

‘Air-mindedness’ and Air Parades:  
Images of Flight and Aviation and Their Relation to Soviet Identity  
in Soviet Film 1926-1945

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PhD Thesis

I, Candyce L. Veal, declare 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.

## **Abstract**

Taking Soviet films from 1926 to 1945 as its frame of reference, this thesis seeks to answer the question: is autonomous voicing possible in film during a period defined by Stalin's concentration of power and his authoritarian influence on the arts? Aviation and flight imaging in these films shares characteristics of language, and the examination of the use of aviation and flight as an expressive means reveals nuances in messaging which go beyond the official demand of Soviet Socialist Realism to show life in its revolutionary movement towards socialism. Reviewing the films chronologically, it is shown how they are unified by a metaphor of 'gaining wings'. In filmic representations of air-shows, Arctic flights, aviation schools, aviation circus-acts, and aircraft invention, the Soviet peoples' identity in the 1930s became constructed as being metaphorically 'winged'. This metaphor links to the fundamental Icarian precursor myth and, in turn, speaks to sub-structuring semantic spheres of freedom, transformation, creativity, love and transcendence. Air-parade film communicates symbolically, but refers to real events; like an icon, it visualizes the word of Stalinist-Leninist scriptures. Piloted by heroic 'falcons', Soviet destiny was perceived to be a miraculous 'flight' which realised the political and technological dreams of centuries. But aviation and cinematographic flights communicate multi-valently, beyond that of the ideological dominant. Film based on the myth of the 'Russian Icarus' points to the possibility of the Revolution as an Icarian flight perceived as a fall in Stalin's time. Cinematographic flights, both actual and metaphorical, can be communicated on levels of psychology, cinema-philosophy and allegory, and 'gaining wings' is a universal metaphor for self-expansion in love, creative work and gaining knowledge. The expressive use of flight and aviation may have been directed towards the communication of a 'bright' socialist future, but this thesis shows its communication of Soviet identity is more complex.

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## Introduction

The definition of *aviation*, according to an article in the Soviet Encyclopaedia of 1953, has three aspects. It is ‘a means of air travel on machines heavier-than-air’; it is ‘an organization or service using heavier-than-air technology for flight’; and it is also ‘one of the state’s armed forces, *Voенno-vozdushnye sily*.’<sup>1</sup> In the Soviet Union of the 1930s aviation could be said to have been in a second ‘Golden Age’.<sup>2</sup> It was proving to be one of the most successful industries under Stalin’s first two Five-Year Plans (1928-32 and 1933-37). Alexander Boyd, in his chapter ‘Higher! Faster! Further!’, in *The Soviet Airforce since 1918* says ‘A dramatic increase was to occur in the decade covered by Stalin’s first two Five-Year Plans; from less than a thousand aircraft in 1928 the number of Red Air Force machines rose to some 2,700 by January 1933 and to over 5,500 by 1938’.<sup>3</sup> Reina Pennington gives somewhat different figures for the Five-Year Plans but stresses aviation’s importance as a symbol of modernity and their success: ‘While aviation was just one component of Soviet modernization, it served as an exemplar of modernity. [...] aviation production grew from 860 per year in 1930-31 to 2,595 per year in 1933. During the Second Five-Year Plan, the combat strength of the VVS (*Voенno-vozdushnye sily*) quadrupled, and aviation grew to 3,578 per year in 1937.’ And ‘The second Five-Year Plan dictated a tripling of civil-aviation routes throughout the country.’<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as the aviation historian, John T. Greenwood,

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Aviation”, From The Great Soviet Encyclopaedia (1953)’, in *Mass Culture in Soviet Russia: Tales, Poems, Songs, Movies, Plays and Folklore 1917-1953* (hereafter: *Mass Culture*), ed. by James von Geldern and Richard Stites (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press: 1995), pp. 479-86 (p. 479).

<sup>2</sup> Von Hardesty, ‘Early Flight in Russia’ (hereafter: ‘Early Flight’) in *Russian Aviation and Air Power in the Twentieth Century* (hereafter: *Russian Aviation and Air Power*), ed. by Robin Higham, John T. Greenwood and Von Hardesty (London: Frank Cass Publishers: 1998), pp. 18-37 (pp. 21-30).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Boyd, *The Soviet Air Force since 1918* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s, 1977), pp. 35-55 (p. 35).

<sup>4</sup> Reina Pennington, ‘From Chaos to the Great Patriotic War, 1922-41’, in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 37-62 (p. 42); Reina Pennington, *Wings Women and War, Soviet Aviation in World War Two Combat* (hereafter: *Wings, Women and War*) (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2001), pp. 8-9.

says, ‘A native aviation industry took more definite shape during these years [...] At the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan 12 aircraft industry enterprises were at work, but by its end there were 31 plants, mostly new, reconstructed, or still under construction.’ All of this testifies to the fact that ‘Stalin, describing the accomplishments of the First Five-Year Plan [in January 1933], could justifiably declare: “We had no aviation industry. Now we have one.” [U nas ne bylo aviatsionnoi promyshlennosti. U nas ona est’ teper.]’<sup>5</sup>

Designers such as Nikolai Nikolaevich Polikarpov (1892-1944), Andrei Nikolaevich Tupolev (1888-1972), Aleksandr Sergeevich Iakovlev (1906-1989) and Sergei Vladimirovich Il’iushin (1894-1977) developed aircraft that would break worldwide long-distance records, and created planes, such as the I-16 fighter and the TsKB-26 (DB-3) long-distance bomber, that would be used right through the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> The Soviet Union benefited from the close relationships that its designers had with their test pilots, for example that of Valerii Chkalov (1904-1938) with Polikarpov, Mikhail Gromov (1899-1985) with Tupolev, and Vladimir Kokkinaki (1904-1985) with Il’iushin.<sup>7</sup>

The Soviet fliers went down in the annals of their nation’s history. Their standing in the Soviet Union and across the globe reflected the worldwide glamour associated with record-breaking pilots, those who, since Louis Blériot’s crossing of the English Channel in 1909 and Charles Lindburgh’s crossing of the Atlantic in 1927, enjoyed the popular acclaim associated with Hollywood stars.<sup>8</sup> And it was the bravery

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<sup>5</sup> Iosif Stalin, ‘Itogi piatiletki v chetyre goda v oblasti promyshlennosti’, in I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 18 vols (no editor given) (1946-1951), XIII (*iiul’ 1930 - ianvar’ 1934*) (1951), pp. 178-88 (p. 178); and see: John T. Greenwood, ‘The Aviation Industry’, in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 126-62 (pp. 134-35).

<sup>6</sup> Boyd, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> Boyd highlights the importance of the dynamic relation between designer and test-pilot in *ibid.*, pp. 66-67. He also notes that Chkalov became Polikarpov’s chief test-pilot, and kept this position for Five-Years until his death in 1938. See *ibid.*, p. 45n (The note has no number). Il’iushin appointed Kokkinaki as ‘brigade test-pilot, and worked with him for thirty-five years.’ See ‘Sergei Ilyushin’, in Bill Gunston, *The Osprey Encyclopedia of Russian Aircraft* (hereafter: *Osprey Encyclopedia*) (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2000), pp. 99-129 (p. 99).

