. Her mobility is impaired, her everyday life is chaotic and she infects others with this chaos]. It is also significant that in Khokhlova’s room, the multi-functional furniture is juxtaposed with bourgeois knick-knacks, in particular a glass statuette of an elephant. Rodchenko noted the efforts that the film-makers made to find such a ‘kharakternyiu vesch’ [characteristic thing], which would signify instantly to the viewer the ‘legkomyslennyi’ [frivolous] attitude of the heroine. While the scenes that feature this prop have not survived, a glass elephant statuette was similarly chosen to adorn the dressing table of Liuda, who indulges in superficial desires, in Tret’iá Mesochnskáia, on which in 1927 Rakhal’s also worked as the kino-khudozhnik alongside Sergei Iutkevich.

113 Widdis, Socialist Senses, p. 215.
114 Gosfil’mofond Rossi. 1.2.1.86. The film-makers spent fifty rubles on the waste paper, the same amount that they spent on Khokhlova’s scarf.
115 V. Kolomarov, ‘Veshch’ v kino’, Kino i kul’tura, 9-10, 1929, pp. 29-37 (p. 35).
116 Ibid. In the stills incorporated in Lukhmanov’s article ‘Zhizn’ kak ona dolzhna byt’’, it is evident that the litter on the floor has been omitted. Lukhmanov, ‘Zhizn’ kak ona dolzhna byt’’, pp. 32-33.
117 Oksana Bulgakova [Bulgakowa], ‘Novyi LEF i kinoveshch’’, Russian Literature, 103-105, 2019, pp. 61-94 (p. 66).
Other objects in *Vasha znakomaia* acquire special symbolic significance, most notably the striped scarf belonging to Khokhlova. In a production document, the *LEF* cinema critic Viktor Pertsov writes that the scarf held particular importance as an agent in the development of the relationship between Khokhlova and the editor, Petrovskii: the editor first recognises Khokhlova by her scarf, associating her with a new type of modern, Soviet woman; he purchases the scarf as a present for his wife in an attempt to revolutionise her in Khokhlova’s image; later, Khokhlova forgets her scarf in the office of the editor, who uses its return as a pretext to visit her. Pertsov even proposed that the film should be titled *Polosatyi sharf* [The Striped Scarf].

Throughout the film, the stripes of the scarf function as a recurring visual motif, appearing in the linear light patterns in the journalists’ office and, as a frame still published in *Sovetskii ekran* demonstrates, the carpet in the hallway to Khokhlova’s flat. However, as with Rodchenko’s streamlined multi-functional furniture, the film-makers use the scarf to make an ambiguous statement on Soviet everyday life. While the modern aesthetic of its monochrome stripes evokes ideas of the new Soviet woman and a rationalised lifestyle, its role in the film’s narrative is connected with Khokhlova’s negligence of her work and Petrovskii’s betrayal of his wife. In one scene, the scarf is also shown as an alluring consumer object, framed in the window display of a Moscow boutique next to other fashionable clothes. It is significant that the reflections of light on the glass window disrupt its strict monochrome stripes.

119 Viktor Pertsov, ‘Direktsii Moskovskoi ob´edinennoi fabrike sovkino’ [1927]. Gosfil’mofond Rossii. 1.2.1.86.
120 Ibid.
121 Widdis, ‘*Faktura*’, p. 25.
122 For discussion of Khokhlova’s modern costumes and aesthetic, see Djurdja Bartlett, ‘Stars on Screen and Red Carpet’ in Beumers (ed.), *A Companion to Russian Cinema*, pp. 337-63 (pp. 346-47).
With its combination of rationalised furniture, office mess and consumer items, how, then, are we to interpret *Vasha znakomaia*’s message about Soviet everyday existence? Kuleshov notes that during the production process Sovkino made the film-makers revise the scenario several times, resulting in a number of compromises. Additionally, Rodchenko bemoaned the inadequate resources available at Sovkino. Kuleshov’s statements about the film suggest, however, that its incongruous meanings were intentional. In promotional material, Kuleshov claimed that “*Vasha znakomaia*” не явится совершенным образом бытовой постановки’ [“*Vasha znakomaia*” will not be a perfect example of everyday settings]. Rather, it would present a ‘сатирия над meshanstvom’ [a satire on meshanstvo]. In this respect, Kuleshov’s statement that in *Vasha znakomaia* he continued to explore many of the same concerns that he had while making *Pozakonu* is also significant. As in *Pozakonu*, the film examines the conflict within individuals between their inner desires and social codes and responsibilities. The multiple and contradictory meanings present in the objects and the sets in *Vasha znakomaia* convey the struggle that individuals face as Soviet citizens living in a new Soviet reality, but continuing to experience distinctly un-Soviet amorous desires, idleness and weaknesses for the pleasures of consumerism.

The importance of certain objects as both symbols of desire and agents that govern the relationship between employers and their workers is also explored in the Leningrad Soiuzkino studio’s *Zlatye gory* (Golden Mountains, 1931), which was directed by Sergei Iutkevich, with sets designed by the *kino-khudozhnik* Nikolai Suvorov. The film’s scenario, written by Andrei Mikhailovskii and Vladimir Nedobervo, follows the oppressive treatment of factory workers at a metallurgical plant in Saint Petersburg in 1914. In an attempt to gain the loyalty of one worker, Petr, the factory manager presents him with the gift of a pocket watch. Captivated by the pocket watch and its lure of increased social status and responsibility, Petr remains ignorant of the exploitations of the factory management. After witnessing the unjust arrest of a colleague, however, he is converted to the revolutionary cause. Thus the film’s narrative focuses on the conflict that individuals experience between their personal aspirations and their social duty to support working class interests. This conflict is played out primarily through Petr’s relationship to the pocket watch, which acts as both a symbol of his individual desires and an index of his psychological evolution, just as the striped scarf does in *Vasha znakomaia*. In its concern to encourage the apolitical individual to develop understanding of and sympathy for the socialist cause, *Zlatye gory* presents a prototype of the Socialist Realist narrative in fiction cinema. It is striking that, as in *Vasha znakomaia*, the workplace is figured not as a space of physical labour and

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123 ‘Vasha znakomaia: beseda s L. V. Kuleshovym’, p. 6.
126 Ibid.
production, but instead as a site in which individuals are forced to negotiate the struggle between their desires and social responsibility. The film thus corresponds with what Widdis describes as the growing calls in the late 1920s and early 1930s for ‘a cinema “of socialist feelings (sotsialistichesikh chuvstv)”’ [emphasis in original], resulting in a shift in focus onto human psychology and emotions.128

Žlatye gory enacted a shift on a formal level, also. The film-makers drew on set traditions of the 1910s and 1920s, but adapted them to forge a new aesthetic style that corresponded with the Socialist Realist concern for individual psychology. This is evident if we compare Žlatye gory with Iutkevich’s previous film about an industrial workplace, Kruzheva (Lace, 1928), on which he worked as both the kino-khudozhnik and the director. As Widdis observes, in Kruzheva production sequences of mechanical lace manufacture form a significant part of the film’s visual impact.129 By contrast, in Žlatye gory machinery barely features; instead, much like in Bauer’s Nabat, the focus is on creating a sense of atmosphere that would enhance dramaturgical tension and convey the psychological states of the workers. Žlatye gory was made in the midst of the First Five-Year Plan (1928-1932). As in Stachka, the film-makers faced the problem of how to represent pre-revolutionary industrial conditions, which were still undergoing modernisation. By focussing on individual psychology, the film-makers could suggest that the problem of revolutionising Russia’s industrial production lay not in its resources or infrastructures, but in the mentality of its workers.

The film’s focus on human psychology and atmospheric effects is also partly a result of Suvorov’s artistic background and training. Reflecting on his practice, Suvorov recalls how as a young artist at the Saratov School of Fine Art he was impressed by the works of the German Expressionist artists Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz and Heinrich Zille.130 In Žlatye gory, Suvorov drew on the approach of such artists, focussing on how representational techniques, such as contrasts in light and distortions in scale, could convey characters’ psychological conditions. Hyperbolic structures dwarf workers, conveying their feelings of impotence. In one scene, Petr is forced to climb an elongated step ladder to reach the workers’ strike meeting. After his attempt to dismantle the gathering fails, he is framed standing alone at the bottom of the ladder, which

128 Widdis, *Socialist Senses*, p. 227. For in-depth discussion of this shift in cinema, see ibid., pp. 227-65.
129 For discussion of these sequences, see ibid., pp. 603-04.
towers above him, conveying his isolation from his comrades (Fig. 4.29). Similarly, in the scenes set outside the factory premises in the Saint Petersburg streets, the factory’s walls loom over Petr and cast dramatic shadows, which obscure forms and plunge parts of the frame into darkness (Fig. 4.30). As a result, any sense of conventional perspective is destroyed, producing a feeling of spatial disorientation that corresponds with Petr’s confused mind. This sense of dislocation and confusion is heightened through atmospheric effects. The incorporation of smoke combined with the use of soft-focus cinematography further works to obfuscate forms and to distort distances. Suvorov’s techniques recall Enei’s approach to set design in Shinel’, reflecting the close professional relationship of these two kino-khudozhniki, who worked alongside one another at Leningrad film studios in the late 1920s and 1930s. However, while in Shinel’ Enei includes a number of set details in order to convey Akakii’s psychological state, Suvorov’s sets are remarkably stark. Several scenes incorporate only a single object, either framed close-up against a dark background or shot out of focus.

Fig. 4.29. Zlatye gory, Petr and the ladder.

Fig. 4.30. Zlatye gory, Saint Petersburg street.

131 For discussion of the working partnership between Enei and Suvorov, see ‘Dva interv’iu Nikolaia Suvorova’, pp. 323-25.
This approach is most striking in the sequence in which the factory manager presents Petr with a pocket watch (Fig. 4.31). Here, the focus is specifically on the watch’s allure as an object and how its presentation as a gift alters the relationship between the factory manager and Petr. Close-up shots show the manager slowly revealing the watch from a dark case; its lustrous silver body and chain glimmer, visually echoing the metallic buttons of the manager’s waistcoat and the metal filling in Petr’s teeth, and thus link the three. The shimmering metal of the characters’ garments stands in for the factory machinery, which is conspicuously absent throughout the film. On receiving the watch, Petr is also presented with a waistcoat, which he puts on, covering his workers’ shirt. The watch is therefore directly associated with class status and Petr’s social aspirations.

To emphasise the watch’s function as an alluring bourgeois status symbol, the film-makers exploited not only its material, but also its aural properties. Made at a time of innovation in sound technology, *Zlatye gory* explores the relationship between sound and image. When opened, the watch plays a recurring waltz. As Joan Titus notes, the film’s composer, Dmitrii Shostakovich had previously used the waltz as a background score in *Novyi Vavilon* (New Babylon, 1929) to convey the bourgeoisie’s decadence. In *Zlatye gory*, the noise that objects make also serves to represent the psychological states of characters. The waltz’s whimsical melody conveys Petr’s entrancement, while its repetitive tune expresses the factory manager’s attempt to regulate Petr’s actions. Watches and clocks appear in a number of films of the 1920s that addressed contemporary working life. In both *Proekt inzhenera Praita* and *Aelita*, for example, recurring images of clocks emphasise the contemporary timeframe of particular scenes and convey the dynamic pace of modern life. In films of the 1930s, however, clocks and watches began to be used to symbolise ideas about regulation. As Lilya Kaganovsky demonstrates, in Enei’s sets for Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg’s *Odna* (Alone, 1931) the alarm clock suggests the State’s control over its subjects. In contrast to *Odna*’s alarm clock, which calls the female protagonist to her social duties in the film’s opening sequence, the pocket watch enchants Petr with the promise of increased social status.

132 For discussion of the innovation of sound technology in the film, see Joan Titus, ‘*Golden Mountains* (1931) and the New Soviet Sound Film’ in her *The Early Film Music of Dmitry Shostakovich*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 69-98.
133 Ibid., p. 77.
As well as the clock, Suvorov reused a number of avant-garde symbols of the 1920s in his set designs and reworked them to convey ideas about control. Notably, the horizontal light patterns, which in *Vasha znakomaia* functioned as a form of defamiliarisation, were used in *Zlatye gory* for symbolic meaning to express the workers’ oppression. In the scenes that take place in the office of the Baku factory manager, intense sunlight streams through the blinds casting horizontal light patterns across the workers’ bodies (Fig. 4.32). In their resemblance to prison bars, the light patterns convey the workers’ subjugated condition. Similar horizontal configurations of light recur throughout the film to emphasise the theme of control. In the scene in which Petr stands next to the ladder leading to the workers’ meeting, the ladder’s rungs cast horizontal bars of shadow behind him. In another scene, Petr is framed against a high fence of vertical iron bars, which again cast linear shadows over his body. Similarly, grid configurations, which film-makers had used in *Stachka* and in *Vasha znakomaia* as symbols for a rationalised approach to work, are used on a number of occasions in *Zlatye gory*. In the scenes set in the factory manager’s residence, the grid appears in the form of the music rack of a grand piano, implying the bourgeoisie’s oppressive nature.
During the 1930s, theatre set designers reworked avant-garde visual tropes of the 1920s, also. Drawing on the aesthetic vocabulary of set designers of the 1920s, Vadim Ryndin in his scenery for the Kamernyi teatr’s 1933 production of Sophie Treadwell’s *Machinal* (1928) used a series of grids to create a cage structure, which represented the restriction of individual rights that was a main theme of the play.\(^{135}\) Rather than positioning them at various angles to one another, he placed each grid upright and stacked in ordered layers, creating a severe impression. As Margarita Tupitsyn argues, Ryndin’s sets, in alluding to the similarity between the grid’s geometric structure and a prison cage, endow the grid, as an ‘abstract emblem of modernity’, with an ideological meaning relevant to the increasingly hazardous political climate.\(^{136}\) She further argues that this marked a shift away from the use in the 1910s and 1920s of certain motifs as devices to explore self-reflexive questions about form and space to a greater interest in the late 1920s and early 1930s in their symbolic associations and their ability to convey a sense of mood and atmosphere. Correspondingly, while in *Zlatye gory* Suvorov drew on aesthetic approaches to set design developed during the 1920s, he adapted them to a new agenda of filmmaking that prioritised the psychological states of individuals.