<sup>8</sup> For a description of Charles Lindburgh’s reception see R.G. Grant, *Flight: 100 Years of Aviation* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2002), pp. 118-19.

of the pilots, more than any other group on whom honours were bestowed, that led to the establishment, in 1934, of a new class of hero bearing the country's name: 'Hero of the Soviet Union' [Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuza]. While aeronautical designers gave the country aircraft that demonstrated to the world the Soviet Union's technological advances, newsreel of the 1930s showed Moscow's reception of Russia's heroic pilot-rescuers and record-breakers under showers of paper as their garlanded entourages made their way to the Kremlin to be honoured by Stalin. The idea of the pilot took on legendary significance. At the same time, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, the aircraft themselves acquired symbolic meaning. As Scott W. Palmer, a specialist in the cultural interpretation of Russian aviation says in his analysis of aviation in the first decades after the Revolution, 'As masters of this new technological marvel, Communist Party officials consciously worked to harness the Promethean impulses associated with flight, manipulating aviation to win public support for the construction of socialism'.<sup>9</sup>

For the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, aviation was one of the modern technologies which symbolically stood in opposition to persistent practices of serfdom. He felt these practices had no place in a 'century of electricity and aeroplanes'.<sup>10</sup> Formulating plans which had been worked out over a period of ten to fifteen years, he famously said at the Eighth Congress of People's Commissars in November 1921: 'Communism is Soviet Power plus electrification of the whole country.' [Kommunizm – eto est' Sovetskaia vlast' plus elektrifikatsiia vsei strany].<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Scott W. Palmer, 'Peasants into Pilots, Soviet Air-mindedness as an Ideology of Dominance' (hereafter: 'Peasants into Pilots'), *Technology and Culture*, 41, 1 (2000), 1-26 (p. 3). His article 'Icarus, East: The Symbolic Contexts of Russian Flight', *The Slavic and East European Journal*, 4, 1 (2005), 19-47, and his book; *Dictatorship of the Air, Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia* (hereafter: *Dictatorship of the Air*), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 2-3, set out his analysis of 'the origins, character and meaning of 'air-mindedness''.

<sup>10</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'K voprosu o smete ministerstva zemledeliia', in Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th edn, 55 vols (Moscow: Politizdat, 1960-1975), XXV (*mart–iiul'*), ed. by Z. A. Levina and E. A. Kruglova (1969), pp. 171-76 (p. 172).

<sup>11</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'Doklad vserossiiskogo tsentral'nogo ispolnitel'nogo komiteta i soveta narodnykh komissarov o vneshnei i vnutrennei politike, 22 dekabria', in *ibid.*, XLII (*noiabr' 1920-mart 1921*), ed. by M. M. Vasser and G. S. Zhuk (1970), pp. 128-62 (p. 159); and





**Figure 1: Projecting a New Socialist World: Lenin and Trotskii watch a Nieuport Fighter on May Day 1918**

Furthermore, there is a powerful photograph of the first May-Day celebrations after the October Revolution in 1918. Lenin and Trotskii are captured on camera looking skyward together as their gaze follows a Nieuport fighter overhead. Standing, as it were, on the threshold of the creation of a new country, the iconic stance of the Bolshevik leaders as they gaze upwards and out of the frame can be seen as a potent symbol of the aspiration towards a new world, towards modernity, and, towards an unbounded off-screen space expressing, in Revolutionary terms, limitless possibility for the betterment of mankind. Every country since Wilbur and Orville Wright successfully achieved heavier-than-air flight in 1903, has looked to the skies for a reflection of

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in 'Moskovskaia gubernskaia konferentsiia RKP (b), 20-22 noiabria 1920g.', in *ibid.*, XLII, pp. 17-38 (p. 30).

man's ability to shape the future. But there must be few that can boast the aeroplane as one of its symbols since that country's inception. As Nancy Condee says, 'Soviet symbols are inextricably embedded in this one century.'<sup>12</sup>

Aviation technology and film technology developed in close relation after the introduction of the Lumière Brothers' cinematographic apparatus to Russia in 1895, and the issuing of a patent in Russia for Wilbur and Orville Wright's heavier-than-air flying machine in 1909. In films such as *Journey to the Moon* (*Voyage dans la lune*, 1902) and *The Conquest of the Pole* (*À la conquête du pôle*, 1912) the director Georges Méliès and production studios Pathé Frères brought visions of polar and inter-planetary flight to the screen and also originated the cinematic portrayal of the flight-inventor as a 'dreamer'. The 1908 'air-journey' [*Puteshestvie po vozdukhu*] documentary which played at the 'Bol'shoi Parizh' cinema in Moscow, and which showed an aerial balloon flight from Paris to Verdun, is illustrative of a whole genre of aerial travelogue film which grew out of the marriage of film technology and aviation.<sup>13</sup> Vadislav Starevich created a folkloric flight of a witch on a broomstick in his film of Nikolai Gogol's satiric *Noch' pered rozhdestvom* (Khanzhonkov & Co., 1913) which shows an early twinning of notions of dark forces and erotic impulses. In Eduard Pukhal'skii's (aka Puchalskii) *Antoshu korset pogubil* (*Liutsifer*, 1916), an aircraft is used as a comic ploy when a well-to-do man joins a crowd of people who are excitedly watching what appears to be a Farman flying overhead, but not to admire the flight. He is hoping to tempt a thief to steal an incriminating corset from his pocket, which, no matter how hard he has tried, he cannot get rid of before his wife returns. Subsequently, in a wonderful meta-textual moment, the thief returns it out of spite, saying in an accompanying note that he has enjoyed this man, the actor Anton Fertner in films, but how could the celebrity insult a thief with this rubbish. Pre-revolutionary film also saw the emergence of the archetypal chivalrous pilot as a romantic hero. In Iakov Protozanov's *Gornychnaia Dzhenni* (Ermler Studio, 1918) the pilot-son is loved by the family maid. She is really the daughter of an impoverished widow of a Count, but not knowing this, the pilot defends her honour after a guest makes inappropriate advances

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy Condee, 'Introduction', in *Hieroglyphics: Visual Culture in Late Twentieth-century Russia*, ed. by Nancy Condee (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), pp. vii-xxiv (p. viii).

<sup>13</sup> *Letopis' rossiiskogo kino 1863-1929* (hereafter: *Letopis' rossiskogo kino*), ed. by V. Fomin, A. S. Deriabin and V. Vishnevskii, 3 vols (Moscow: Materik, 2004), I, p. 60.

on his 'servant'. He nearly sacrifices his life for love of her in the ensuing duel.<sup>14</sup> These individual imaginings and records of flight and aviation look forward to genres and tropes which evolve but last far into the future, and across cultures. But the Revolution introduced what was thought 'original' to Soviet cinema. According to a Soviet film encyclopaedia Soviet cinema was new because in it were realised the 'experience of revolution and the process of building a new life [...] it resolved the eternal themes of art; man and history; man and society'.<sup>15</sup>

The potential of cinema as a technological tool which could assist in the construction of socialism was perceived by Lenin, as much as ten years before it occurred in 1917. He understood that cinema could be a means of 'enlightenment of the masses if it were in the hands of people cultured in socialism.'<sup>16</sup> In its early days, the government set up a separate film department within the State Committee for the People's Enlightenment, headed by Lenin's wife, Nadezhda Krupskaya.<sup>17</sup> The Moscow city council and the political organ of the Red Army (under the Political Direction of the Revolutionary Council) set up a Photographic and Cinematographic Bureau. Thus an ideological and military frame was intrinsic to the establishment of Soviet film. For the founders of the new country it was film in the form of newsreel rather than acted narratives that was most important because it showed life as it happened. And, in this capacity, it was seen as a means of educating the masses and inculcating socialism. (I shall return to the introduction of aviation technology and its impact on Russian culture in the second chapter.)

The government transferred to Moscow from Petrograd in March 1918, and, by the end of April, it set up a film committee to which outstanding people from the

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<sup>14</sup> Although, this film is made in 1918, it is made by a pre-revolutionary director, and under private studio production before full nationalization.