**V. Conclusion**

ornate art deco sets and stylised architectural forms reveal the fantasist nature of the room’s male occupants, who retreat there not to work, but to indulge in amorous desires or to pursue romantic affairs. Bauer’s decision to associate the space of the private study with romantic liaisons served to emphasise the individualist attitudes of the late-Imperial aristocracy and their neglect of social responsibility.

Following the tradition of Bauer’s films, the private study in Aelita and in Shinel’ continued to be portrayed as a solitary realm, where individuals seclude themselves to delight in their personal fantasies. In contrast to Bauer’s films, however, in Aelita and Shinel’ the male protagonists indulge in individual desires to transcend the banality of their everyday existence. The film-makers exploited hyperbole and exaggeration in their set designs to convey the phantasmagorical nature of characters’ dream worlds and to place them in stark contrast with contemporary reality. While in Aelita the presence of models serves to reveal a tension between work as a practical activity and an intellectual pursuit, in Shinel’ monuments are used to critique the impotence of individuals in the face of overarching power structures.

The clash between the ordinary individual and established authoritarian systems was also a principal concern in films of the 1920s and early 1930s set in the industrial workplace. Many of these films juxtaposed the industrialists’ private office with the work floor to reveal social tensions and injustices in the workplace. In order to represent ideas of authority and the regulation of subjects, Rakhal’s in his sets for Stachka and Vasha znakomaia drew upon his experience of working in late-Imperial cinema, adopting and reworking many of the strategies that Bauer had used in his sets for private studies. In contrast to late-Imperial films, however, both Stachka and Vasha znakomaia show a concern for the photogenic quality of the industrial environment. As film-makers embarked on a new era of sound cinema in the 1930s, representations of the workplace began to focus on the inner struggle within individuals between personal desire and social responsibility. In line with this, in Zlatye gory objects were used not only for their photogenic and material properties, but also as symbols for individual desires. This chapter has attempted to show that in late-Imperial and early-Soviet fiction films desire and imagination was represented as an important aspect of workers’ experience. In the following chapter, I turn from the sphere of work to that of artistic creation and explore how fiction films represented spaces such as the artist’s studio, the theatre stage and the circus arena.
Chapter Five
Artistic Arenas

From the earliest days of Russian fiction cinema, film-makers used settings associated with various forms of artistic creation and performance, such as theatre halls, cabaret clubs, circus arenas, artists’ studios and exhibition halls. On one level, the interest in representing artistic spaces was a response to the popular taste among cinema audiences for films that showed the glamorous aspects of modern, urban life. However, as Susan Felleman writes in her study of the ways in which post-war American and European films incorporate artworks, ‘when a film undertakes the representation of “art” as a theme or engages an artwork as a motif, it is [...] entering into a contemplation of its own nature and at some level positing its own unwritten theory of cinema as art.’ On another level, therefore, film-makers also used artistic settings in order to comment self-referentially on the nature of different artistic media and on cinema’s status as an art. Ontological questions about the nature of different art forms were of great importance in the first decades of the twentieth century in Russia. As a number of historians of Russian art have noted, the period was one of intense artistic theorisation. These debates about art developed amid cinema’s emergence as a new creative practice, which further intensified the climate of self-reflection, raising questions about different forms of visual perception, the creative potential of new technology and, particularly in the wake of the Revolution, art’s social function.

This chapter explores how Russian film-makers represented a number of environments associated with the pictorial and performative arts as a means to engage with these contemporary debates. It first addresses how in the 1910s film-makers used artists’ studios in order to associate cinema with high culture and to stake a claim for film’s status as a legitimate and independent art form, taking as case studies За дверями гостиной (Behind the Drawing-Room Doors, 1913), Портрет Дориана Грея (The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1915), Его глаза (His Eyes, 1916) and Умирающий лебедь (The Dying Swan, 1917). During the late 1910s and the 1920s, film-makers moved away from depicting artists’ studios, for a number of reasons, and began instead to represent environments associated with film-making in order to explore questions about cinema as a cultural industry. The chapter, therefore, considers how film-makers used film-making environments to comment on different filming practices and the stardom associated with

2. Susan Felleman, Art in the Cinematic Imagination, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006, p. 3.
cinema culture, focusing on Kulisy ekrana (Behind the Screen, 1917), Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma (The Cigarette Girl from Mossel’prom, 1924) and Potselui Meri Pikford (The Kiss of Mary Pickford, 1927). Lastly, the chapter considers different representations of the circus in Molchi, grust’... molchi’... (Still, Sadness... Still..., 1918), 2-Bul’di-2 (The Two Buldis, 1929) and Poslednii attraktcion (The Last Attraction, 1929). Although film-makers had commented on the shared affinities between cinema and the circus since the 1900s, their fascination with the circus intensified after the Revolution and reached a high point in the late 1920s, with a number of films using the circus arena as their principal setting. In particular, the chapter considers how film-makers turned their interest away from ontological questions and began instead to address issues relating to creative independence and the social function of art in revolutionary life, using the circus as a metaphor for artistic liberation and political activism.

I. The Artist’s Studio

While the theme of artists in their studios had been popular since the Renaissance in European painting, in Russian art the genre was much less common. As Rosalind P. Gray [Blakesley] notes, depictions of artists’ studios first appeared in the paintings of Ivan Firsov and Aleksei Tyranov in the late eighteenth century. According to Blakesley, both Firsov and Tyranov used the theme to convey the status of artists as members of a cultural elite, employing compositions that challenged the social divide between the artists and the upper-class clients whose portraits they were engaged to paint. In one of the first representations of an artist’s studio in a Russian fiction film, in the Khanzhonkov studio’s Za dveriami gostinoi, the kino-khudozhnik Boris Mikhin adopted a similar strategy in his set design. The scenario, written by the film’s directors, Ivan Lazarev and Petr Chardynin, follows a love intrigue between the artist Akhtyrin, his working-class model Nina, and Elena, the daughter of the wealthy landowner Volotskii, who commissions Akhtyrin to paint her. Jealous of Akhtyrin’s romance with Elena, Nina attempts to destroy her portrait. In telling this story, the narrative foregrounds concerns about the cultural

4 In particular, film-makers had commented on the fact that both the circus and the cinema were ‘low’ art forms that were based on the expressive display of the body. See Ol’ga Burenina-Petrova, Tirk v prostranstve kul’tury, Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015, pp. 195-97.
7 Ibid., pp. 94-95.
8 For a synopsis of the scenario, see Vestnik kinematograf, 17, 1913, pp. 39-40.
9 John Walker notes that a number of early American and European films about artists used the theme of the jealous model, including Robert William Paul’s The Sculptor’s Jealous Model (1904) and A. E. Coleby’s The Sculptor’s Dream (1910). See John Walker, Art & Artists on Screen, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993, p. 91.
status of artists, resonating with film-makers’ own desires during the 1910s to fashion themselves as members of a cultural intelligentsia.

While this film has received little critical analysis, several historians and critics have remarked on the formal innovativeness of Mikhin’s sets, noting in particular the kino-khudozhnik’s use of the fundus system and the way in which he incorporated paintings. Made in 1913, Za dveriami gostinoi was one of the first films in which the fundus was employed. In several sequences set in the artist’s studio, Mikhin uses layers of curtains and wall partitions to create a sense of receding spatial depth, anticipating the way in which he would later use domestic furnishings to structure space in Kreitserova sonata (The Kreutzer Sonata, 1914), as discussed in Chapter Three. Additionally, Mikhin employs canvas paintings as screens to create multiple layers of space in the frame. The inclusion of paintings also works to increase the impression of height in the frame by drawing the eye to the space above the actors’ heads.

Mikhin used paintings not only as formal elements of the set, however; he also exploited their symbolic value in order to comment on Akhtyrin’s position as a member of a cultural intelligentsia. It is notable that Akhtyrin maintains two studios, one in which the working-class model Nina poses for him and another in which he receives his aristocratic clients, such as Volotskii. In the first studio, paintings are left in disarray across the studio floor, with their backs turned to the viewer so as to hide the subject matter and to display instead the bare canvas and its wood support (Fig. 5.1). Propped on the artist’s easel is an unframed painting of humble peasant life, while a chalk portrait scrawled on the wall behind the canvas depicts the artist wearing a worker’s flat-cap. These set details betray Akhtyrin’s modest existence and working-class background. By contrast, his second studio contains paintings encased in heavy gilt frames that depict subjects from the academic tradition of art (Fig. 5.2). It is also filled with props relating to high culture, including a suit of armour, a naval history painting, a classical bust, an anatomical model and a tapestry. Embroidered with the mythological figure of Hera and her peacock, the tapestry’s subject alludes to the feeling of jealousy that Nina experiences when she discovers Akhtyrin’s affair with Elena. Decorated with rich velvets, an oriental rug and exotic palms, the interior more closely resembles a fashionable upper-class salon than an artist’s studio.

12 Liudmila Miasnikova notes that Vladimir Egorov also frequently used this strategy in his cinema set designs in the 1910s and 1920s. See Liudmila Miasnikova, ‘Vladimir Egorov: uchenyi risoval’shchik, stavshii “kinoshnikom”’, Dekorativnoe iskusstvo i predmetno-prostranstvennaia sreda, Vestnik MGKhPI, April 2015, pp. 316-36 (p. 319).
Similarly, the exhibition hall where Akhtyrin displays his works is decorated with classical marble columns and velvet drapery. The contrasts between the design of the two studios evoke the tension between Akhtyrin’s working-class status and his ambitions to fashion himself as a cultured individual.

Fig. 5.1. *Za dveriami gostinoi*, Akhtyrin’s working studio.

Fig. 5.2. *Za dveriami gostinoi*, Akhtyrin’s formal studio.
Mikhin’s inclusion of specific paintings can also be interpreted as a comment not only on the artist’s cultural standing, but also on the film viewer’s cultural awareness. As Sergei Kozlovskii and Nikolai Kolin note in their manual on set design, early Russian kino-khudozhniki had to rework paintings in black and white before including them in their sets, so that the camera could register the tonal distribution of the image accurately. This suggests that kino-khudozhniki made a conscious decision about the specific artworks they included in films. It is notable that several of the paintings in the studio in which Akhtyrin receives his clients resemble works from the canon of Russian and European art history. The naval history painting is similar to those by the Russian Romantic artist Ivan Aivazovskii (1817-1900), who was renowned for his seascapes.

Additionally, the female portrait, executed with loose brushstrokes and displaying a concern for the effects of light, closely resembles the paintings of the French Impressionist Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841-1919). With its walls lined with artworks that recall those by eminent artists, the studio set resembles the kunstkammer paintings that initially developed as a genre in early-Netherlandish art. As Victor I. Stoichita observes, kunstkammer paintings became popular in seventeenth-century European culture as a visual game of connoisseurship that would test the viewer’s art historical eye and their cultural capital. As with kunstkammer paintings, Mikhin’s inclusion of well-known artworks in Akhtyrin’s studio assumes a level of prior art-historical knowledge on the part of the film viewer and thus works to reaffirm their status as a cultured individual.

Moreover, a number of the film’s scenes also bear close compositional similarities to famous art works. In one sequence, Akhtyrin, Elena and a group of companions dressed in fashionable clothing, picnic outside under the dappled light created by a tree in the extreme foreground, recalling Claude Monet’s Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe (Lunch on the Grass, 1865-66). Similarly, the sequence in which Akhtyrin and Elena boat on a lily-covered lake bears similarities with Impressionist paintings, such as Renoir’s La Seine à Argenteuil (Boating at Argenteuil, 1873) and La Yole (The Skiff, 1875). As we recall from Chapter Three, Mikhin had studied in Paris in the 1890s, and he would have been familiar with the works of Impressionist painters from time spent there, as well as from visiting Russian collections such as those of Ivan Morozov and Sergei

18 Monet’s painting also includes in its group of bourgeois lunchers the Realist painter Gustave Courbet, thereby associating artists with the lifestyle of a particular social class.
Reworking well-known compositions in paintings was a tactic that European artists had long used to affiliate themselves with a larger artistic tradition. In his set designs, Mikhin appears to appropriate this strategy, similarly incorporating painted artworks and compositional techniques derived from the canon of art history to associate his practice as a kino-khudozhnik with the fine arts.

In the artists’ studios that Vladimir Egorov designed for Portret Doriana Greia and Ego glaza, he similarly draws on strategies derived from painting in order to associate cinema with a fine art tradition. He also, however, adds another dimension to their significance, using them to explore ideas about the nature of different forms of visual representation and of cinema’s specific expressive features as an art form. For his 1915 film adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s 1891 novel The Picture of Dorian Gray, the director Vsevolod Meierkhol’d invited Egorov to work as the kino-khudozhnik, having previously collaborated with him at the Moskovskii khudozhestvennyi teatr (MKhT, Moscow Art Theatre). Although the film has not survived, production stills, contemporary reviews and film-makers’ memoirs demonstrate the attention that the film-makers paid to the set design as a means to heighten the film’s formal expressivity. As several scholars have noted, Portret Doriana Greia self-consciously explores cinema’s expressive potential and its artistic heritage in painting and the theatre: Philip Cavendish describes the film as ‘a sustained enquiry into cinematic self-definition at the point where the theatrical and the visual intersect’; Anna Kovalova argues that it represents ‘the first attempt to make a film with the emphasis on the poetics of the image, presupposing a genuine non-mechanical adaptation of the methods of theatre and painting to cinema’. In light of the film-makers’ self-reflexive interests, the ways in which they use specific motifs associated with visual representation – such as portraits and mirrors – and devise compositional strategies to depict the artistic realms of the painter’s studio and the theatre auditorium have particular significance.

In her reading of the film, Kovalova argues that in Meierkhol’d’s scenario the artist Basil Hallward is accorded a more significant role than in both Wilde’s original novel and other adaptations of it. Moreover, contemporary reviews and production stills suggest that Egorov’s

20 For example, Leah Clark notes that Renaissance artists used this tactic in the fifteenth century. Leah R. Clark, Collecting Art in the Italian Renaissance Court: Objects and Exchanges, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 116-56.
24 Ibid., p. 85.
sets for Hallward’s studio were styled in a highly unusual manner, which made it stand out from the film’s other settings. The art theorist Iakov Tugendkhol’d remarked on Egorov’s use of black-and-white gamut screens to produce silhouettes and to enhance the play of shadow and light.25 A still published in Sine-fono illustrates how Dorian’s portrait takes up the majority of the background, disrupting the impression of perspectival depth (Fig. 5.3).26 It is also notable that elements of the studio are repeated in the portrait, with the table in the room’s foreground mirroring the painted piano in the picture, while the contours of the studio’s walls are marked out in paint in the same sketchy manner as the portrait’s brushwork. Such similarities create a sense of continuation between the pictorial space of the painting and the real space of the studio. According to Kovalova, Meierkhol’d specified that the studio sequences should be tinted in a sepia tone.27 Together, these formal strategies would have undermined the impression of photographic verisimilitude and drawn attention to the constructed nature of the scenes taking place in the studio, while emphasising the space’s function as an artistic realm.