<sup>15</sup> 'Sovetskaia kinematografiia', in *Kino entsiklopedicheskii slovar'*, ed. by S. I. Iutkevich (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1986), pp. 391-94 (p. 392). The use of a Soviet encyclopaedia is of interest as a source because it unequivocally represents a government-approved interpretation of the facts of the world, which is also directed towards the education of the Soviet public. In this way, its formulations contribute to an understanding of official Soviet self-perception.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

cinema industry and arts were invited in order to discuss what the nature of the new country's cinema would be. They included directors and cameramen such as: Dziga Vertov, Vladimir Gardin, Grigorii Giber, Iurii Zheliabuzhskii, Lev Kuleshov, Aleksandr Levitskii, Aleksandr Lemberg, P. K. Novitskii, Ol'ga Preobrazhenskaia, Aleksandr Razumnyi, Eduard Tisse and Valentin Turkin.<sup>18</sup>

In August 1919 the Soviet government passed the decree: 'On the transfer of Photographic and Cinematographic Trade and Industry to the Institution of the People's Commissariat of Enlightenment' [O perekhode fotograficheskoi i kinematograficheskoi torgovli i promyshlennosti v vedenie Narodnogo Komissariata Prosveshcheniia]. By the beginning of 1920 nationalization had been completed and the film industry (production and sales) became the All-Russian Film Department of Narkompros (Vserossiiskii kinofotoodel Narkomprosa).<sup>19</sup> In 1922 it became Goskino (Central State Photographic and Cinematographic Enterprise). The companies Sevzapkino, Kino-Moskva, Mezhrabpom-Rus' and Proletkino existed at the same time in competition.<sup>20</sup> At the time of the sixth anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution in November 1923 banners were held aloft in Moscow by cinema workers exhibiting Lenin's words 'of all the arts the most important is cinema!' [iz vsekh iskusstv samoe vazhnoe – kino!].<sup>21</sup> And in 1924 all the film companies were merged to form Sovkino.<sup>22</sup>

Debates about what form Soviet cinema should take abounded. In Lenin's discussion in 1922 with the German activist, Clara Zetkin, he made it clear that he thought art should be intelligible to the masses.<sup>23</sup> A tension between this ideology and the desires of those artists who saw the Revolution as the freedom to communicate by

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ven. Vishnevskii, 'Fakty i daty iz istorii otechestvennoi kinematografii (1921-1924), in *Iz istorii kino, materialy i dokumenty*, ed. by S. S. Ginzburg et al (Moscow: Izd. Akademiii nauk SSSR, 1958), pp. 125-206 (p. 166).

<sup>22</sup> 'Sovetskaia kinematografiia', p. 392.

<sup>23</sup> V. I. Lenin, 'Lenin: Art Belongs to the People. Conversation with Clara Zetkin', in *The Film Factory Russian and Soviet Cinema in Documents 1896-1939* (hereafter: *The Film Factory*), ed. by Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 50-52.

new expressive means grew. Polemics developed between exponents of documentary and en-acted film (centred on Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eizenshtein) and between exponents of film as a formal means capable of profound expression, and film as entertainment. With the establishment of the Soviet Air Fleet in 1923, the close relationship between cinema and aviation technologies grew.<sup>24</sup> The first ‘Soviet Week of the Air Fleet’ was held from 24 June to 1 July 1923.<sup>25</sup> Agit-planes were sent out to the countryside introducing aviation to the people of the regions, and inculcating them with a spirit of aeronautics and defence. Aeroplanes were used to bring projectors and film to the countryside. On one occasion two film technicians parachuted with their equipment into a remote field in order to screen a small film.<sup>26</sup> Long-distance prestige flights were organized by the Big Flights committee established in 1925.<sup>27</sup> Following the tradition of the ‘Great Flight’ (Velikii perelet) from Moscow to Peking, Soviet aviation asserted itself in evocatively named aircraft and flights such as ‘Wings of the Soviets’, ‘The Proletariat’, and ‘Star Flight’ (Zvezdnyi perelet).<sup>28</sup> Soviet girls and boys were portrayed thwarting interventionist-spies’ attempts to steal Soviet aircraft designs. They were shown designing model aeroplanes, and discovering what it meant to belong to Soviet society by being a part of the volunteer, paramilitary organizations Dobrakhim and Osoaviakhim. But this did not have universal approval, especially amongst all film-makers. The pre-revolutionary actor and Soviet film-director, Iurii Tarich (1885-1967), who went on to be a co-founder of the Belorussian film industry, singled out films such as *Kak Pakhom, poniukhav dym, zapisalsia v Dobrokhim* [No Sooner had Pakhom Smelled the Fume, than He Enrolled in Dobrokhim] (Kinosektsiia ODVF, 1924), saying with mild sarcasm that in them there is ‘an authentic absence of authentic everyday living’ (podlinnoe otsutstvie podlinnogo byta).<sup>29</sup> He added: ‘primitive agit-film [kino-agitki] did not contain a gram of truth’ and ‘did not have

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<sup>24</sup> I return to the impact of the introduction of aviation in Russian culture and the establishment of the Red Army Air Fleet in Chapter One.

<sup>25</sup> Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, p. 152.

<sup>26</sup> *Letopis' rossiskogo kino*, p. 60.

<sup>27</sup> Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, pp. 161.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 161-63, 169, 173-75.

<sup>29</sup> The first chapter includes an analysis of his film; *Kryl'ia kholopa* (Sovkino, 1926).

anything in keeping with authentic art' (ne imeli nichego obshchego s podlinnym iskusstvom).<sup>30</sup>

At the time of the 1928 Congress of Cinema Workers there was a climate of unease amongst film-makers. The second half of the 1920s had seen the expulsion of Trotskii from the Party, and then Stalin led the Party in a turn against Bukharin and Zinov'iev. On the reviews page in the government's newspaper, *Pravda*, cinema workers and artists, accused of 'formalism' and over-exceeding budgets, rounded on each other under the newspaper's rubric the 'Court' (Sud). Film-makers called for more direction from the Party about the form that Soviet cinema should take. The debates of the 1928 Congress can be seen as presaging the discussion of the early thirties (especially between the writer Maxim Gor'kii and Joseph Stalin), which led to the formulation of a policy of Soviet Socialist Realism in the arts. This policy was instigated at the First Writer's Congress in August 1934. Boris Shumiatskii, as head of the newly centralized Soiuzkino, set out Socialist-Realist values in film-making in his book, the title of which echoes Lenin's opinions on art: *A Cinema for the Millions* (*Kinematografiia millionov*). Formalized at the first Writers' Congress, Socialist Realism required from all the arts not only that they appeal to the millions (and therefore be entertaining), but that they show life in its revolutionary development. If art showed life truthfully, then it could not help but show it moving towards Socialism. In films of this period 'reality' is primarily structured on screen in order to express this ideological dynamic.

Four important principles of Soviet Socialist Realism by which this would be effected and measured were:

*narodnost'*: meaning that a work of art should communicate a sense of national culture which is drawn from the masses and is intelligible to them; it should show the culture's humanity and the relations of the people to the state; and, in it, traditional (folkloric) and academic forms are fused;

*klassovost'*: signifying that a work of art should express class consciousness;

*ideinost'*: meaning that a work of art must be topical, that it should 'reflect the organic relation of the workers lives as an expression of the most advanced communist ideas by means of the treatment of reality'; and

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<sup>30</sup> A. V., Krasinskii, *Iurii Tarich* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhniki, 1971), p. 42.

*partiinost'* signifying the requirement that art should further the interests of the masses and become part of the activity of the Communist Party.<sup>31</sup>

In September 1934 the Chief Directorate of the Film and Photo Industry (GUKF) 'was reorganised into smaller units that were intended to be both more easily manageable and more easily held to account. From this Mosfil'm and Lenfil'm studio organizations emerged. (...) In October 1934 the first union of film-workers was established.'<sup>32</sup> On the occasion of that year's seventeenth anniversary of the October Revolution directors and important people in the film industry wrote a letter to Stalin celebrating how far the industry had come in that time. Ian Christie and Richard Taylor point out that this letter is 'a mark of how far aesthetic concerns were subjugated to ideological ones'.<sup>33</sup> The film-makers' letter has the same register of officialdom as Stalin's own speech when he described the successes of the Five-Year Plans, including the aviation industry. The film-makers' letter proclaims: 'The slogan of the Five-Year Plan – 'Everything with our own machines and from our own materials' – has been almost fully realised in our film industry. And this has been achieved in a country that had no knowledge of precision instrument production or of the chemical industry. For this we are grateful to the Party and to you, its great Leader, Comrade Stalin.'<sup>34</sup>

In view of the fact that ideological messaging in film and cinematographic form was a matter of Party concern, and that film-making and films were supervised by Stalin himself from within the Kremlin,<sup>35</sup> this thesis takes Soviet films from 1926 to 1945 as its frame of reference, and asks the question: is autonomous voicing possible in film during a period defined by Stalin's concentration of power and his authoritarian

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<sup>31</sup> Caradog Vaughn James, 'Art and the People', in *Soviet Socialist Realism Origins and Theory* (London: St Martin's Press, 1973), pp. 1-15.

<sup>32</sup> Ian Christie and Richard Taylor state that on 28 September 1934 the GUKF was reorganized into smaller units'. See *Film Factory*, p. 316; Kenez gives the establishment of GUFK as 1933. He says that because it (with the simplified acronym GUK) was 'directly subordinated to Sovnarkom it was in effect a commissariat'. See: Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society: 1917-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 130.

<sup>33</sup> *Film Factory*, p. 316.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 337.

<sup>35</sup> Grigorii Mar'iamov, *Kremlevskii tsenzor, Stalin smotrit kino* (Moscow: Kinotsentr, 1992), pp. 3, and 5-8.

influence on the arts? I examine the importance of aviation as a cultural phenomenon in Soviet cinema during the period of Stalin's ascendance and centralization of power. I enquire into the nature of the Soviet 'pilot-hero', and with reference to Katerina Clark's seminal work, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, I examine the cinematic portrayal of this 'paradigmatic New Man'.<sup>36</sup> I also examine how and what cinematographic flight and aviation imaging contributes to Soviet identity.

### **Methodology**

In my approach I use a mixture of methodologies. The first is 'poetic' analysis, by means of which I closely examine the cinematographic 'text' of the films. In doing this, I draw on a variety of thinkers from different spheres whose work is suggested by the film. For instance, the Russian philosopher and literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) characteristics of time and space in relation to 'the hero' from his 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', 'Notes toward a Historical Poetics', are a useful tool for illuminating the treatment of time and space and the hero in air-parade film.<sup>37</sup> Variances in Bakhtin's triadic relationship sub-structure literary categories, and this contributes to an understanding of the Soviet people's 'self-identity' in terms of 'family biography'.

The second approach involves analysis of cinematographic flights and aviation in their capacity as expressive means. Cinematographic flight and aviation, as expressive means, communicate states of mind and emotion. And their use shares characteristics of language. Flight and aviation imaging communicates a dynamic which is close to Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1767-1835) understanding of language's mental origins as an 'energeia' which gives rise to language in the following terms:

Inasmuch as thought in its most typically human relationships is a longing to escape from darkness into light, from limitation into infinity, sound streams from the depths of the breast to the external

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<sup>36</sup> Katerina Clark, 'The Aviation Hero as Paradigmatic New Man', in *The Soviet Novel, History as Ritual*, 3rd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 124-29.

<sup>37</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel, Notes toward a Historical Poetics' in Bakhtin, the *Dialogic Imagination, Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258 (pp. 85-158).



ambient. (...) There it finds in the air, this most subtle and motile of all elements whose apparent in-corporeality significantly corresponds to the intellect, a marvellously appropriate intermediary substance.<sup>38</sup>

Drawing on the literary historian and poet, August Schlegel, Noam Chomsky argues that ‘anything by means of which the inner manifests itself outwardly is rightly called language’.<sup>39</sup> He adds: ‘So characteristic of language is this freedom from external control or practical end, for Schlegel that he elsewhere proposes “alles, wodurch sich das Innere im aussern offenbart, mit Recht Sprache heist” (Everything which is in itself intrinsically interior, by rights, is revealed externally in speech.)<sup>40</sup> A similar emotional and cognitive dynamic is communicated in terms of *cinematographic flight*, which becomes a complex-signifier of ‘freedom’ and of the dynamic of form emerging from chaos. Whether as aviation-signs, or as cinematographic means (fluidity of the camerawork, the aerial view, meaningful connectivity and cognitive links between frames, ecstatic representations of movement of a life-force), cinematographic flight and aviation imaging can describe the dynamic of internal forces in the processes of becoming, and extending outward through higher planes of being which Sergei Eizenshtein (1898-1948) describes as *sensuous knowledge*. This is demonstrated in his film *Staroe i novoe/General'naia liniia* (Sovkino, 1926-1928, released 1929). It is also present in a different guise as the process of cognition and inspiration in the Tatlin-like ascension spirals of Dziga Vertov’s (1896-1954) printing sequence in *Tri pesni o Lenine* (Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1934) and in the entwined communication of forces of production, nature and history in his *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*. (This film and *General'naia liniia* are discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.)

The philosopher Susanne K. Langer, analysing the nature of music’s communication, asks whether music is a ‘language.’ She concludes that it is a form of ‘sentient ideas’. It is ‘significant form.’ It has ‘import, (...) the pattern of life itself, as it

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<sup>38</sup> Wilhem von Humboldt, ‘Nature and Properties of Language’, *Linguistic Variability and Intellectual Development* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971), (1836), pp. 33-44 (p. 34).

<sup>39</sup> Noam Chomsky, ‘Creative Aspect of Language Use’ *Cartesian Linguistics and Chapter in the History of Rational Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> *Cartesian Linguistics*, p. 17.

is felt and directly known.’<sup>41</sup> Similarly, cinematographic flight and aviation not only communicate on the level of enunciation, but on a deeper level. Langer calls this communication in music; “vital” (...which is) a qualifying adjective restricting the relevance of “import” to the dynamism of subjective experience’. The movement of flight, I would suggest, corresponds visually to the aural dynamic of music as vital significant form. Langer says that music is “significant form” and its significance is that of a symbol, a highly articulated sensuous object, which by virtue of its dynamic structure can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey. Fe[e]ling, life, motion and emotion constitute its import.’<sup>42</sup> She says that a ‘kinetic realm’ is defined by objects and the ‘free space’ between them. A person represents a ‘kinetic volume’ within this space. The individual is a central point from which the kinetic realm and its (intuited) geometry can be defined or ‘measured’ by means of the extent of the reach of the body and through visual perception. Quoting the Italian sculptor Bruno Adriani, Langer says “It is the sensory scene of our human experiences”, it is experienced through intuition and the artist tries “to make it perceptible through formal creation”. By means of an act of imagination we ‘amplify’ this space with a perception of the universe which we ‘lodge’ within it.<sup>43</sup> Unlike other likely semiotic spheres (such as tractor, automobile, train and electrical industries which images of flight and aviation are often closely linked in Soviet films) cinematographic flights are able to communicate ‘vitality’, as *significant form* by means of varying qualities of movement and by the significance of the space (mental or geographic) which the *flights* move through, and to which they give identity by passing through it.<sup>44</sup> Thus flight and its cinematographic representation communicate on the level of deep (psychic) structure.

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<sup>41</sup> Susanne K. Langer, *Feeling and Form, A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key* (London: Routledge, 1953), p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32. (The ‘e’ is missing in the original.)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>44</sup> David Thompson gives insights into the significance of flight in western film, and points to the importance of movement as part of the film’s affectiveness, in part nine: ‘The Last Flight’; *Life at 24 Frames*, BBC Radio 4, 27 January 2011, Podcast: 3 February 2011.

In 1924 Stalin said ‘Cinema is an illusion, but it dictates its own laws to life itself’.<sup>45</sup> This echoes the definition of language by certain linguists, such as Marie Louise Pratt, who describes language as both ‘world creating and world describing enterprises’.<sup>46</sup> Stalin’s words also correspond to dynamic definitions of myth and discourse by Joseph Campbell and Catherine Belsley, who maintain that ‘for each member of its culture, the myth is the defining force and the controlling image’,<sup>47</sup> and that discourse is a metalanguage, a ‘domain of language usage whose shared assumptions are revealed in the formulations which characterize it’.<sup>48</sup> C. Vaughn James describes the relationship of art and reality as dictated by Socialist Realism as ‘twofold: reality is reflected in art but art also exerts an active effect upon reality’. Following the importance Belsley gives to ‘enunciation as the conduit of meaning’ in this process, in this thesis images of flight and aviation are analysed as ‘forms of enunciation’ and as ‘conduits of meaning’.<sup>49</sup> This thesis examines images of flight and aviation in their capacity as language and myth, as both descriptive of and creating Soviet identity. It analyses where there is a departure between unique moments of ‘language usage’ and the process of language-myth creation. It also looks at flight as a vitally intuitive ‘significant form’. Thus the significance of flight and aviation can be understood on psychological, cognitive, emotional and philosophical levels. Their semiotics are influenced by what can loosely be compared to linguistic levels of analysis: lexical, semantic, syntactic, stylistic and

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<sup>45</sup> Joseph Stalin cited by Richard Taylor, ‘The Illusion of Happiness and the Happiness of Illusion: Grigorii Aleksandrov’s the Circus’, *Slavonic and East European Review*, 74, 4, October (1996), 600-620.