Fig. 5.3. Portret Doriana Greia, Basil Hallward’s studio, published in Sine-fono, 1915, 21-22, p. 42.

26 Republished ibid., p. 64.
27 Ibid., p. 81.
Egorov’s styling of the artist’s studio corresponds to Meierkhol’d’s denouncement of cinema as a photographic medium, which produced mimetic representations of the real world. Writing in 1912, the director argued that contemporary film-makers, in their struggle against cinema’s origins, borrowed methods from theatre and painting to associate film with established art forms:

Имея несомненное значение для науки, кинематограф, когда его притягивают к служению искусству, сам чувствует свою беспомощность и тщетно пытается приобщиться к тому, что носит название «искусство». Отсюда его попытка отделаться от принципа фотографии: он сознает необходимость оправдать первую половину своего двойного наименования – «театр-кинематограф». Но театр – искусство, а фотография – не искусство. И кинематограф спешит как-нибудь соединиться с совершенно чуждыми ему, механизму, элементами, и вот он пытается ввести в свои предоставлениям цвета, музыку, декламацию и пение.

[Cinema has undoubted significance for science, but when it is put to the service of art it feels its own impotence and in vain tries to justify the name ‘art’. It therefore attempts to detach itself from the principle of photography; it recognises the need to justify the first half of its double denomination – ‘theatre-cinema’. But theatre is an art, while photography is not. And cinema hastens to join in somehow with elements that are completely alien to it, to its mechanism, and so it tries to introduce colours, music, speech and song into its services].

Meierkhol’d remained hesitant, however, about the tactic of drawing on existing artistic methods to overcome cinema’s photographic and mimetic tendencies. In an article published in 1915, just a week before filming on Portret Doriana Greia began, he again expressed doubts about cinema’s artistic potential and stated that in his forthcoming work he intended to innovate cinematic techniques: ‘My attitude towards the existing cinema is extremely negative. My immediate task is to investigate the methods of cinema that have not been used but undoubtedly lie concealed within it […]’. It is still too early to say whether cinema will be an independent art or subsidiary to theatre’. 29

This desire to innovate is apparent in the sets that Egorov designed for the theatre auditorium in Portret Doriana Greia. Both contemporary critics and cinema historians have remarked on the formal inventiveness of the theatre auditorium sequence. 30 Sergei Iutkevich even wrote that the sequence ‘открыл совершенно новые для того времени возможности кинематографа’

[revealed possibilities of cinema that were completely novel for the time].

A production still printed in *Sine-fono* in 1915 shows that, in the sequence in which Dorian, Lord Henry and Basil watch a performance of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* from their theatre box, the film-makers positioned a mirror behind the protagonists’ heads so as to reflect the performance while allowing the viewer to see the characters’ expressions (Fig. 5.4). In a similar manner to the screens and canvases in the artist’s studio, the mirror disrupts the impression of deep perspectival space; by reflecting the stage performance, it instead highlights the existence of space in front of the frame, an effect further emphasised through the programme that protrudes over the box’s edge. As Iurii Tsiv’ian notes, Russian film-makers in the early to mid-1910s initially derived their use of mirrors from the precedent of painting, in which artists included them to inscribe the viewer into the pictorial space. He argues that this was not a question of imitating painting, however, but an innovative tactic that demonstrated film-makers’ growing understandings of the specific features of cinematic space and how it differed from a theatrical model. Indeed, Egorov’s set-design sketches for the film, which he later included in the unpublished text ‘Khudozhnik oformleniia teatral’noi stseny i khudozhnik kino kartin... kakaia raznitsa?’ (The Artist of Theatre Stage Scenery and the Artist of the Film Frame... What’s the Difference?), reveal his concern for modelling cinema space in a way that departed from that used in the theatre (Fig. 5.5). His sketches for *Portret Doriana Greia* illustrate how he took into account the various angles at which the camera could be positioned when shooting certain scenes. The mirror’s significance is not only formal, however. As Tsiv’ian observes, from around 1913 film-makers began to use mirrors in sets for their symbolic associations, as well as their formal properties. The image in the mirror shows Juliet on her balcony, repeating the architecture of the theatre box and thus functioning as a form of *mise en abyme*. This visual repetition in the form of a reflection evokes ideas about representational doubling and artistic mediation that are central themes in Wilde’s text.

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34 RGALI f. 2710, op. 1, ed. kh. 59, pp.1-45.


Fig. 5.4. *Portret Doriana Greia*, theatre auditorium.

Fig. 5.5. Vladimir Egorov, ‘Khudozhiik oformleniiia teatral’nii stseny i khudozhnik kino kartin... kakaia raznitsa?’ (The Artist of Theatre Stage Scenery and the Artist of the Film Frame... What’s the Difference?). RGALI f. 2710, op. 1, ed. khr. 59, p. 8.
In his designs for the Thiemann and Reinhardt company’s *Ego glaza*, Egorov again paid close attention to how sets could be used to address ideas about the limits of visual representation in art. As in *Za dveriami gostinoi*, the film’s scenario follows a love intrigue between an artist and his model. Based on Aleksei Fedorov’s novella of the same title, *Ego glaza* tells the story of the artist Strel’nikov, who is blinded by his wife with acid after she discovers that he has fallen in love with his model. *Ego glaza* was part of the producers’ *Russkaia zolotaia seriia* (Russian Golden Series), and they again capitalised on Egorov’s expertise in set design to promote a more ‘cultured’ cinema. This is evident in the film’s unusual opening, which, in the place of standard credits, shows the frontispiece to a copy of Fedorov’s text with Egorov’s name printed in bold next to those of the directors Viacheslav Viskovskii and Aleksandr Volkov.

Writing in *Teatral’naia gazeta* in 1916, an anonymous critic noted that Egorov’s sets for the artist’s studio in *Ego glaza* were particularly successful. The stark contrast between the white canvases and the dark wood support recalls the black-and-white gamut screens that Egorov employed in *Portret Doriane Greia*. The turned backs of the canvases frustrate the process of looking, alluding to the film’s subject of the loss of vision. This idea is also evoked through the half-finished drawings of a female nude pinned to the studio’s walls, in which the soft pencil contours and light patches of shading render the female form barely perceptible. Egorov had previously used strategies to dematerialise and to obscure human forms in his theatre designs, notably for the MKhT’s productions of Leonid Andreev’s *Zhizn’ cheloveka* (The Life of Man, 1907) and Maurice Maeterlinck’s *Siniaia ptitsa* (The Blue Bird, 1908). In these performances, Egorov’s layering of gauzes and screens made the human body appear as only a vague outline. This technique was intended to evoke an atmosphere of loss, corresponding to the theme of death, which was central to both plays. Egorov’s design tactics also correlate with wider Symbolist thought on the disparity between sight and perception and its challenge to the primacy of visual expression. As noted in Chapter One, contemporary critics even remarked on the ‘cinematographic’ nature of Egorov’s designs in terms of the way they enhanced the interplay between shadow and light. Egorov’s continued interest in obscuring

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40 Ibid., pp. 26-29.
41 Ibid., p. 28.
visual forms in *Ego glaza* thus betrays his preoccupation with questions about visual perception and representation.

Fig. 5.6. *Ego glaza*, the artist’s studio.

Fig. 5.7. *Ego glaza*, artist’s studio drawings.
In a number of the films that he designed as well as directed, Evgenii Bauer also explored questions about different forms of visual representation through depicting spaces such as painters’ studios, photography darkrooms and theatre stages. Bauer’s interest in painting’s capacity to evoke aspects of the human condition, such as death, is evident in his earliest works in cinema. In 1913, he co-directed with Vitalii Brianskii and designed the sets for the film *Krovavaia slava* (Bloody Glory, non-extant), in which after a model commits suicide an artist attempts to paint her portrait. Bauer again explored the theme of painting’s ability to represent death in *Umiraiushchii lebed* (The Dying Swan, 1917). The film’s scenario, written by Zoia Barantsevich, tells the story of Gizella, who is mute and who devotes her life to ballet after the man she loves betrays her with another woman. Gizella quickly wins acclaim as a dancer for her interpretation of Mikhail Fokin’s solo piece *Umiraiushchii lebed*, more commonly known by the French title *La Mort du cygne.* On seeing Gizella’s performance, the artist Count Valerii Glinskii, who is fixated on the idea of creating a painting on the theme of death, invites her to sit for him in her stage persona. In both its scenario and its visual aesthetics, the film demonstrates Bauer’s close engagement with contemporary artistic discourses about methods of figurative and performative representation.

The film’s scenario reflects the interest in the intersection between representation, death and eroticism seen in late-Imperial Russia among decadent writers, such as Andreev, and artists associated with Symbolist groups, such as the *Golubiia roza* (Blue Rose). As Morley argues, Bauer parodies and ridicules this interest in death visually in the set he creates for Glinskii’s studio: canvases depicting skeletons fill the room and an artificial life-size skeleton, positioned in the foreground in most of the scenes, acts as the *dikovinka* (Fig. 5.8). Decorated with flowers and urns, the studio is pervaded with a funeral-like atmosphere. In the corner of one canvas is a portrait of a grieving woman painted with sinuous lines. The subject and style of the portrait recall the works of the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch, whose macabre paintings that used female figures in mourning to express psychological pain influenced a number of Russian avant-garde artists such as Mikhail Vrubel’ and Elena Guro. As Tsiv’ian argues, Munch’s influence is also apparent in the insert shot in the sequence of Gizella’s nightmare, which bears close

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Fig. 5.8. Umriaiushchii lebed’, Glinskii’s studio.

The morbid feel of Glinskii’s studio evokes ideas about the commemorative function of painting. Since the Renaissance, artists and theorists had commented on painting’s role in preserving the memory of the deceased. In his treatise on painting De Pictura (1435), the humanist theorist Leon Battista Alberti argued that ‘painting has a direct power being not only able to make the absent seem present but even to make the dead seem almost alive after many centuries’. In a number of his films, Bauer explores the capacity of visual representations to evoke the presence of the dead. In Grezy (Daydreams, 1915) Sergei Nedelin fills his study with paintings and photographs of his dead wife, while in Posle smerti (After Death, 1915) Andrei pines over a huge portrait of his deceased mother and a photograph of the dead actress Zoia Kadmiina. In her reading of Posle smerti, Morley argues that while Andrei’s photograph of Zoia ‘remains an inert image’, Bauer’s cinematic representation reanimates and revitalises her, suggesting cinema’s superiority to other art forms in bringing things to life.

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49 Morley notes that in Grezy and Posle smerti the male protagonists use paintings and photographs to revive the presence of absent women. See Morley, *Performing Femininity*, pp. 149-50 and pp. 190-92.

50 Ibid., pp. 200-03.
In *Umiraiushchii lebed*, Bauer similarly juxtaposes pictorial and cinematic representations in terms of their potential to convey a particular state of being. Like Andrei, who struggles in vain to evoke the living presence of Zoia in his photographs, Glinskii has limited success in capturing the true essence of death in pictorial form; rather than using the skeleton as a source of inspiration, he copies its figurative form in a crudely mimetic manner. As already noted, Bauer intends the viewer to recognise that his skeleton paintings are absurd. There can be no doubt that the naive quality of the paintings expresses Glinskii’s inability to distinguish between the real world and the realm of imagination and creativity. However, the simplified forms, bold contours and flattened space in Glinskii’s paintings also recall the way in which during the 1900s and 1910s Russian avant-garde artists, such as those associated with the *Soiuz molodezhi* (Union of Youth, 1909-1917), neglected formal precision and laws of perspective and reduced their imagery to a stock of basic symbols in their desire to express essential human feelings.51 In their works, the *Soiuz molodezhi* artists questioned the merits of figurative painting in the service of mimetic representation and suggested an alternative artistic approach that exploited the expressive quality of colour, line and shape. Against this context, Glinskii’s paintings can thus be read as a comment on the limits of figurative representation, and its capacity to express states of being and abstract sensations.

By contrast, Bauer emphasises the expressive potential of performative and cinematic forms of representation in capturing feeling and emotion. Restricted by her inability to communicate verbally, Gizella uses dance as a medium to convey her sorrow at being betrayed.52 In the sequence in which Gizella dances Fokin’s *Umiraiushchii lebed*, she performs on a stage devoid of props and against a plain black background (Fig. 5.9). Here, the focus is exclusively on the precise and fluid movements of Gizella’s body, emphasising its expressive capacity unaided by external accoutrements. The elegance of Gizella’s body in motion contrasts starkly with the crude, static forms of Glinskii’s paintings. In the 1900s and 1910s in Russia, Symbolist artists and writers placed great emphasis on the quality of movement in art: Pavel Kuznetsov referred to his paintings as visual symphonies;53 and Viktor Borisov-Musatov argued that the more an artwork displayed ‘musical qualities’, the closer it was to the absolute.54 Andrei Belyi even claimed that performance and music were more intuitive than the visual arts, and could therefore express a person's spiritual and emotional reality more fully. In his 1910 Symbolist treatise, he declared that:

54 Ibid.
Movement is the basic function of reality. It rules over images. It creates these images. They are conditioned by movement... Beginning with the lowest forms of art and ending with music, we witness a slow but sure weakening of the images of reality. In architecture, sculpture and painting these images play an important part. In music they are absent. In approaching music a work of art becomes deeper and broader.55

Bauer’s framing of Gizella’s dance sequence is also significant with respect to ideas about the expressive potential of performative and pictorial representations of the body. As Morley notes, while Bauer includes stage performances in a number of his films, the way in which he frames Gizella in Umiraushshii lebed’ is unusual.56 Unlike in Diita bol’shogo goroda (Child of the Big City, 1914) and in Grezy, in which he films the stage from behind the heads of the audience, in Umiraushshii lebed’ Bauer chooses to exclude the orchestra and the viewers from the frame.57 Morley argues that Bauer’s choice to shun verisimilitude creates the impression that Gizella’s performance stands outside the film’s narrative.58 The dance sequence’s extra-diegetic nature is further suggested through Bauer’s choice of colouring. As Morley notes, according to Tsiv’ian, contemporary reviewers documented that in some of the prints of the film the sequence was tinted in various and constantly changing colours.59 Bauer’s approach to colouring recalls the American dancer Loie Fuller’s Serpentine Dance (1892), in which her body was illuminated by multicoloured lights emitted from lanterns as she performed against a black background without scenery.60 By accentuating the visual impact of colour and the body in movement, Bauer questions the primacy of mimetic representation and of cinema’s function as a photographic representation of reality, demonstrating instead the medium’s potential to produce an immersive visual experience.