<sup>46</sup> Marie Louise Pratt ‘Ideology and Speech Act Theory’, in *The Stylistics Reader: From Roman Jakobson to the Present*, ed. by Jean Jacques Weber (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 181-196 (p. 191).

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Campbell cited in Richard Gray, *Archetypal Explorations: An Integrative Approach to Human Behaviour* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice*, cited in Lorraine Gamman and Merja Makinen, *Female Fetishism* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 13, n. 8.

<sup>49</sup> I am drawing on my seminar, ‘Planes of Discourse: Defining Soviet Women Through Aviation Images on Screen’, at the ‘Russia on Screen: Identity and Appropriation’, Conference, Queen Mary College, London University, 10 May 2008. I would like to thank Dr. Seth Graham for the verbal play in the phrase: ‘planes of discourse’ and his helpful discussion of female fetishism and the treatment of women in Soviet film-comedies.

pragmatic. And it is helpful to define two of the terms referred to in the title of this thesis.

### **Airminded-ness**

*Air-mindedness*, according to Scott W. Palmer, signifies anything and everything aeronautical in the imagination and consciousness. His book *Dictatorship of the Air: Aviation Culture and the Fate of Modern Russia*, seeks ‘to identify the fundamental characteristics of Russian aviation and to assess their impact in shaping the images and institutions created by the country’s citizens and statesmen.’ He suggests that the subtle difference between ‘air-minded’ and ‘air-mindedness’ is the difference between an idea of enthusiasm for flight and the culturally specific and historical factors which both produce that enthusiasm and by which it is expressed.<sup>50</sup> I am deeply indebted to his work, and to Robert Wohl’s two-part study of the cultural significance of aviation and flight in Russian and Western culture.<sup>51</sup> In this thesis, the notion of *air-mindedness* draws on Scott W. Palmer’s conception, and it includes the linguist (and political philosopher) Noam Chomsky’s sense of ‘mind’ as a focus on ‘mental aspects’ of the world.<sup>52</sup> *Air-mindedness* signifies internal, private and subjective worlds, and also cultural and social forces in transformation.

### **Air Parades**

For the purposes of this thesis, the phrase *air parade* is both denotative (signifying a public event of aviation or aerial display) and symbolic. Its symbolic connotations speak to spheres of public value systems (as opposed to private and internal worlds).

Parade-culture is a semiotic sphere which speaks to officialdom, and its problematics has been authoritatively analysed by Karen Petrone. In post-Soviet films such as Ivan Dykhovichnyi’s *Prorva* (Mosco Parad, 1992) and Sergei Livnev’s *Serp i molot* (Hammer and Sickle, 1994) the constructed joy of parade-culture and the transformative idea of the Soviet New Man is a kind of nightmare. But in 1920 Pavel German and Iulii Khait wrote a song, ‘The Aviator’s March’ (Aviamarsh), whose

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<sup>50</sup> Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1908-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and Robert Wohl, *The Spectacle of Flight: Aviation and the Western Imagination, 1920-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Noam Chomsky, ‘Language and Nature’, *Mind* (New Series), 104, 413 (1995), 1-61, p. 1.

‘aggressive optimism’ was emblematic of the 1930s.<sup>53</sup> It became the national anthem of the Red Army Air Force in 1933, and the aviation industry seemed to prove Soviet self-perception as written in its famous first line: ‘We were born to make fairy tales come true.’ (My rozhdeny chtob skazku sdelat’ byl’iu). In the Soviet Union of 1960s this was paraphrased to read ‘We were born to make Kafka’s nightmare come true’.<sup>54</sup> But Khait and German’s positive symbolic notion of the Soviet people gaining steel arms (wings) on which to fly is a kind of transformation which looks forward to the pilots of the Great Patriotic War saying that Soviet aviation was evidence that Lenin’s dreams had been realised.<sup>55</sup> This thesis hopes to show that the realization of dreams, and connectivity in love, are two of the fundamental meanings of flight and aviation semiotics in film.

### **Thesis Structure**

The first chapter; ‘The “Russian Icarus” and Inaugural Flights’ foreshadows the discourse of this thesis by means of an analysis of two films of the late 1920s. The first is Iurii Tarich’s *Kryl'ia kholopa (Wing's of a Serf)* (Third Film Factory, Goskino, released by Sovkino, 1926),<sup>56</sup> which is based on the myth of the ‘Russian Icarus’ and tells the story of a sixteenth-century serf who invents wings; demonstrates them in a successful flight before Ivan the IV and his court; and is then sentenced to death for this ‘ungodly act’. The film portrays what is, in effect, a mythological air-parade at which there is a meeting of the state and the individual. This results in an assertion of the prevailing values of autocratic rule and the persecution of the serf. Tarich’s film illustrates a kind of oppression against which the Revolution fought. Viewed

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<sup>53</sup> Von Geldern and Stites (eds), *Mass Culture*, pp. 257-58; For full text of the song see *ibid*, and also an unattributed web article with uploaded original song-sheets: <<http://a-pesni.golosa.info/drugije/aviamarch.htm>> [accessed 5 September 2011]. These song sheets indicate that the song’s creation is variously dated between 1920 and the creation of the airfleet in 1923.

<sup>54</sup> Von Geldern and Stites (eds), p. 257.

<sup>55</sup> P. S. Kutakhov, ‘Zavetam Lenina verny’’, in *V. I. Lenin i Sovetskaia aviatsiia: dokumenty, materialy, vospominaniia*, ed. by D. S. Zemlianskii (Moscow: Voennoe izdatel'stvo Ministerstvo oborony SSSR, 1979), pp. 3-10.

<sup>56</sup> This information is as it is given in the credits of the film.

diachronically, the message of Tsarist injustice can also be read as an allegory of the treatment of the creative artist and the individual by any authoritarian power. It points to the debasement which attends power through fear, in a period when Stalin was consolidating his power after the adoption of his policy of ‘Socialism in One Country’ at the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925. The second film analysed in the first chapter is Abram Room’s (1894-1976) (*Bed and Sofa*, aka *Liubov’ v troem* aka *Trois dans un sous-sol*) (Sovkino, 1927). It also shows an early air parade, and also communicates a notion of ‘gaining wings’. But in this film the metaphor is not allegorical, it is psychological. Room’s film demonstrates the idea of freedom as the notion of finding oneself. The air parade is a place where a young woman’s potential to connect with, and know, the world expands. But the film shows that this potential is contained within a controlling patriarchal frame. The chapter emphasizes the importance of flight and aviation in terms of two important metaphors: gaining wings and the air parade. In doing this, it introduces the varying levels at which flight and aviation semiotics speak: as topic, socialized-myth, allegory, psychology and as cinematographic means. Each film illustrates the possibility of a social criticism and the assertion of the individual in ways which both communicate official values and communicate beyond them.

Chapter Two, ‘Airminded-ness: The Opening of New Worlds’, examines the introduction into Russia of aviation technology and aviation parade in the early decades of the twentieth century, and its impact on Russian culture. In this chapter the technology of the aeroplane and the idea of gaining wings are shown to be material and conceptual ‘facts’ which signify the realization of a new socialist world, perceived as an ineluctable ‘fact’ in Soviet consciousness. It discusses how the notion of gaining wings speaks to the realization of the dream of centuries, and how, from a Soviet perspective, aviation symbolically represents the fulfilment of a revolutionary dream of equivalent magnitude, the coming of communism. The chapter demonstrates the conceptual role that aviation and flight played in the ‘battle for consciousness’. The cinematographic notions of flight uniquely communicate processes of thinking; evolution in thinking; and acquisition of knowledge. Soviet identity is illustrated as an ability to embrace ‘the new’, and to transform oneself and the world. The notion of a socialist dream of a heaven-on-earth paradoxically replaces what is pejoratively perceived as religious intoxication. And autonomous voicing exists on a formal level, which opens the possibility of discourse on film. Furthermore, because the state has a

position on the nature of film-form, this also opens the possibility of discourse on the relation of state and the individual as director. In this chapter the films illustrate how flight and aviation ambivalently serve a poetic function and communicate multivalent messages which propagate the Party line, but also create levels of discourse on what is authentic.