In contrast to the way in which Bauer represents Gizella’s performance, the sets and framing of Glinskii’s studio work to emphasise the contrived nature of Glinskii’s approach to representation. Gizella is made to pose next to an enormous bouquet of flowers on a podium, the edge of which is clearly visible, with the curtain behind left slightly open (Fig. 5.10). These details serve to highlight the artificial nature of Glinskii’s set-up. Contorted into an awkward pose, even Gizella’s body appears unnatural and artificial, emphasising the fact that Glinskii is interested in

55 Cited and translated ibid., p. 84.
56 Morley, Performing Femininity, pp. 158-59.
57 Ibid., p. 158.
58 Ibid. Morley argues that in Diita bol’shogo goroda Bauer similarly frames the Salome dancer sequence in a way that shuns verisimilitude to suggest its extra-diegetic status. See ibid., pp. 82-86.
59 Ibid., p. 159.
representing not Gizella herself, but her stage persona of the Dying Swan. It is Glinskii’s inability to distinguish between Gizella as a real person and her stage persona that results in the film’s tragic ending, in which Glinskii strangles Gizella when she no longer conforms to his ideal of a model. After killing Gizella, Glinskii returns to his painting, and thus Bauer ridicules again the artist’s reliance on figurative representation as a means to capture particular states of being.

Fig. 5.9. *Umiraiushchi lebed’,* Gizella’s performance.

Fig. 5.10. *Umiraiushchi lebed’,* Gizella posing for Glinskii.

61 Morley, *Performing Femininity*, pp. 159-60.
62 The tinting of this sequence was applied by the British Film Institute for the DVD *Mad Love: Three Films by Evgenii Bauer*, London: BFI DVD Publishing, 2002.
II. Film Studios and Cinema Theatres

After 1917 and, indeed, throughout the 1920s, artists’ studios were very rarely depicted in fiction films. The decline in interest in this previously popular artistic arena reflected a broader contemporary shift in Russian culture, in which many avant-garde creatives and theorists denounced the idea of the artist as a solitary individual, who created paintings for aesthetic pleasure from the confines of their studio. In his polemical tract ‘Ot kartiny k sittsu’ (From the Picture to the Calico Print, 1924), the LEF theorist Osip Brik argued that painting was inextricably bound to capitalist ideology and no longer had relevance as an art form in Soviet society. Similarly, in his 1926 text *Iskusstvo i proizvodstvo* (Art and Production), the Productivist theorist Boris Arvatov attacked easel art as a bourgeois tradition, defined by individualism and competition and claimed that artists must abandon painting to work with technology and production. A number of avant-garde critics and artists promoted experimenting with technologically advanced media, such as photography and film, in the place of painting. Lev Kuleshov argued in a 1922 article that, while painting led to a cul-de-sac, cinema was the art form most suited to modern life; Brik similarly urged artists to study new developments in photography and film, arguing that they were the art forms most suitable for a modern, socialist society.

Against this climate of increasing opposition to painting and support for photographic media, film-makers began to represent environments associated with film production and spectatorship in order to explore questions about cinema’s nature as an art. One of the earliest fiction films to use the setting of a film studio to address explicitly the subject of film-making is the Ermol’ev studio’s *Kulisy ekrana* (Behind the Screen, 1917). The film survives only in part and information concerning its production and reception is scant. The roles of scenarist and director have been attributed variously to Aleksandr Volkov and Georgii Azagarov. Although it is not known who worked as the kino-khudozhnik, the set design is remarkable for the way in which the material

63 A number of films in the 1920s do, however, depict individuals pursuing creative practices and craftwork in their homes, including *V bol’shom gorode* (In the Big City, 1927), *Dva druga, model i podruga* (Two Friends, a Model and a Girlfriend, 1927) and *Devushka s korobkoi* (The Girl with a Hatbox, 1927).

64 For discussion of debates about painting’s role in revolutionary society and art’s social function, see Buchloh, ‘From Faktura to Factography’, pp. 83-119 and Gough, *The Artist as Producer*.

65 Osip Brik, ‘Ot kartiny k sittsu’, *Lef*, 2, 1924, pp. 27-34.


67 Osip Brik, ‘Foto i kino’, *Sovetskoe kino*, 4-5, 1926, p. 23.

68 For information regarding the cast and film-makers who worked on the film, see Ivanova et al., *Veliki kinem*, p. 386 and Aleksandr Deriabin ‘Kino o kino’, *Katalog kinofestivalia “Belye stolby 2016”*, Belye stolby: Gosfil’mofond Rossii, 2016, pp. 8-29 (pp. 9-10).
environment of the film studio is used to comment on cinema’s nature as both an artistic practice and a cultural industry associated with stardom. In *Kulisy ekrana*, the well-known actor Ivan Mozzhukhin plays himself. The fictional scenario tells how Mozzhukhin loses his arm while attempting a stunt during filming, and is replaced as the studio’s lead actor by a younger star. Mozzhukhin is in despair, until the studio invites him to return to work as a director. In the extant scenes, Mozzhukhin and his wife, the actress Natal’ia Lysenko, who also plays herself, return to the film studio where they had previously worked, and experience feelings of nostalgia for their former lives as film stars.

The sets created for the sequences that take place in the fictional film studio associate the world of cinema with a sense of modern glamour, while also serving to comment on film’s nature as a form of visual representation. An enormous baroque mirror fills the main film-making arena, reflecting the studio’s steel girders and high glass ceilings as well as the hustle and bustle of the film-makers working there (Fig. 5.11). In comparison to the theatre auditorium mirror in *Portret Doriana Greia*, here the mirror dominates the frame creating the impression of an all-reflecting background. The mirror and its reflected image thus evoke the quality of a projection screen, which serves to make the viewer aware of different paradigms of looking and methods of mediating images. As the fictional film-makers anticipate the arrival of Mozzhukhin and Lysenko, they peer through the glass walls of the studio, not only emphasising the cult surrounding star actors, but also specifically evoking the camera’s mechanism as a glass-lens optical device through which film-makers perceive the external world (Fig. 5.12).

Fig. 5.11. *Kulisy ekrana*, film studio reflected in the mirror.

71 It is reasonable to assume that Vladimir Balliuzev worked as the *kino-khudozhnik* given that he designed the sets for most of the Ermol’ev studio’s films in the late 1910s.
72 For alternative interpretations of the film’s scenario, see Deriabin ‘Kino o kino’, p. 10.
73 Tsiv’ian notes that the use of mirrors that extend beyond the frame is unique to early Russian films. Tsivian, ‘Portraits, Mirrors, Death’, p. 75.

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In addition to including self-referential optical devices such as glass and mirrors, the film-makers incorporate different forms of artistic representation into the film-studio sets. A tapestry of ornately framed paintings decorates the studio’s hallway from floor to ceiling (Fig. 5.13). Representing a range of genres and executed in various styles, the collection of paintings recalls Mikhin’s method of representing the artist’s studio in Za dveriami gostini and similarly works to associate cinema with the tradition of art history. Cinema’s relationship to existing artistic traditions is also emphasised in the scene in which Lysenko prepares to leave her home to visit the film studio. Positioned between a self-portrait bust and a framed picture of herself with Mozzhukhin, Lysenko looks up at each of the works in turn, inviting the viewer to draw a comparison between different representations of herself and how she appears before the camera (Fig. 5.14). The film-makers employ a similar strategy in the scene in which Mozzhukhin returns to his former dressing room (Fig. 5.15). A torn publicity still of Mozzhukhin is pinned to the wall and others are stacked untidily on the table. The publicity stills portray Mozzhukhin in some of his most acclaimed roles in late-Imperial cinema, including as Germann in Pikovaia dama (The Queen of Spades, 1916) and as Prince Stepan Kasatskii in Otets Sergii (Father Sergius, 1917). As Mozzhukhin leafs through the stills, his facial expression is reflected to the viewer in a mirror on the table. According to Aleksandr Deriabin, the shadow of Mozzhukhin’s profile cast on the wall recalls the distinctive final sequence in Pikovaia dama. The presence of shadows, reflections and

74 Vladimir Balliuzek worked as the kino-khudozhnik for both Pikovaia dama and Otets Sergii, supporting the speculation that he designed the sets for Kulisy ekrana.

75 Deriabin ‘Kino o kino’, p. 10. Mozzhukhin’s costume also resembles the one he wears as Germann in this scene in Pikovaia dama. The scene attracted considerable attention in the contemporary cinema press with a full-page article dedicated to it in Kino-gazeta. See Anon., ‘Germann i ero “ten”’, Kino-gazeta, 10, 1918, p. 9.
torn publicity stills in the dressing-room sequence evokes ideas about the ephemeral nature of film stardom. Such images also contrast with the framed picture and classical bust in the actors’ home which allude to Mozzhukhin and Lysenko’s desire to preserve the memory of their former glory days. As in the sequence with Lysenko, the juxtaposition of numerous mediated images of the actor – Mozzhukhin himself; the publicity stills; the actor’s image reflected in the mirror; the silhouette of his profile – again makes the viewer aware of different forms of representation and registers of looking. In a similar manner to Steven Jacobs’ reading of close-ups of publicity stills in films, the prolonged shots of Lysenko and Mozzhukhin contemplating images of themselves disrupt the narrative flow of the film and create a moment of stillness that forces the viewer to focus on the character being presented to them and the actor’s status as a star.76

Fig. 5.13. Kulisy ekrana, film studio corridor.

Fig. 5.14. Kulisy ekrana, Lysenko portraits.

The glamour myth associated with cinema is also addressed in the Mezhrabpom-rus’ studio’s *Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma* (The Cigarette Girl from Mossel’prom, 1924). On this film, the director and camera operator Iurii Zheliabuzhskii collaborated with the kino-khudozhnik Sergei Kozlovskii, continuing the partnership that they had formed in the late 1910s at the Rus’ studio. Vladimir Balliuzek assisted Kozlovskii with the set design. Immediately prior to working on *Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma*, Zheliabuzhskii and Kozlovskii had worked on *Aelita* (1924) with the writers Fedor Otsep and Aleksei Faiko, who also wrote the scenario for *Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma*. As in *Aelita*, the film takes place in contemporary Soviet Moscow but conflates the boundaries between the fictive and the real. The scenario follows a fictional film crew as they attempt to produce a film on Soviet everyday life. While out shooting in Moscow’s streets, the film-makers enlist the cigarette seller Zina as an extra in their production and the camera operator Latugin falls in love with her. Latugin secures a professional acting job for Zina and, before long, she becomes the star of her own film.

As a number of scholars have noted, *Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma* presents a critical take on Soviet film-making in the mid-1920s. In particular, it satirises the interest in films of Soviet everyday life. Throughout the film, Zheliabuzhskii, Kozlovskii and Balliuzek use sets and compositional

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strategies to question the premise of creating a fiction film that represents everyday life authentically by repeatedly highlighting the constructed nature of the sequences presented to the viewer. For example, the opening scene – a panorama of Moscow shot from an aeroplane – emphasises the film’s use of contemporary urban life as a cinematic setting. In the lower left corner of the frame, part of the aeroplane’s body is visible, suggesting that the image presented is not objective reality, but a view of Moscow mediated from a particular vantage point. In another scene, the director and Latugin use a large storefront display as a background in their film. The advertising images visible on the glass surface recall the dorisovki (painted glass backdrops) used in studio film-making to give the impression of background landscapes (Fig. 5.16). As in the artist’s studios in Za dveriami gostinoi and Umriashchii lebed’, empty space is left in the foreground of the frame, creating the appearance of a stage. In a later sequence, the filmmakers use a dummy to stage a scene of Zina jumping from a bridge; the metal railings of the bridge run parallel to the edge of the frame, reinforcing the presence of the frame’s border. When Latugin loses his job as a camera operator, he is forced to work as a street photographer and resorts to using artificial sets, photographing a couple posed against a painted backcloth of mountain scenery as they sit in a Moscow park (Fig. 5.17). The rugged nature of the painted landscape contrasts with the ornamental fountain and paved terraces of the city park, creating a play between appearances of the artificial and the real.

Fig. 5.16. Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma, street filming.

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80 For discussion of the use of dorisovki in set design, see Chapter One of this thesis, pp. 70-71.
While, for the most part, the fictional crew refrains from using artificially constructed sets in their film of everyday life, the film studio is depicted in several sequences. An establishing shot of the studio shows it filled with a selection of props typically found in late-Imperial films, including art nouveau furniture, patterned textiles and figurines. Studio film-making is thus associated with the pre-Revolutionary tradition of ornate interiors in contrast to a Soviet approach based on outdoor filming. In another sequence, the fictional crew attempt to shoot a scene using an interior set decorated in a style reminiscent of Bauer’s films (Fig. 5.18). An enormous china vase, placed on a chest of drawers, towers over Zina, possibly satirising Bauer’s approach of using dikovinki—symbolically characteristic objects placed in the foreground of frames—by reducing their function to mere eye-catchers. Moreover, as in Bauer’s films, Kozlovskii and Balliuzek use decadent interiors for their associations with commercialism. The film producer’s office, with its richly patterned fabrics and gothic-style furniture, recalls the office of the wealthy industrialist Pavel Zheleznoy in Nabat, as discussed in Chapter Four (Fig. 4.5 and 5.19). Such styling indicates the producer’s nature as a devious businessman, negligent of workers’ rights and concerned primarily with financial gain. In one scene set in his office, an open doorway in the background leads onto a view of the studio backlot, which is filled with undecorated fundus parts. The juxtaposition of the producer’s ornate interior and the bare plywood boards sets up a contrast between the studio management’s commercial imperatives and the film-makers’ pursuit of economy and rational production.

81 Examples of films that incorporate such props include Ditia bol’shogo goroda (1914), Iuri Nagornyi (1916) and Gornichnaya Dzhenni (The Maidservant Jenny, 1918).
82 See Chapter Four of this thesis, p. 169.
It is notable that Kozlovskii and Balliuzek repeatedly use the undecorated *fundus* as a background. In one scene, Latugin and Zina flirt with one another as they sit amid a stack of plywood panels (Fig. 5.20). With their flat geometric forms arranged into abstract patterns, the combination of *fundus* parts resembles the non-objective compositions that were produced by members of the Constructivist group, such as Liubov’ Popova’s series *Zhivopisnaia arkhitekturika* (Painterly Architectonics, 1916-1918).\(^{83}\) Kozlovskii and Balliuzek’s valorisation of the *fundus* as an expressive element reflects the commitment to rationalising production techniques evidenced by

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83 For discussion of the non-objective compositions of Russian Constructivist artists, see Gough, *The Artist as Producer*, pp. 61-100.
many kino-khudozhniki in the mid-1920s. As we recall from Chapter One, Kozlovskii was a key interlocutor in debates about economising production methods and innovating set technology, and he illustrated many of his articles on the subject with studio photographs of plywood panels assembled into various configurations. In addition to the fundus, the film-makers also romanticise Latugin’s Pathé camera. In the sequences set in the studio, it is positioned on a raised dais in the centre of the frame, its simple but elegant geometric form contrasting with the jumble of ornamental props in the background. In several scenes depicting Latugin filming on location, the camera is framed against picturesque backgrounds of Moscow’s parks and historic monuments such as Saint Basil’s Cathedral. As he flirts with Zina, Latugin leaves the camera to film everyday life unaided, thus endowing it with a certain agency. The camera’s anthropomorphic form, with its central body and outstretched legs, further emphasises its status as an active participant in representing everyday life over a mere technical device.

Throughout Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’ proma, there is also a distinct focus on cinema as a production process. We see technicians editing films and processing negatives. Close-up shots and directed lighting highlight the metallic body of the drying rack for film negatives, recalling the way in which industrial machinery is represented in the production sequences of films set in factories, as discussed in Chapter Four. Moreover, Kozlovskii and Balliuzek use the form of the film negative

84 For example, see Sergei Kozlovskii, ‘Tekhnika kinosatel’’, Kino i kul’tura, 5, 1925, pp. 57-59 and Kolin and Kozlovskii, Khudozhnik-arkhitektor v kino, pp. 378-422.

as a recurring visual motif, repeating its vertical pattern in the protagonists’ striped costumes, in
the wallpaper that decorates certain interiors and in the fences of Moscow’s streets. The
romanticisation of film production and film-making equipment serves to emphasise cinema’s
creative possibilities as a new technology, contrasting with the way in which film-makers and
theorists of the 1910s strove to distance cinema from its mechanical nature by associating it with
a fine arts tradition.

In comparison to the focus on the film-making process in Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma, in Potselui
Meri Pikford the main theme is the celebrity culture that cinema generates. The scenario, co-
written by the film’s directors Sergei Komarov and Vadim Shershenevich, tells of Goga Palkin’s
rise from cinema ticket-checker to local celebrity after he is accidentally included in a love scene
with the Hollywood star Mary Pickford and receives a kiss from her. Palkin’s new celebrity status
enables him to pursue a romance with Dusia, who was previously interested only in star actors
such as Douglas Fairbanks. The film satirises the mania among Soviet audiences for Hollywood
stars such as Fairbanks and Pickford, whose visit to the Soviet Union in July 1926 was a media
sensation.86 The film-makers even used documentary footage of the couple’s visit in the film.

Potselui Meri Pikford was another Mezhrabpom-rus’ production for which Sergei Kozlovskii
designed the sets, this time collaborating with the kino-khudozhnik Dmitrii Kolupaev. As discussed
in Chapter Two, during the mid- to late 1920s Kolupaev was interested in ethnographic
research and promoted the merits of location filming over studio filming.87 His involvement in
this film, which was largely shot in the studio and used artificial sets, is therefore surprising; it
highlights the fact that during this period film studios typically employed kino-khudozhniki on
contracts that required them to work on a variety of film genres regardless of their own creative
preferences.88

In Potselui Meri Pikford, Kozlovskii and Kolupaev’s interiors convey the decadence and glamour of
cinema culture. As in Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’proma, the studio administrator’s office is decorated
with ornate art nouveau furniture and statuettes, while the cinema foyer has an elegant art deco
staircase and flooring and is filled with exotic palms (Fig. 5.21). As Tsiv’ian and Lucy Fischer
both demonstrate, the art deco style was closely associated with cinema culture, with both

86 The publishers Kinopechat’ dedicated a booklet to Fairbanks and Pickford’s visit. During their tour of
Moscow, the Hollywood stars visited the Mezhrabpom-rus’ studio and met Igor’ Il’inskii. On their
visit to the Soviet Union, see Jeffrey Brooks, ‘The Press and Its Message: Images of America in the
1920s and 1930s’ in Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites (eds), Russia in the
237 and Alan Ball, Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia, Oxford: Rowman &
87 See Chapter Two of this thesis, p. 110.
88 For discussion of studio contracts, see Chapter One of this thesis, p. 56.
sharing roots in industrialisation and modernity and invoking a sense of dynamic mobility. From the mid-1920s, Hollywood and European cinemas became major showcases for popularising the style. Kozlovskii and Kolupaev’s use of art deco for the cinema therefore works to convey Soviet cinema’s emulation of and fascination with Western cinema trends. Moreover, the foyer’s walls are covered with publicity posters and celebrity headshots of American actors such as Douglas Fairbanks, highlighting Soviet cinema culture’s fascination with Hollywood celebrities.

Fig. 5.21. *Potselui Meri Pikford*, cinema foyer.

The hold that celebrities exert over the public’s imagination and fantasies is emphasised through Palkin and Dusia’s interaction with publicity images. Palkin decorates his home with advertising posters of Fairbanks playing Zorro in the 1920 Hollywood production *The Mark of Zorro*. Emulating Fairbanks, Palkin wears a similar mask while he attempts to perform stunts. When Palkin falls, the camera cuts in to focus on the image of Zorro, whose smiling face appears to taunt Palkin. This recalls an earlier sequence in the cinema theatre in which, after Dusia rejects Palkin, the same poster of Zorro appears to mock him, leading him to tear it from the wall (Fig. 5.22). Throughout the film, portrait photographs also play a key role in forming characters’ desires and negotiating their relationships with one another. Dusia and Palkin’s romance is

90 Ibid., pp. 56-57.
92 In *Odna iz mnogikh*, the protagonist also decorates her room with publicity stills and posters of Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford.
largely played out through photographs. As Dusia voices her disinterest in Palkin, she defaces a photograph of him, drawing a moustache on his face. This gesture of ridicule also makes Palkin resemble Fairbanks in the headshot that Dusia later steals from the auditorium wall to keep as a love memento. Palkin keeps in his jacket pocket a photograph of Dusia which he periodically looks at, and he is distraught when it is ruined during a cryogenic experiment. Publicity posters and portrait photographs therefore allude to Dusia and Palkin’s fantasist nature and their habit of forming desires based on constructed representations rather than on reality.93

Fig. 5.22. Poletui Meri Pikford, celebrity images.

Ideas relating to visual trickery are conveyed through a number of Kozlovskii and Kolupaev’s sets. In one sequence, a silhouette of two figures seen through the glass door of the cryogenic lab deceives Palkin, who is convinced that a doctor is strangling a patient. As Palkin receives cryogenic treatment, the large turning wheel spins him so fast that he is flung into a corner of the room, leading the scientists to believe that he has vanished. The spinning wheel distinctively recalls a fairground attraction, such as that depicted in Chertovo koleso (The Devil’s Wheel, 1926). A number of the film’s sets function as apparatuses for performing stunts. In one scene, Palkin is hoisted on a concrete slab high above the film studio; when he falls, the film-makers think he has performed a disappearing act. In another, Palkin performs a bicycle trick on a tightrope.

Kozlovskii and Kolupaev also incorporated trick objects in their sets. Telephones and office equipment are revealed to be hidden cameras, which secretly film Palkin. The use of sets as a form of visual gag or as apparatuses for stunt performances was a typical feature of American

93 This recalls the way in which Bauer uses statuettes, painted portraits and photographs in the studies of his male protagonists to comment on their fantasist nature, as discussed in Chapter Four. In Sumerki zheniskoi dushi (Twilight of a Woman’s Soul, 1913), Bauer also includes publicity photographs of the female protagonist Vera as a stage performer. See Morley, Performing Femininity, p. 65.
film comedy, and thus again served to satirise American cinema culture. It was also a hallmark of circus forms such as the balagan. As Douglas Clayton observes, during the 1920s a number of film-makers perceived certain similarities between cinema and the circus balagan. In their 1922 theatre adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s Zhenit’ba (The Marriage, 1842), the Fabrika ekstsentricheskogo aktera (FEKS, Factory of the Eccentric Actor) directors Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg combined elements of the circus, such as genuine acrobats and clowns, with the screening of visual material from a Charlie Chaplin film. Sergei Eizenshtein similarly created the film sequence Dnevnik Glumova (Glumov’s Diary, 1923) to be projected against the background of his circus-inspired sets for Sergei Tret’iakov’s 1922 adaptation of Aleksandr Ostrovskii’s Na vsiakogo nudretsas dovol’no prostoty (Enough Stupidity in Every Wise Man, 1868). By incorporating techniques from the circus into their practice, avant-garde creatives could highlight cinema’s appeal as a form of mass entertainment appropriate to modern society, departing from the way in which film-makers in the 1910s employed set techniques from the fine arts to elevate cinema’s status as an artistic medium.

II. The Circus

In addition to drawing on circus techniques, film-makers also depicted circus environments to comment self-referentially on cinema’s nature as both an art form and a commercial enterprise. Petr Chardynin’s 1918 two-part drama Molchi, grust’... molchi... (Still, Sadness...) and Skazka liubvi dorogoi (A Tale of Precious Love), produced at the Kharitonov studio, is significant in this respect, including a number of self-referential devices in its set design. The film was made as a ‘iubilenaia kartina’ [jubilee picture] to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Chardynin’s début as a cinema director. As Morley highlights, Chardynin went to great lengths making the film: he wrote an original scenario; he assembled a team of expert film-makers, including the co-directors Czesław Sabiński and Viacheslav Viskovskii, the camera operators Vladimir Siversen and Grigorii Drobin, and the kino-khudozhnik Aleksei Utkin; he cast eminent actors, notably Vera Kholodnaia, Vladimir Maksimov and Vitol’d Polonskii, in lead roles; and

98 In the 1910s, it was common for film-makers to recycle props from film to film. In my analysis, however, I am referring to films in which the intertextuality is deliberate.
99 Several reviews described the film as a ‘iubilenaia kartina’, see Anon., Kino-gazeta, 8, 1918, p. 4 and Veronin [Valentin Turkin], Kino-gazeta, 23, 1918, pp. 13-15 (p. 13). A special issue of Kino-gazeta was dedicated to Molchi, grust’... molchi.... See Kino-gazeta, 20, 1918.
he spent four months shooting the film. However, as Morley notes, despite Chardynin’s ambitions, the film was not well-received in the contemporary cinema press, with the critic Valentin Turkin commenting disparagingly on the film-makers’ recycling of themes, motifs and settings familiar to late-Imperial cinema. While Turkin argued that the rehashing of cinema conventions demonstrated the film-makers’ inability to innovate a new cinematic approach, Morley suggests that the inter-textual references were a ‘conscious aesthetic programme’, likely motivated by Chardynin’s desire to pay tribute to the Russian fiction film industry, which – like the director himself – celebrated its tenth anniversary in 1918. The way in which Utkin appropriates motifs and settings from the tradition of late-Imperial cinema and reworks them to comment on the theme of artistic independence supports Morley’s argument that the film-makers incorporated inter-textual references deliberately.

Although only the first part of the film, titled Molchi, grust´... molchi..., survives, it provides ample evidence of Utkin’s extensive incorporation of inter-textual references in his sets and costumes. First, as Morley notes, in assuming the character of Pola, Kholodnaia reprises one of her most popular roles – that of a circus performer – which she had played when cast as Mara Zet in the non-extant Pozabud´ pro kamin, v nem pogasli ogni... (Forget About the Fireplace, the Flames Have Gone Out..., 1917), on which Utkin had also worked as the kino-khudoznik. According to Morley, publicity materials show that Kholodnaia wore similar costumes in both films. Moreover, as she argues, the beginning of Pola’s romance with Prakhov recalls Bauer’s portrayal in Deti veka of how Mariia – also played by Kholodnaia – and Lebedev begin their love affair (see Chapter Three). The similarities between the two sequences are notable in terms of set design. Prakhov attempts to woo Pola in an interior filled with plants, recalling Lidiia’s conservatory in Deti veka. A number of the film’s other settings recall those commonly found in Bauer’s films, including Prakhov’s study, with its richly patterned wallpaper and array of ornaments, as discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis. Here, again, such interiors serve to highlight the materialistic nature of the film’s protagonists. Having initially worked as a kino-khudoznik for the Khanzhonkov studio on films such as Zhizn´ za zhizn´ (A Life for a Life, 1916), Utkin developed his set design approach under Bauer’s influence.

However, in contrast to Bauer’s sets for films such as Deti veka, in which ornate interiors reflect how the world of commerce compromises the domestic sphere (see Chapter Three), in Molchi, grust´... molchi... Utkin uses elaborate sets to show how it threatens creative independence. In

100 Morley, Performing Femininity, p. 212.
101 Ibid., p. 214.
102 Ibid., p. 215.
103 Ibid., p. 214.
105 Ibid., p. 215.
several interiors in *Molchi, grust’... molchì...*, Utkin introduces subtle changes to the typical Bauer approach to design. In Prakhov’s living room, for example, instead of Bauer’s favoured prop of female nude statuettes, Utkin incorporates a statuette of a snarling bulldog, alluding to Prakhov’s malicious intentions and crude manner. In a later sequence set in the same living room, Utkin includes a statuette of a woman huddled over and crying, contrasting with the refined poses of the classical statuettes used in Bauer’s films. Placed directly behind Pola as she slumps in dejection, the statuette directly comments on Pola’s disappointment at her life with Prakhov. The inclusion of such details lends the film what Morley describes as a ‘melancholic’ atmosphere, which reflects its scenario about Lorio and Pola’s fall from artistic grace and struggle to survive as independent performers.\(^\text{106}\) Lorio and Pola’s dimly lit basement flat resembles a hovel more than a home (Fig. 5.23). A mattress rests on the floor with the sheets in disarray and posters peel from the dirty walls, conveying the protagonists’ pitiful existence after they lose their circus jobs. For Morley, the film’s melancholic tone reflects the socio-cultural climate of its making; released in January 1918, when the nationalisation of the late-Imperial cinema industry was imminent, *Molchi, grust’... molchì...* anticipates the end of independent studio film-making.\(^\text{107}\)

Fig. 5.23. *Molchi, grust’... molchì...*, Lorio and Pola’s home.