Chapter Three, 'Air Parades', uses Varlamov and Kiselev's *Bogatyri Rodiny* (Soiuzkinokhroniki, 1937) and chronicle (newsreel) film from the 1930s and 1940 as its basis. The chapter illustrates how historical events and national aviation programmes are transformed into symbolic activities on the airfield. It shows how the notion of gaining wings denotes and connotes the successes of Stalin's Five-Year Plans, Osoaviakhim, and flight training. And it examines how the air-show is comparable to an *agora* (a public square in which individual commanders within society, its rulers and the public meet in a process of symbolic evaluation), how the Soviet perfected people are identified as 'krylatye liudi' and how aviation displays became icons of party ideology and historical events. It then demonstrates how reality is transformed into rhetorical language and cultural mythology, and how this imaging travels into films of different genres.

Chapter Four, 'Lyrical Flights and *Pravda zhizni*' shows how 'lyric-drama' uses the officialese of Stalinist aviation mythology and how it communicates an officially acceptable message, but also how it obviates this messaging through various processes of subtle transgression, and transformations of the tropes and code of Stalinist aviation mythology. Analysis of Iulii Raizman's *Letchiki* (Mosfil'm, 1935) shows how it was possible for a director to simultaneously celebrate Soviet society and delicately resist its parade-culture values. The notion of gaining wings in this lyric drama is a layered metaphor which represents the entwined feelings of self-expansion in creative work (aircraft design) and in feelings of love.

Chapter Five, 'Inculcating Courage', illustrates how the notion of gaining wings metaphorically signifies the gaining of courage on the part of young people, both girls and boys. This chapter shows how the transformation of the precursor historical event of the aerial Cheliuskin rescue has become the stuff of bed-time stories for children, and it shows the elision of reality and fantasy when the pilot, Vasilii Molokov, walks from the pages of a story book to the fictional public stage in the film. This chapter also shows the ambivalence in the representation of female pilots in the context of children's film. *Diadia-letchik* may be a man or a woman, but a 'queen of the air' with

superlative flying skills is not allowed to accomplish the ultimate act of rescue by flying in medicine to a children's hospital. The films described in this chapter do not communicate on multivalent levels, neither is their voicing overtly rhetorical, rather, they echo and have a similar appeal to that of Lev Tolstoi's short parables which communicate didactic messages with emotional appeal. They communicate what are tantamount to kernels of wisdom concerning moral values. These values are: those of the collective, faith in the future, and a sense that if you try hard enough and study, you can accomplish anything. The characters relate to the Jungian notion of growing to adulthood as an archetypal journey of the innocent child/orphan on his path to self-realization which is the same archetypal journey as that of becoming a hero.

Chapter Six is the concluding chapter and briefly draws together the findings of this thesis.



## Chapter One: 'Russian Icarus' and Inaugural Flight

This chapter examines two films of the late 1920s. The first, directed by Iurii Tarich,<sup>1</sup> is *Kryl'ia kholopa*. The second is Abram Room's *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. In each film there is a public aerial display (an air parade) at which individual private aspirations of the main character and public social value-systems meet, but are ambivalently shown to be separate, and in opposition. These films show how flight and aviation in Soviet cinema communicate myth and allegory, and also how they communicate emotion vitally as significant form. They also demonstrate varying planes of meaning in the archetypal metaphor 'to gain and to spread one's wings'.

*Kryl'ia kholopa* is based on one of several myths of a 'Russian Icarus', which have appeared at various times in Russia's history. For this reason it is worth giving attention to the myth and its antecedents before analysing images of flight and aviation in Tarich's film. 'Russian Icarus' myths are tales of serfs who endeavoured to fly by making wings or balloons of various materials, and who then demonstrated their inventions before their respective tsars and empresses. These tales are found in the reigns of Ivan the Terrible (Grand Prince of Moscow from 1533, Tsar from 1547-1583), Peter the Great (1682-1725), Aleksei Mikhailovich (1645-1676), and the Empress Anne Ioannovna (1730-1740).<sup>2</sup> From Russian peasants who built balloons of leather, such as Simeon, who tested his machine before Empress Anne, to the peasant who built giant doves wings in 1695, these visionaries were punished both for their successes and failures.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tarich is a pseudonym which is based on the name of the town where he spent his pre-revolutionary exile, Tara. It also appears as an appendage to his family-name, thus he is referred to as: Iurii Viktorovich Alekseev, Iurii Alekseev-Tarich, and Iurii Tarich. See: A. V. Krasinskii, *Iurii Tarich* (Minsk: Nauka i tekhniki, 1971), p. 5; and 'Iurii Tarich', Kino-teatr.ru, <<http://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/screenwriter/sov/31135/bio/>> [accessed 17 October 2014].

<sup>2</sup> N. Borozdin (Capt.), *Zavoevanie vozdushnoi stikhii: Popularnyie ocherki sovremennogo vozdukhoplavaniia i ego primeniia k" tseliam" voiny* (Warsaw: K. Kopytovskii, 1909), p. 6. Also see: Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, pp. 3-5. The review article in *Pravda* of *Kryl'ia kholopa* includes Anne Ioannovna as one of the rulers under whom a story of a Russian Icarus appeared. Kris. Khersonskii, 'Kryl'ia kholopa (Goskino – Soiuzkino)', *Pravda*, no. 271, 23 November 1926, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Borozdin, p. 6.

### **Ovid's Icarus**

*Kryl'ia kholopa* is based on Konstantin Shil'dkret's story of the same name which first appeared as a series in the *Workers Gazette* (Rabochaia gazeta).<sup>4</sup> This story in turn speaks to the fundamental precursor myth told by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses* and in his *Ars Amatoria*.<sup>5</sup> In these tales Daedulus constructs wings in order to free himself and his son, Icarus, from captivity in Crete, where they are imprisoned in a labyrinth which Daedulus has engineered for King Minos, the Minotaur ruler of the island. Icarus plummets to his death when he becomes so captivated by the experience of flight that he ignores his father's warnings, and flies so high that the sun melts the wax which binds his wings together. This myth is a noticeable weft in the fabric of Russian culture.<sup>6</sup> Two of its universally received interpretations, which are pertinent to their Soviet signification, are: the idea of the archetypal son paying a price for not listening to the wisdom of his father; and man's ineluctable striving for freedom from oppression. These two aspects link to both the notion of the Russian Revolution, which was meant to free workers and peasants from what was perceived as a capitalist and bourgeois yoke, and to the 1930s sense of 'Wise Father Stalin.' But it also links to the fate of those who found themselves in opposition to Party policy as lead by Stalin from the mid-twenties.

### **Contextual Allegory of Russian Icarus**

Each of the reigns in which the 'Russian Icarus' myth appears is marked by dramatic periods of state oppression, for example the forced labour that accompanied

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<sup>4</sup> Krasinskii, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> See: Ovid, 'The Art of Love', in *The Erotic Poems*, trans. by Peter Green (London: Penguin Books, 1982), pp. 166-238 (pp. 191-93); and 'The Death of Icarus', in *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. by Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 184-85.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent account of the significance of the Icarus myth in Russian visual culture, from its classical origins to the present see: Helena Goscilo, 'The Aerial Ways of Aspiration and Inspiration, or the Chrono/t(r)ope of Transcendence', 'Russian Aviation and Space: Technology and Cultural Imagination', Workshop, Leeds University, 28-30 October 2010, forthcoming; and Maria Tsantsanoglou, 'From the Dream of Free Flight to the Nightmare of Free Fall', in *Utopian Reality: Reconstructing Culture in Revolutionary Russia and Beyond*, ed. by Christina Lodder, Maria Kokkori, Maria Mileeva (Leiden, Netherlands, and Boston, MA.: Brill, 2013), pp. 43-56.