Indeed, the loss of artistic independence is a prominent theme in the film. Lorio and Pola’s marginalisation from the mainstream art world is represented spatially through Utkin’s set design. In the first sequence in which Lorio and Pola work as street performers, they are initially excluded from the frame before a slow horizontal pan gradually brings them into view. Throughout the sequence, the couple remain in a marginal position at the edge of the frame as they perform on a slightly raised pavement, which evokes a stage (Fig. 5.24). It is notable that in

\[^{106}\text{Ibid., p. 216.}\]
\[^{107}\text{Ibid.}\]
the sequence in which they perform at Prakhov’s party for his wealthy aristocratic friends, Lorio and Pola are not given a stage, but are crammed in among the crowd, barely distinguishable from the other guests. Similarly, when Pola subsequently performs with a gypsy party, she is denied any performative space of her own. Such positioning contrasts with the way in which Lorio and Pola occupy space when they perform in the circus. Here, they stage their act in the centre of the arena, which takes up most of the frame, while the aristocratic audience is pushed to the margins. Although subtle, the difference in positioning evokes a sense of anxiety surrounding artistic independence that film-makers must have felt with the impending nationalisation of the Russian film industry.

Fig. 5.24. Molchi, grust’... molchi..., Lorio and Pola as street performers.

During the Soviet 1920s, a number of film-makers were drawn to the circus as a setting for its associations with artistic freedom and liberation. In FEKS’s *Chertovo koleso*, the high art establishments of the Dom kul’tury (House of Culture) and the Institut plasticheskogo iskusstva (Institute of Pictorial Arts) are taken over by circus acrobats and magicians, whose performances are frequented by city low-lives and criminals who use the space as an illicit drinking den. In addition to its potential for dramatising ideas about rejecting established codes, film-makers were also interested in the agitational potential of the circus. Since the mid- to late 1910s, Russian critics had associated the circus with overcoming physical obstacles and disrupting social boundaries.\(^{108}\) In his text ‘The Art of Circus’ (1923), for example, the LEF writer Viktor Shklovskii argued that the principle of ‘difficulty’ defined the circus as an art.\(^ {109}\) Similarly, Kuleshov viewed circus tricks as more than mere stunts; rather, they demonstrated the


accomplishment of challenging tasks, comparing them to a form of work. A number of avant-garde creatives also sought to harness circus buffoonery for political ends. In his scenario for \textit{Na vsiakogo mudretsia dovol’no prostoty}, Tret’iakov used the circus arena as an agitational space, with clowns and acrobats playing roles that parodied contemporary political figures. Eizenshtein’s set for the adaptation was modelled on a circus arena and was equipped with various acrobatic apparatuses, including trapeze wires, planks, tightropes and a trampoline. This fascination with the agitational potential of the circus continued throughout the 1920s. As several critics writing in the contemporary cinema press observed, a number of films of the late 1920s and early 1930s – including \textit{2-Bul’di-2} (The Two Buldis, 1929), \textit{Poslednii atraktsion} (The Last Attraction, 1929) \textit{Benefis klouna Zhorzha} (The Benefit of Clown George, 1930, non-extant) and \textit{Smertnyi iumor} (Deadly Humour, 1930, non-extant) – set their action against the backdrop of the Revolution and the Civil War and used circus tricks and acrobatics to address issues of social struggle. In the two surviving films, \textit{2-Bul’di-2} and \textit{Poslednii atraktsion}, the film-makers exploit and problematise the circus as a vehicle for political agitation.

When approaching the task of representing the circus in the Mezhrabpom-film \textit{2-Bul’di-2}, Kuleshov collaborated with the \textit{kino-khudozhnik} Kozlovskii, who was again assisted by Balliuzek. The scenario, by the \textit{LEF} theorist Osip Brik, tells the story of a father-and-son clown duo, who work for a provincial circus in a Russian town initially under Bolshevik control during the Civil War. As the White Army approaches, the son, Little Bul’di, mobilises the circus in an attempt to resist. Nevertheless, the town falls and the circus is subject to the terrors of pro-tsarist rule, with Big Bul’di forced to perform degrading comic acts, such as setting himself on fire. Believing that his son has been shot by counter-revolutionary forces, Big Bul’di initially submits to the Imperial regime before experiencing a political awakening when he discovers that his son is alive.

While \textit{2-Bul’di-2} is set during the Civil War years, the theme of the subjugation of artists to political regimes held particular significance in the late 1920s when the film was produced. Work on the film began in 1928, but criticism of both its lack of appropriate political content and its

111 Cavendish, ‘From “Lost” to “Found”’, para. 4 of 33.
112 Ibid.
114 Kozlovskii and Balliuzek would collaborate once more, on Mezhrabpomfilm’s \textit{Prazdnik sviatogo Iorgena} (The Festival of St. Jorgen, 1930).
115 Brik was a close associate of Tret’iakov, working alongside him as a contributor and editor of \textit{Lef} and \textit{Novyi lef}, and he may well have drawn on Tret’iakov’s adaptation of \textit{Na vsiakogo mudretsia dovol’no prostoty} when writing the scenario for \textit{2-Bul’di-2}.
perceived formal inadequacies meant that it underwent a number of script re-writes.\textsuperscript{116} It was also partially re-filmed with the assistance of the director Nina Agadzhananova, before being granted limited release in August 1929.\textsuperscript{117} The film’s production therefore coincided with a period of increased centralisation in Soviet cinema, which was outlined at the first All-Union Party Cinema Conference in March 1928.\textsuperscript{118} During this period, the circus was also subjected to greater state control, as set out in a series of decrees passed from 1928 by the Tsentral’noe upravlenie gosudarstvennykh tsirkov (TsUGTs, Central Administration of State Circuses).\textsuperscript{119}

In \textit{2-Bul’di-2}, the close relationship between art and politics is made clear in the setting of the opening sequences, which depict soldiers at the front. A group of them gather in a circle, anticipating the form of the circus ring that is the film’s principal setting. In the background of the frame, the ropes of the army tents evoke the trapeze wires of the circus, while the tracks of military artillery in the barren landscape have a visual parallel in the chariot wheel tracks that appear in the circus arena in later sequences. The connection between the circus and militant activity is also emphasised in the introductory shots of the circus ring, which cast it as a political arena (Fig. 5.25). From its centre, Little Bul’di makes an agitational speech, encouraging the audience to support the Bolshevik cause. Later in the film, the audience is filled with Red Army soldiers, their upright rifles framing the arena (Fig. 5.26). Kozlovskii and Balliuzek’s austere sets for the arena, devoid of the pageantry and glamour typically associated with the circus, are also significant in this respect.

The circus’s ideological potential was well recognised throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. Following the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks requisitioned the circus for political ends, developing a range of didactic and agitational spectacles that promoted revolutionary themes and messages.\textsuperscript{120} During the Civil War era, the Red Army staged a number of circus performances to disseminate their account of events at the front to the masses.\textsuperscript{121} In a 1925 article ‘Piat’ let gosudarstvennykh tsirkov’ (Five Years of State Circuses), the People’s Commissar for Education and Enlightenment Anatolii Lunarcharskii emphasised the circus’s potential as a revolutionary art form, for being close to the masses, and argued that it could be used to enlighten and to instruct the Soviet proletariat.\textsuperscript{122} However, despite official recognition of the circus’s propaganda potential, throughout the 1920s critics complained of the Soviet circus’s


\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., pp. 33-42 and Burenina-Petrova, \textit{Tsirk v prostranstve kul’tury}, pp. 195-97.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 195.

\textsuperscript{122} Anatolii Lunarcharskii, ‘Piat’ let gosudarstvennykh tsirkov’, \textit{Tsirk}, 3, 1925, p. 3.
conservatism. Writing in 1929 in the journal *Tsirk i estrada*, the critic Sergei Sokolov noted that circus performances continued to be based on bourgeois, pre-Revolutionary traditions and were devoid of agitational content.

The disparity between the circus’s bourgeois heritage and its revolutionary potential is played out in the film through the juxtaposition of different types of performers and acts. Dressed in a ridiculous outfit of oversized clothes and with garish make-up, the buffoon-like clown Big Bul’di contrasts with Little Bul’di and his agile physique, sumptuous costume and subtle make-up (Fig 5.25).

During the 1930s, the drive to modernise and Sovietise the circus continued to be a concern and was addressed in Mosfil’m’s *Tsirk* (The Circus, 1936), which follows the attempt to create a ideologically appropriate Soviet act, ‘Polet v stratosferu’, to replace pre-revolutionary and Western circus repertoires.

123 During the 1930s, the drive to modernise and Sovietise the circus continued to be a concern and was addressed in Mosfil’m’s *Tsirk* (The Circus, 1936), which follows the attempt to create a ideologically appropriate Soviet act, ‘Polet v stratosferu’, to replace pre-revolutionary and Western circus repertoires.
On one level, the pairing of the two Bul’dis references the traditional circus partnership of the eccentric red-headed clown [ryzhii], who wreaks havoc, and the elegant white-faced clown [belyi], who maintains order. On another, however, the two Bul’dis represent the clash between the old tradition of the circus and its revolutionary potential. As Donald McManus notes, in early twentieth-century theatres this opposition frequently functioned as a political metaphor for tensions between existing, authoritarian social orders and revolutionary class struggle. Big Bul’di performs simple comic tricks, which emphasise his ridiculous nature and are often based on body humour: he trips and tumbles as he chases a ball around the ring, the audience laughing at his clumsy and uncontrolled movements; he sets himself on fire, then bumps his head, causing an enormous swelling to appear, before spurting jets of tears.

By contrast, Little Bul’di performs acrobatics that demand physical strength and poise. As tsarist forces storm the city, Little Bul’di somersaults to avoid their gunfire. Similarly, at the end of the film, he trapezes his way across the circus arena to freedom. Little Bul’di’s acrobatics recall the 1918 performance of the eminent Russian acrobat Vitalii Lazarenko, which became known as the ‘Revolutionary Leap’ for the way he vaulted across a series of obstacles. Moreover, in a 1928 decree, TsUGTs singled out acrobatics for their potential to enlighten the masses in so far as they demonstrated the qualities of determination and rigour. Little Bul’di is further portrayed as a new, revolutionary type of circus artist through his activities as an agitator and a social activist. The reconceptualisation of the artist as activist gained currency in the late 1920s. In 1928 – the same year in which Kuleshov began work on 2-Bul’di-2 – Tret’iakov

125 On this traditional circus partnership, see Neirich, When Pigs Could Fly and Bears Could Dance, pp. 38-39.
128 Ibid., p. 80.
published in the journal *Novyi lef* a number of polemical tracts in which he called for artists to take up agitational roles to mobilise the proletariat to carry out tasks that would advance the socialist cause.\(^{129}\) Since the 1910s, a number of creatives had marked out the circus as a space for individual empowerment and political activism.\(^{130}\) In the 1919 article ‘*Veselyi sanatorii*’ (The Happy Sanatorium), the artist and theatre designer Iuri Annenkov identified the circus as a special place in which anyone might become a hero.\(^{131}\)

Placed in contrast to the heroic, revolutionary activist Little Bul’di is the horse-tamer, who demonstrates pro-tsarist sympathies. Dressed in a white shirt with leather gloves and seated on a horse ostentatiously decorated with tassels and animal furs, the horse-tamer represents the equestrian showmanship favoured in late-Imperial circuses.\(^{132}\) Whipping the horses to gallop in particular formations, the tamer uses force to subordinate others to his will. His victory lap round the ring is later repeated by the White Army Cossacks when they seize the circus. The horse-tamer therefore represents how art can be appropriated as a method of guidance and control, in contrast to the positive image of art in the service of social activism embodied in the figure of Little Bul’di.

The idea that art should serve an agitational function was not uncontested, however. In his 1923 text *Khod konia* (Knight’s Move), Shklovskii lamented that ‘[...] the greatest misfortune of our time is that the government is regulating art without knowing what it is [...]’. The greatest misfortune of Russian art is that it is not allowed to move organically, as the heart moves in a man’s chest: it is being regulated like the movement of trains.\(^{133}\) Released in September 1929, the Sovkino studio’s *Poslednii attraktsion* criticises the state’s requisitioning of the circus to propagate ideological messages to the masses. Ol’ga Preobrazhenskaia and Ivan Pravov directed the film and Aleksei Utkin designed the sets. Shklovskii’s scenario for the film tells the story of a travelling circus troupe from the Caucasus which is requisitioned during the Civil War when an agitator joins the troupe and forces them to adapt their acts into highly propagandistic and theatricalised performances that will edify the rural masses.

Following the Sovkino studio’s preference in the mid- to late 1920s for location over studio filmmaking, most of the film is shot outdoors.\(^{134}\) In his sets, Utkin exploited the natural features of

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\(^{130}\) Donald McManus notes that in a number of national twentieth-century theatres the circus clown was associated with critiquing authority and thus functioned as a political metaphor. McManus, *No Kidding*, pp. 15-16.


\(^{133}\) Shklovskii, *Knight’s Move*, p. 8.

\(^{134}\) Preobrazhenskaia and Pravov directed *Poslednii attraktsion* immediately after their work on *Baby riazanskie* (The Women of Riazan, 1927), which also used location filming rather than studio sets.
the rural landscape to convey the unrefined character and carefree lifestyle of the circus performers. Introductory shots of the troupe show them half-dressed and framed against rugged rock faces, wild vegetation and countryside untouched by human intervention. Such scenes emphasise the troupe’s existence on the margins of civilised society, as well as the performers’ uncouth nature. The rickety carriage which carries them across the countryside and the make-shift stage on which they perform reflect the improvised quality of the performers’ acts and convey the circus’s status as a low art form (Fig. 5.28). Moreover, the troupe’s costumes are stylised and their bodies grotesque: like that of Big Bul’di, the clown’s makeup is garish and his costume is exaggerated; the weight-lifter’s grubby belly protrudes from his tight leotard; and the dancer’s tutu is revealing, permitting extended views of her cleavage and buttocks.