industrialization under Peter I; *Bironshchina* under Empress Anne; and the quelling of Sten'ka Razin and Bogdan Khmel'nitskii's rebellions, as well as division and persecution in the Orthodox Church, under Tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich. Tarich's film was made in a period that witnessed the struggle of internal Party oppositions and Stalin's intensified industrialization, which attended the victory of his policy of 'Socialism in One Country' (which was adopted at the Fourteenth Party Congress in 1925). This was prior to the adoption of collectivization programmes, which led to mass relocations and subjugation of large sections of the peasant population in the countryside in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The film was also made at a time which saw the Renovationist schism within the Orthodox Church that resulted from the persecutions of the Bolshevik anti-religious campaigns. The film was made by a director who worked with the theatrical group of the Student Theatre (Kursantskii teatr) which was later called the Sverdlov, in the Kremlin.<sup>7</sup> The theatre served those on cannon courses for commanders of the Red Army,<sup>8</sup> and it was attended by those who worked within the Kremlin, such as Lenin, Mikhail Kalinin, Krupskaya.<sup>9</sup> So Tarich may have been in a unique position to observe the tensions between those in power within its walls. But Tarich was a dedicated Revolutionary, and prior to the Revolution had been exiled for his association with the Socialist Democratic Workers Party in Warsaw (led by the future head of the Cheka, Feliks Dzerzhinskii). He went on to write satirical mass spectacles aimed at the capitalist world and the words for the Kremlin student-guards song; and, one month after Lenin's death, he played the deceased leader of the Revolution on stage in his work 'Death of an Empire' (Gibel' samoderzhavie).<sup>10</sup> The question arises: what did the myth of the Russian Icarus mean to this director? This question is accentuated by the shift in the film's alternative titles to *Tsar, Ivan Groznyi*, or simply, *Ivan Groznyi* (under which it was released in the United States, Canada, Europe, Mexico and Argentina).<sup>11</sup> Multiple advertisements in *Pravda* said that *Kryl'ia*

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<sup>7</sup> Krasinskii, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 8, 18-19 and 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 64 and 68.

*kholopa* was a ‘film-novel of the times of Ivan the Terrible’, and that the fate of Nikishka and Fima are decided by the times in which they live.<sup>12</sup>

***Kryl'ia kholopa***

‘All the people consider themselves to be kholops, that is slaves of their Prince.’

Sigsimund Herberstein (A sixteenth-century German traveler to Russia.)<sup>13</sup>

The constitution of July 1918 said the Revolution was nothing less than: ‘the abolition of all exploitation of man by man’

Steve A. Smith<sup>14</sup>

The title *Kryl'ia kholopa* immediately conveys the notion of wings (kryl'ia) as objects invented by a serf (kholopa), and it speaks to a sense of *radostnost'*, *chuvstvo poleta* that is, to a sense of self-expansion experienced in creative work, in gaining knowledge and in falling in love, all of which is expressed in the metaphor: *to spread one's wings* (*raspravliat' kryl'ia*). These ideas are rehearsed in the story of the serf, Nikishka, who, during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, builds wings as a flying machine. He successfully flies before the court, but rather than be exalted, the Tsar pronounces it an ‘ungodly act’ and Nikishka is condemned for having dealings with the Devil. The Tsar orders that he be beheaded and his wings burnt after a liturgy has been read. Thus, *Kryl'ia kholopa* is an early film which explicitly presents a creative flight-engineer as a *malen'kii chelovek* who is oppressed by the external forces of the state. Maureen Perrie’s study of the reception of Ivan the Terrible shows that the Tsar has been subjected to various historical interpretations. Each was able to serve as an allegory for the despotism of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Pravda*: no. 270, 21 November 1926, p. 6; no. 279, 2 December 1926, p. 8; no. 280, 3 December 1926, p. 6; no. 284, 8 December 1926, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 85.

<sup>14</sup> Steve A. Smith, *The Russian Revolution A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 40.

contemporary ruler at the time of their writing.<sup>15</sup> The question arises: is the story of *Kryl'ia kholopa* an allegory of the kind of oppression against which the Revolution fought? Or does *Kryl'ia kholopa* create a 'meta-text' which comments on authoritarian rule by the Bolsheviks in the mid-twenties?

### **Of Wings and Sacrifice**

The first subliminal intimation of 'wings of a serf' occurs when, near the beginning of the film, Nikishka's sweetheart, Fima (Sofia Garrel'), is gathering water through a hole in the ice. She lifts two buckets of water on a curved pole across her shoulders, and as the camera tracks her when she passes behind several small trees and bushes, her silhouette suggests the shape of 'wings'. This image of Fima then cuts to a taxidermied bird which is suspended as if in flight in a barn. The film subtly communicates a tension between notions of wing/freedom; serf/oppression; flight and restraint which are also communicated in the semantic spheres to which the title speaks. With the edit to the bird the camera introduces Nikishka (Ivan Kliukvin). His bright, open face studies it, making clear that he has made the bird a scientific model for understanding aerodynamics. The image identifies a common characteristic of the paradigmatic flight-designer and engineer; his knowledge comes intuitively from nature. In Vsevolod Pudovkin and Dmitrii Vasil'ev's biographical film *Zhukovskii* (Mosfil'm, 1950), we see the great scientist hunting, and then studying a bird in flight near the beginning of the film. It is when, during a storm, a bird suddenly crashes into his room through a window that he has the insight which leads to a break-through in understanding of the aerodynamics of wings. But in *Kryl'ia kholopa* the image of the stuffed bird is in effect bound by the ropes from which it is suspended, and its outspread wings visually pre-echo the prostrate torture-victims of later scenes. Both the shape of Nikishka's body as he is tortured for his 'devil's work', and the dead body of the Tsaritsa's maid-servant (with her head sunken on her chest and out-stretched arms tied to a rack after trying to help Nikishka to escape), visually recall the shape of Nikishka's bird, Fima's silhouette and also of Christ's crucifixion.<sup>16</sup> This is the beginning of a concatenation of images

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<sup>15</sup> Maureen Perrie, *The Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia* (London: Palgrave, 2001), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> The importance of the semiotics of the crucifix as an ambivalent sign of where and with whom ultimate law and power resides in this film, and the relation of levels of law including

in the film which combines the semiotics of the wing and the crucifix (which includes the choreography of Fima's water-gathering apparatus, the outstretched wings of his model-bird, and images of torture). By these means, the film-makers subliminally intrude into the communication of the serf's spirit of enquiry and aspiration a notion of a biblical *passion*.

The first view of Nikishka's wing-construction is a trace of a fine-rope-lattice which crosses the screen. It is unrecognizable as a wing. This rope-work looks like squares of geometry similar to veins of leaves in magnification, and Fima is seen in close-up through the visual *web* this creates. By means of this juxtaposition the film-makers subtly communicate a feeling of love, which is intrinsically linked to the impulse to create. But this image also looks forward to another layer of semiotics, which is based on notions of bondage and torture shown later in the film. In this introductory scene when Fima laughs at the idea of flight, Nikishka eagerly says: 'I will fly, you'll see!' (Polechu, vot uvidesh'!), and he eagerly leaps, belly-first, onto the suspended harness he uses to simulate flight. Waving his arms as if they are wings, the film shows how the desire to fly pre-exists internally before it emerges externally. Furthermore, it links this desire to the impulse of personal love. He grabs Fima mid-swing. Subsequent edits of the fluttering light and shadow which move across their faces communicate a sense of their joyful feelings, as if they are in flight. This moment in the film is affined to an archetypal sense of flight and love as a dual symbol, which is also intrinsic to Viktor Vasnetsov's (1848-1926) painting *Kover-samolet* (1919-1926). This painting includes a young peasant and princess-bride in flight as a folkloric communication of love, and it shows them on what was the origin of the Russian word for aeroplane: *samolet*, meaning 'self-flier', or magic carpet.

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literary principles of formalism employed by Shklovskii, is analysed by Rosemarie Baker, 'Shklovsky in the Cinema 1926-1932' (hereafter: 'Shklovsky in the Cinema') (unpublished masters thesis, Durham University, 2010, pp. 59-60) <<http://ethesis.dur.uni.ac.uk/378/>> [accessed March 2012].