![Fig. 5.28. Poslednii attraktsion, circus stage.](image)

The grotesque bodies and unrefined nature of the circus troupe contrast starkly with the pretensions of the Bolshevik agitator. In the scene in which the agitator is introduced to the viewer, he wears a plain workers’ overall and contemplates a bust of Socrates as he searches for propaganda inspiration (Fig. 5.29). Despite the agitator’s aspirations, the propaganda performances that he orchestrates for the circus troupe are contrived and derivative. In one scene, in order to impress a group of villagers, the agitator dresses as a pretend weight lifter, stuffing his jumper to create the blatantly artificial impression of muscles. In another, he repaints the circus caravan with an image of menacing Imperial soldiers carrying a banner with the agitational slogan ‘Враг несет рабство, голод, и смерть’ [The enemy brings slavery, hunger and death], but using the same stylised forms as the caravan’s previous circus advertisement. In a later sequence, the agitational spectacle which he creates for the troupe to perform in front of villagers is highly theatricalised and draws on well-known stereotypes. The production tells of the ills of capitalism and the triumph of labour, recalling in theme one of the first Bolshevik
agitational performances about the struggle between labour and capital: Ivan Rukavishnikov’s 1919 *Politicheskii karusel’* (Political Carousel). Cast in the role of the greedy American capitalist, the clown wears a costume of a bulging money sack and stands framed against an enormous spider’s web (Fig. 5.30), closely resembling the fat capitalists in Viktor Deni’s agitational posters, such as *Kapital* (Capital, 1919) and *Liga natsii: kapitalisty vsekh stran soediniates’!* (League of Nations: Capitalists of the World, Unite!, 1920). The money sack’s opening, however, recalls the traditional ruff of a clown costume, emphasising the comic nature of the capitalist’s caricatured appearance. In similarly exaggerated costumes, the young female acrobat carries an artificial oversized sickle and bundle of corn, while the male acrobat is dressed as a worker with an enormous hammer.

Fig. 5.29. *Poslednii attraktsion*, agitator and Socrates.

Fig. 5.30. *Poslednii attraktsion*, theatricalised performance.


The rehashing of Soviet propaganda stereotypes serves to critique the agitator’s perception of culture as a vessel for propagating ideological messages. This idea is clearly portrayed in a sequence which depicts the agitator sitting in front of a blank propaganda placard (Fig. 5.32). As he stares at it, trying to think up an agitational slogan, a projection of a Bolshevik agitator appears across its surface. Devoid of a background setting and any artistic intervention or stylisation, the image appears exclusively as a form of agitation to disseminate a political message. In this way, it recalls Shklovskii’s criticism in *Khod konia* that following the Revolution artists’ skills were being reduced to designing propaganda posters that lacked artistic merit.137

The way in which the placard is propped on a stand resembles a canvas on an easel. Moreover, the varnish on the wooden planks recalls the texture of a painted canvas, while the projected quality of the image evokes the cinema. These details suggest that the film-makers were expressing a broad criticism about the state’s requisitioning of not only the circus, but also of art forms in general to serve a purely political function. Such a message would have held particular urgency in the late 1920s and early 1930s, when the state was increasing its control over artistic production in a process which would lead to the inauguration of Socialist Realism as the official method for all cultural forms under the 1932 decree ‘O perestroike literaturno-khudozhestvennykh organizatsii’ (On the Reconstruction of Literary and Artistic Organisations).138

Fig. 5.31. Poslednii attraktsion, agitational placard.

IV. Conclusion

In the 1930 Souizkino production *Goroda i gody* (Cities and Years), directed by Evgenii Cherviakov and with sets designed by Semen Meinkin, part of the film’s action takes place in the Munich studio of the fictional Russian émigré artist Andrei Startsev. While in the 1910s film-makers had included artists’ studios in a number of films, by the 1930s it was a highly unusual choice of setting. As in *Za dveriami gostinoi*, the artist Startsev is initially concerned with increasing his cultural status, using his studio to secure patronage from members of the upper-class, in particular a high-ranking German officer. Meinkin’s set represents the studio as situated in an attic overlooking Munich’s rooftops and isolated from social life. Sitting with his back to the window, Startsev’s sole interest is his painting, which, placed in the centre of the studio, dominates the room. Throughout the film, painting is derided as a superficial and outmoded art form: gilt-framed paintings in avant-garde styles are exhibited at salons frequented by shallow members of the bourgeoisie, who senselessly follow the latest fashions; in a later sequence, a painted portrait of the Tsar is paraded through the Saint Petersburg streets by Imperialist supporters. As the Revolution breaks out in Russia, however, and the country is plunged into civil war, Startsev experiences a political awakening — as with Big Bul’di in 2-Bul’di-2. He begins to paint morbid canvases condemning ‘chelovekoubiistvo’ [human massacres]. Subsequently, he returns to Russia to join the Red Army and becomes involved in ‘social work’, reconstructing the city’s infrastructure.

In contrast to film-makers of the 1910s, Cherviakov and Meinkin thus use the figure of the artist and his working environment not only to pose self-reflexive questions about the cultural status of artists, but also to explore the social responsibility of creatives in revolutionary society, corresponding with the way in which film-makers in the late 1920s used the circus arena. *Goroda i gody* therefore exemplifies the shift in film-makers’ preoccupations in representing artistic environments that this chapter has traced, from exploring ontological questions about artistic media to addressing social issues about creative independence and artists’ role in revolutionary society.

Initially, in the 1910s, film-makers used artists’ studios as a key site to explore ideas about cinema’s status as an art and its relationship to other artistic media. In *Za dveriami gostinoi*, Mikhin’s inclusion of specific paintings and use of compositions recalling well-known artworks served to create a cultured cinema through playing to film viewers’ art historical knowledge. As the decade progressed, film-makers began to use the environment of the artist’s studio to address ontological questions about cinema’s artistic nature. In *Portret Doriana Greia* and *Ego glaza*, Egorov derived his use of mirrors and paintings as props from the tradition of the fine arts, and
employed them to elevate cinema from its origins as a photographic form of representation inclined towards verisimilitude. In Umirauiushchii lebed’ Bauer similarly used the artist’s studio to explore questions about the expressive limits and possibilities of painting and cinema, and to stake a claim for cinema’s superiority in conveying abstract sensations and emotions. As critics in the 1920s increasingly interrogated painting’s status as an art appropriate to revolutionary society, Russian fiction films refrained from representing artists’ studios. Rather, film-makers used environments associated with film production and spectatorship in order to comment on cinema’s artistic potential. In Kulisy ekrana, Papirosnitsa ot Mossel’ proma and Poselui Meri Pikford, the film-makers used props and settings that emphasised cinema’s creative possibilities as a new technology, as well as drew attention to its status as a cultural industry. As the 1920s progressed, film-makers increasingly moved away from using artistic environments to address ontological questions relating to cinema and the arts; instead, they focused on exploring creative independence and artists’ social responsibility, reflecting the state’s increasing control over the cultural sphere and mobilisation of the arts to serve a political function during this period. While in Molchi, grust’... molchi... Chardynin and Utkin employed the circus as a trope to reflect on the theme of artistic freedom, in 2-Bul’di-2 and Poslednii attraktsion the circus arena became a politicised space, which film-makers used to interrogate arts’ agitational function to promote a certain political message.

This shift in the ways in which film-makers used artistic environments corresponds with what the art historian Benjamin Buchloh identifies as a change in agenda among Russian artists working across the 1910s and 1920s, from a concern with self-reflexive issues of artistic representation to a focus on questions about their role as social and political activists.139 The chapter thus highlights how film-makers also engaged with contemporary artistic debates, using cinema to explore questions about the ontological nature of different artistic media and the social responsibility of artists.

As Soviet film-makers embarked on a new era of sound cinema in the 1930s, the *kino-khudozhnik*’s role remained a subject of debate. Throughout the decade, *kino-khudozhniki* writing in the contemporary cinema press lamented that they were still not fully recognised for their distinctive contribution to cinema. In an article titled ‘Khudozhnik v kino’ (The Artist in Cinema), published in *Iskusstvo kino* in 1936, Vladimir Kaplunovskii noted that cinema audiences and even film-makers continued to ask the questions: ‘кто является кинохудожником, каковы его обязанности и каково его место в кино?’ [who is the *kino-khudozhnik*, what are his responsibilities, and what is his place in cinema?]. He claimed that the various titles used for the *kino-khudozhnik*—*khudozhnik-arkhitketor*, *khudozhnik-oformitel’* and *khudozhnik-dekorator*—had only added to the confusion. Kaplunovskii’s article appeared alongside those dedicated to the increased importance of the scenarist and the composer in Soviet cinema, suggesting an anxiety about the *kino-khudozhnik*’s creative rights with the advent of sound technology. Articles such as Kaplunovskii’s continued to be published throughout the 1930s. Writing in 1938 in an article also titled ‘Khudozhnik v kino’ (The Artist in Cinema), Nikolai Suvorov stated that ‘Вопросы же изобразительной культуры кино далеко ещё не решены. Немало неясного даже в самом положении художника на кинопроизводстве. И мы надеемся, что искусствоведы обратят внимание на этот “незаметный”, но весьма ответственный участок в процессе создания кинофильма’ [Questions about the artistic culture of cinema are still far from resolved. It is even not clear what position the *khudozhnik* plays in film production. But we hope that art historians will pay attention to this “unknown”, but very important participant in the film-making process].

Building on the foundational scholarship of Gennadii Miasnikov and Emma Widdis, this thesis has responded to Suvorov’s appeal. It has explored the ways in which *kino-khudozhniki* contributed to the technical decisions relating to film production and outlined their involvement in developing creative ideas. It has also considered how changes in set aesthetics reflected film-makers’ growing understandings of cinema’s expressive potential and their search for a distinctive, national cinema language. And it has explored how *kino-khudozhniki*, working together with the director, the camera operator and the scenarist, used certain sets for their symbolic and...
ideological meanings and employed them to comment on ideas about the material environment. In so doing, it has demonstrated the significance of the *kino-khudozhnik* and promoted greater understanding of the many and varied roles that this figure played in Russian cinema in the silent era. What, then, can we conclude about the *kino-khudozhnik*’s contribution to late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema?

I. The *Kino-khudozhnik*: Versatile Multi-tasker, Technical Expert and Willing Collaborator

Evolving perceptions of the *kino-khudozhnik*’s role in the silent era were closely aligned with broader shifts in understandings about what it meant to be a creative practitioner working in a collaborative context. The idea promoted at the Moskovskii khudozhhestvennyi teatr (MKhT, Moscow Art Theatre) that the set designer was not just a technical craftsman, but a creative individual who was involved in the entire artistic development of a production, provided a model for the first *kino-khudozhniki* working in the late 1900s and early 1910s. Indeed, a significant number of *kino-khudozhniki* – Boris Mikhin, Czesław Sabiński, Vladimir Balluizek, Vladimir Egorov and Viktor Simov – came to cinema directly from the MKhT. With the rise of production art as a dominant creative approach in the 1920s, critics and film-makers increasingly emphasised that the *kino-khudozhnik*’s significance did not lie solely in their artistic vision. They were also valued for their technical expertise, which enabled them to innovate rational solutions, such as the *fundus* system, which economised and improved the design process by reducing the production time and the materials wasted. The increased importance ascribed to technical expertise was reflected in shifts in the *kino-khudozhnik*’s title: from the early 1920s the term *kino-dekorator* was used in a derogatory manner to refer to a creative concerned only with aesthetic effects, while the titles *kino-arkhitektor* and *kino-konstruktor* evoked the qualities of technical competency, versatility and a collaborative work ethic.

While such qualities carried particular weight in early-Soviet ideology, they were also necessary in the context of studio film-making in the 1910s and 1920s in Russia, when resources were often scare, personnel limited, technology under-developed and studios placed pressure on film-makers to produce films quickly. With their breadth of technical skills and artistic knowledge gained from prior experience in a range of creative spheres – painting, graphic illustration, architecture and theatre design – *kino-khudozhniki* were particularly suited to this type of work environment. Several individuals, among them Sabiriski and Sergei Kozlovskii, established indispensable roles for themselves as versatile ‘multi-taskers’, who advised on a number of aspects of film-making, including lighting and framing scenes, directing actors and writing scenarios.
Also valued in the context of studio film-making was a *kino-khudozhnik’s* flexibility: the effective *kino-khudozhnik* had to be able to work with a number of different film-makers, each of whom had their own artistic style, and on films of varying genres, each of which demanded a specific aesthetic approach. This resulted in some surprising instances of collaboration. Two cases in point are Kozlovskii and Simov’s fantastic sets for *Aelita* (1926) and Dmitrii Kolupaev and Kozlovskii’s art deco scenery for *Potselui Meri Pikford* (The Kiss of Mary Pickford, 1927), both of which contrast with the stark approach to set design that these individuals typically favoured. This flexibility undoubtedly contributed to the perception among certain film-makers that *kino-khudozhniki* must suppress their own artistic preferences in order to create sets that corresponded to a studio brief. Suvorov even argued that the ability to adapt to different styles was the key attribute of a successful *kino-khudozhnik.*

The importance attached to versatility and flexibility raises questions about how we value creative input in collaborative projects such as cinema. It highlights that, besides an individual creative vision, film-makers appreciated a range of professional qualities, which related to the more technical side of film production. It also draws our attention to the significance of studio dynamics and collaborative partnerships in film-making.

The question of creative alliances is, however, complex and difficult to establish in relation to *kino-khudozhniki.* While Philip Cavendish has shown that a number of directors and camera operators formed close working partnerships in the 1910s and especially the 1920s, existing evidence suggests that *kino-khudozhniki* were more mobile in terms of their professional collaborations. There are some instances of enduring creative alliances based on shared conceptual and aesthetic principles, such as Evgenii Enei’s partnership with Fabrika Ekstsentricheskogo Aktera (FEKS, Factory of the Eccentric Actor). For the most part, however, studio contracts required *kino-khudozhniki* to work with a number of different film-making units. The question of a *kino-khudozhnik’s* studio allegiance is similarly complex and unevidenced. Apart from Kozlovskii and Vasilii Rakhal’s, who in the 1920s headed the design departments at Mezhrabpom-rus’ (from 1928 Mezhrabpomfil’m) and Goskino (from 1924 Sovkino) respectively, *kino-khudozhniki* in both the late-Imperial and the early-Soviet eras moved relatively freely between commissions at various studios. For example, between 1923 and 1930 Vladimir

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5 Ibid., pp. 301-02.
7 Enei worked on the following silent era films with the FEKS directors Grigori Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg: *Mishki protiv Iudenicha* (Mishki against Iudenich, 1925); *Chertovo koleso* (The Devil’s Wheel, 1926); *Shinel’* (The Overcoat, 1926); *Bratishka* (Little Brother, 1927); *Sofiiz velikogo dela* (The Union of the Great Cause, 1927); *Novyi Vavilon* (New Babylon, 1929). Enei continued to work with FEKS directors into the 1960s, and in 1964 he collaborated with Kozintsev on *Gamlet* (Hamlet).
Balliuzek worked on films for Mezhrabpom-rus’, Sevzapkino and Sovkino, the Belarusian Belgoskino, the Vse-ukrainskoe fotokino upravlenie (VUFKU, All-Ukrainian Photo-Cinema Administration) and the Azerbaidzhanskoe fotokino upravlenie (AFKU, Azerbaijan Photo-Cinema Administration). The working dynamics of late-Imperial and early-Soviet studios is an under-researched subject in Russian Film Studies. A greater understanding of how studios functioned would help to expand the picture of the professional relationship between studios and individual film-makers, such as kino-khudozhniki.

Although this thesis has focussed on providing a typology of kino-khudozhniki and their working practices, it has also revealed how the backgrounds, prior artistic training and creative dispositions of a number of individuals shaped their creative approach and influenced the sets they designed for films: Boris Mikhin’s familiarity with MKhT staging techniques and his training as a sculptor can be seen in the sets he created for Kreitserova sonata (The Kreutzer Sonata, 1914); Balliuzek’s association with Mir iskusstva (World of Art) informed his use of patterning in the interiors for Gornichnaia Dzhenni (The Maidservant Jenny, 1918); and Kolupaev’s background as a landscape painter and his affiliation with the Peredvizhniki (Itinerants) meant that he was inclined to design sets that used rural scenery to comment on social issues relating to provincial life.

Additionally, this thesis has highlighted the role of individuals as early theorists of set design, whose writings shaped how the practice was perceived in the 1910s and 1920s. Kolupaev, for example, was a key interlocutor in the debates about the merits of location filming over using studio sets in the mid- to late 1920s. In his extensive writings produced between 1924 and 1930, Kozlovskii encouraged economy as both an aesthetic principle and a design method. The issues of studio filming and economy had resonance beyond set design, however, and fed into much larger debates about early-Soviet film-making, such as rationalising film production and cinema’s nature as a photographic medium and its ability to represent the real world accurately. The writings of kino-khudozhniki thus highlight how the profession was actively engaged with and helped to shape cinema discourses in the silent era.

II. Late-Imperial and Early-Soviet Set Design: Medium Specificity and National Cinemas

Tracing the role of kino-khudozhniki in late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinema has also enabled this

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thesis to examine the ways in which set design aesthetics developed across the period. Changes in set aesthetics were closely associated with film-makers’ evolving understandings of cinema’s expressive potential, its nature and status as an art form and its relation to other artistic media. Initially in the late 1900s and early 1910s, film-makers approached set design as a strategy to elevate cinema’s cultural standing through associating it with a fine arts tradition. Publicity materials in the contemporary cinema press compared the visual design of films with the works of eminent Russian painters. Evgenii Bauer’s designs for *Trehsoletie tsarstvovaniia doma Romanova* (The Tercentenary of the Rule of the House of Romanov, 1913), for example, were advertised as being created ‘po risunkam’ [according to the sketches] of Konstantin Makovskii, Viktor Vasnetsov and Ivan Bilibin. Film-makers also borrowed a number of terms from the fine-art lexicon to describe film aesthetics, including *kartina* [picture] to refer to a film, *rembrandtizm* to describe a type of lighting effect and, most obviously, the title *khudozhnik* [artist]. The association of film design with the fine arts was not merely a publicity strategy, however; it also revealed film-makers’ understanding that the film frame shared certain aesthetic properties with pictorial representations. This is also expressed in the set design sketches and writings of many *kino-khudozhniki*. For example, Egorov’s illustrated article ‘Khudozhnik stseny teatra i khudozhnik kadra kino... kakaia raznitsa?’ (The Artist of the Theatre Stage and the Artist of the Film Frame... What’s the difference?, unpublished) demonstrates his appreciation of the fact that cinematic space differed considerably from theatrical models and was much more similar to pictorial space.

These understandings about cinema’s expressive potential and its relation to other art forms are also evident in the sets that *kino-khudozhniki* designed for films. Egorov often borrowed both compositional methods and motifs, such as mirrors, from pictorial traditions in order to heighten a frame’s expressivity; Balliuzek, among others, included textiles and wallpaper with different patterns and objects with various types of *faktura* [texture] to provide textural and tonal contrasts. Moreover, the way in which Bauer used the techniques of blocking and framing, which are less effective in the theatre due to the reduced range of vantage points possible in a theatre auditorium, reflects his growing understanding of cinema’s specific expressive features. Together, these approaches to set design demonstrate the highly creative ways in which *kino-khudozhniki* responded to the challenges of designing an image that would be captured on orthochromatic film stock and projected onto a flat screen. Thus, as Widdis has argued, by paying attention to the creative potential of sets, we can provide a different perspective on aesthetic innovation in Russian and Soviet cinema from that offered by studies that focus

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9 See *Zhivoi ekran*, 12, 1913, p. 1.
primarily on editing techniques and cinematography.\textsuperscript{11}

Changes in set aesthetics did not only reveal film-makers’ evolving understandings of cinema’s expressive features, however. They also reflected different perceptions of what a distinctively Russian and, following the Revolution, a distinctively Soviet form of cinema should look like. In the late-Imperial era, the choice of associating a film’s visual design with the works of Russian artists served to align cinema with a national artistic tradition. During the 1920s, many film-makers and critics denounced the approach popular in late-Imperial cinema of designing sets with an excess of objects and different patterned textiles. According to Iutkevich, for example, the elaborate scenery of films produced by the Khanzhonkov and the Ermol’ev studios exemplified the decadence of the pre-revolutionary era. Moreover, he condemned the stylised forms of German Expressionist films as symbolic of the depraved values of Western, capitalist societies. In contrast to these set approaches, Soviet film-makers promoted stark sets with only a very few objects, exemplifying visually the principle of economy that was a cornerstone of early-Soviet ideology.

This thesis has, however, repeatedly questioned the idea that Russian cinema of the silent era was marked more by rupture than by continuity. In exploring in each of its chapters the whole of the silent era, this thesis has shown that, despite the 1917 Revolution, which led to the industry’s nationalisation and restructuring in 1919, many \textit{kino-khudozhniki} who had begun their cinema careers in the 1910s, including Balliuzech, Egorov, Kuleshov, Rakhal’s and Aleksei Utkin, continued to work in the industry during the Soviet era. In several of the sets they designed in the 1920s, these individuals drew upon design approaches that had been developed in the late 1900s and the 1910s. The gradual move towards using sparse sets, for example, is already evident in the mid-1910s in films such as \textit{Domik v Kolomne} (The Little House in Kolomna, 1913), designed by Mikhin, and \textit{Deti veka} (Children of the Age, 1915), with scenery by Evgenii Bauer, under whom Kuleshov and Rakhal’s worked as \textit{kino-khudozhniki}. Additionally, although the Revolution wrought massive changes across all aspects of Russian life, film-makers in the late-Imperial and early-Soviet eras continued to address many of the same social issues relating to the material environment, including questions about domesticity, commodification and technological advancement. In representing the rural provinces, for example, ethnographic research remained important throughout the 1910s and the 1920s. Such continuities in the sphere of set design invite a re-appraisal of how we consider the relationship between late-Imperial and early-Soviet cinemas more generally.

III. The Material Environment: Authenticity, Psychological Intensity, Object Relations and Social Practices

As we recall from Rodchenko’s 1927 article, ‘Khudozhnik i material’naia sreda v igrovom fil’me’ (The Artist and the Material Environment in Fiction Film), which was cited in the Introduction to this thesis, the kino-khudozhnik was responsible not only for innovating new approaches to set aesthetics, but also for creating the entire ‘material’naia sreda’ [material environment], in which the characters of the film would live. In examining how film-makers devised material environments in order to comment on ideas relating to the built and object world, this thesis has provided some new readings of certain films: its discussion of such canonical films as Po zakonu (By the Law, 1926) and Oblomok imperii (Fragment of an Empire, 1929) has drawn attention to features not considered in existing studies; it has also revealed how less well-known films, such as Gornichnaia Dzhenni and Kulisy ekrana (Behind the Screen, 1917), are remarkable from a design perspective. The final section of this conclusion will examine the various ways in which kino-khudozhniki used the material environment as an expressive element in fiction films.

Many kino-khudozhniki used the material environment in films to convey an authentic representation of Russian life. In some of the earliest Russian fiction films, Mikhail Kozhin carefully sourced props and designed artificial scenery in order to create an authentic depiction of traditional Russian customs, corresponding with film-makers’ desires to establish a native cinema that looked distinctively Russian. Similarly, for Sabinski, ‘Главное в кинофильме – все должно быть настоящим, никаких отступлений от натуры, никакого обмана’ [The main thing in a film is that everything is genuine, that there is no deviation from nature nor any deception]. This concern for authenticity was important not only for the first Russian kino-khudozhniki, however. During the 1920s, Kolupaev undertook reconnaissance expeditions to rural communities, while in Staroe i novoе (The Old and the New, 1929) Rakhal’s and Eizenshtein drew on specialist agricultural research to source props. For many Soviet film-makers, the concern for authenticity related to their interest in cinema as a photographic phenomenon and its ability to capture and to reveal aspects of the real world that normally go unnoticed to the human eye.

Many kino-khudozhniki were concerned not merely with creating an authentic representation, however. They also used set details in films to create atmosphere and to convey characters’ psychology. In Brat’ia-razboiniki (The Brigand Brothers, 1912), for example, the barren landscape worked to express the orphaned brothers’ pitiful existence, while the abundance of props in

Kozlovskii’s sets for Polikushka’s shack conveys the protagonist’s frenzied state of mind. Moreover, in Po zakonu, Kuleshov and Isaak Makhlis carefully selected and framed landscapes in order to heighten the film’s emotional intensity and to make visible to viewers the characters’ inner emotions. In addition to the natural features of the landscape, kino-khudozhniki employed interior architecture and ornaments to articulate characters’ emotions. In a number of the interiors he designed, Mikhin used windows and doorways to evoke the feeling of entrapment experienced by the films’ female protagonists. In his sets for Shinel´ (The Overcoat, 1926), Evgenii Enei employed hyperbole extensively to convey Akakii’s fantasies.

The representation of the material environment was also an effective way for film-makers to express social relations and tensions between characters. Bauer frequently employed in his interiors the motif of a staircase in order to articulate social hierarchies. And, as we saw in Chapter Five, in Molchi, grust’... molchi... (Still, Sadness... Still..., 1918), Utkin carefully framed actors in relation to sets to reveal their social marginalisation. Film-makers were not only concerned with expressing the relationship their protagonists had with one another, however. As Widdis has argued, they were also interested in exploring characters’ relationship to material things. For the film-maker Abram Room, the material world exerted a powerful influence on subjects. Writing about the apartment’s furnishings and objects in Tret’ia Meshchanskaya (Bed and Sofa, 1927), Room declared that ‘Каждая из них имеет судьбу, свое прошлое, настоящее и будущее. Все вместе они живут, дышат, вмешиваются в жизнь человека и держат его в цепком плену’ [Each of them has a fate, a past, a present and a future. They all live, breathe and interfere in people’s life and hold them in close captivity]. Drawing on such statements made by Soviet film-makers and critics about the object world, Widdis has demonstrated how in the 1920s and 1930s set design was part of a wider endeavour to remake Soviet subjects’ relationship to their surrounding material environment. This thesis has built on Widdis’s work by illustrating how film-makers explored a number of different types of relationships that characters had with their object world. In Staroe i novoe and Krupnaia nepriatnost’ (The Major Nuisance, 1930), for example, the villagers related to new technology in a way that was similar to religious belief. Moreover, in Devushka s korobkoi (The Girl with a Hatbox, 1927) Trager’s clumsiness and Il’ia’s resourcefulness reveal their moral qualities.

16 See Widdis, Socialist Senses.
In their representations of the material environment, film-makers were also able to explore certain types of activities and social practices. The study and the private office were realms through which they could consider ideas about personal fantasy and the hold it has over protagonists, leading them to blur the distinction between imagination and reality. And in a number of films of the late 1920s, the circus arena was used to address concerns about artistic independence and the social responsibility of creatives.

Thus it is clear that cinema sets were an important means through which film-makers could encourage viewers to reflect on the different spheres of their everyday lives. As a critic writing in 1928 in *Sovetskii ekrans* acknowledged, ‘Фильма вводит в ощущение быта, прежде всего, показом окружающей обстановки, предметов’ [Film makes us sense everyday life first and foremost through the representation of surroundings and objects].\(^{17}\) For this it is the *kino-hudozhnik* whom we should thank.

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Filmography

The films listed below have been ordered alphabetically by title. Each reference includes the following information: Russian title, translated title, year of release, name of studio or production company, kino-khudozhnik, director, camera operator, scenarist and, where applicable, composer. Films that have not survived are identified as non-extant.


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Goroda i gody (Cities and Years). 1930. Sovuzkino and the German film studio Derussa. Kino-khudozhnik, Semen Meinkin. Director, Evgenii Cherviakov. Camera Operators, Sviatoslav...
Beliaev and Aleksandr Sigaev. Scenarists, Natan Zarkhi, Dmitrii Tolmachev and Evgenii Cherviakov.


Director and Scenarist, Evgenii Bauer. Camera Operator, Boris Zavelev.


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