**Figure 2: Fima's wings**



**Figure 3: Nikishka – aeronautic-study**



**Figure 4: Love and Flight**

### Telling Tales

The film begins with an intertitle: 'The Time of the Story is/the second half/of the sixteenth century'. The second intertitle reads: 'Once, on a winter's morning, 1568'. The use of a specific period, and the literary trope; 'odnazhdy' (once), which is typical of fairy-tales (skazki), suggest that the director wants the film to be received ambivalently as historical document and as folklore (if not a dark wonder-tale). The intertitles situate the film within those Soviet costume dramas, such as Aleksandr Ivanovskii's *Stepan Khalturin* (Sevzapkino, 1925), Viacheslav Viskovskii's *Deviatoe ianvaria* (Ninth January) (Sevzapkino, 1925); and Ivanovskii's *Dvorets i krepost'* (Palace and Fortress) (Sovkino, Leningrad, 1923; r.1924),<sup>17</sup> which afforded competition to Hollywood imported melodramas. The intention may have been to prepare the audience for the entertainment values of the day: 'love, sex and violence', which peaked with the vampiric *Medvezh'ia svad'ba*.<sup>18</sup> But this tension between setting the film within a specific historical period and a time which belongs to a folkloric 'no time' invites an allegorical reading, which is, by the same means, simultaneously denied. It may also be that a desire to be read both as authentic film-history and as a folk-tale undermines potential attempts to make parallels between contemporary Soviet governance and the governance portrayed on screen, and thus protect those people involved in the film's artistic decisions.

### Abominations at Court and in the Tsar's Realm

In its portrayal of characters ranging from the Tsar and Tsaritsa, to the Prince to whom the serf is bound, and the acolyte plaything of the Tsar, the film depicts scenes of debauchery and debasement of majesty. It shows the abduction of Nikishka, Fima and other villagers, and how they are forced into Prince Kurliatev's slave work-force (kabala). It tells of Fima's rape by Kurliatev (I. Arkanov), which is, it seems, taken to

<sup>17</sup> See a discussion of these films in Denise J. Youngblood, *Movies for the Masses, Popular Cinema and Soviet Society in the 1920s*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 80-89, (p. 84); and in Krasinskii, p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> Vladimir Gardin and Konstantin Eggert, *Medvezh'ia svad'ba* (Bear's Wedding) (Mezhrabpom-Rus', 1925). The full title of Lunacharskii's play and script for the film is called *Medved'zhia svad'ba: melodrama na siuzhet Merime v 9 kartinakh* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1924). The film's alternative title was *Poslednaia Shemet*. See Denise Youngblood, *ibid.*.



be the right of the master (khoziain) in similar way to *snokhachestvo*. *Snokhachestvo* was the practice of sexual abuse of a daughter-in-law by the father-in-law or male head of her new family.<sup>19</sup> *Kryl'ia kholopa* also shows the Tsar's elite-corps' rape and pillage of Prince Kurliatev's family and household, in part due to the ire of the less well-born boiar, Drutskoi (Nikolai Vitovtov). The film shows the licentious lust of the Tsaritsa, Maria Temriukovna (the second wife of Ivan IV, played by Safiiat Askarova) for Nikishka. And it portrays corruption and lasciviousness in its depiction of the Tsar's homoerotic liason with one young oprichnik, Fed'ka (Fedor) Basmanov (Nikolai Prozorovskii). The Tsar slays a servant for interrupting an intimate meeting in which Ivan the Terrible erotically teases and feeds the acolyte grapes. The film shows the jealous betrayal of the Tsaritsa by her lover, and the Tsar's murder of his wife because of her (supposed) infidelity with Nikishka. Throughout the Tsar's lands it seems that deviousness, dehumanization of life, pride and lust enslave society. Even the boiar Lupatov, whose village is raided by the higher-born boiar, Kurliatev, and who turns to the Tsar for help, is marked by a grovelling petition before the ruler (*bit' v chelom*). The eponymous Serf's innocent, free-spirited experiments tragically lead to his enslavement in the courtiers' contrasting nets of intrigue which trammel society.

### **Breaks in Time**

The notion of the temporal division of the sixteenth century (which is communicated in the intertitles at the beginning of the film) underscores the film with an interpretation of the Tsar's reign which has been repeated since Nikolai Karamzin's (1766-1826) history of Russia. According to this view, following the death of his first beloved wife, Anastasiia, Ivan the Terrible's personality changed.<sup>20</sup> It was in this period that the Tsar's reign began to be characterize by cruelty, and in 1565, he established his personal estate, the oprichnina. He also set up a caste to rule it, the oprichniniki, the proto secret police of Russia. Ivan put 'new men' into his corps and 'their purpose was to destroy those whom the tsar considered his enemies.'<sup>21</sup> In 1924 the state's secret

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<sup>19</sup> Laura Engelstein, *The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 46-47.

<sup>20</sup> Perrie, pp. 6-8.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 5th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 150-51.

police, the OGPU (The Joint State Political Administration) (Ob"edinnoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie) regained what the GPU had lost; the authority to adjudicate and punish. And it 'grew into the superagency of terror for which Stalin and Stalinism are best known.'<sup>22</sup>

The second intertitle of the film gives the year '1568'. It is the year in which the Metropolitan of Moscow, Philip II, was sentenced to death for standing up to the Tsar concerning the oprichniki's brutal methods, and for asking that it be disbanded. The Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925 saw a formal turn against the 'New Oppositionists': Grigorii Zinov'iev and Lev Kamenev. In 1925, Lev Trotskii resigned from his position as War Commissar. The charismatic head of the military - the man who had promoted aviation measures to secure the development of both the Red Army and the Civilian Air Fleets; the person who thus promoted the 'red wings' which were intended to defend the Soviet Union from interventionists was moved towards his *de facto* death sentence.

On the one hand, the foregrounding of the year in which Ivan had his Metropolitan executed, and a period of political terror may critically point up contemporary anti-religious and patrimonial practices. On the other, the film may take its place amongst Tarich's theatrical anti-religious works and give oblique support to the Bolshevik anti-religious campaigns which had been pursued in various degrees since the Civil War.

### **Repairing Time**

The first image of the film is an ornate mechanical clock. It is the first element of the film's expressive matrix based on machines and mechanisms – a matrix which includes the serf's invention of wings and the Tsar's great flax-wheel (to which I return below). The clock stopping also suggests a notion of *time* ceasing, and this is linked to the film's periodic division of the sixteenth century. Similarly, the Revolution is a temporal marker of dramatic social change and a *break* in time. Stalin's implementation of the policy of Socialism in One Country and its attendant intensive industrialization programme can also be seen as a comparable shift. The director subtly begins his film with a sense of a profound rift in time and in the nature of rulership. This supports a

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<sup>22</sup> Peter H.Solomon, *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 26.

notion of the Revolution as a time which ushered in freedom from the practices portrayed on screen. But the symbol of time in the film, the clock, is in need of repair. And it is the young *bobyl'* (as Nikishka is introduced on camera) who is abducted by the high-born boiar, Kurliatev, who is thought capable of fixing the clock, and therefore, metaphorically, possibly the times.

### **The Outsider**

A *bobyl'* according to dictionary translations is a peasant bachelor, or a single, lonely man. In Soviet times a *bobyl'* primarily came to mean an old man who lived alone, and individuals in the late 1920s recall how children would go to such a person (also known simply as a *starik*) to listen to his tales.<sup>23</sup> But in the sixteenth century *bobyli* were a minor category of peasant who were craftsmen and cotters who did not own land themselves and therefore eked out a living as best they could. They were labourers; and transport was one of their spheres of work.<sup>24</sup> They constituted a travelling workforce that supplied monasteries and other institutions. They were single in marital terms because they often had to travel to make their living.<sup>25</sup> But this actually referred to their singular status outside the 'compulsory fiscal group' which related to ownership of arable land.<sup>26</sup> They were outside the norms of taxation on land because they paid their landlords in labour not in quit-rent. One of the modes of work (*kabala*) tied them to the masters who payed off debts on their behalf and made these peasants even more enslaved.<sup>27</sup> One historian says that 'the mysterious class of the *bobyli* (were) trade labourers often and oftenest of all, vagabonds pure and simple, lost in the mass of outlaws of every kind – Cossacks, wandering jugglers, beggars, and thieves'.<sup>28</sup> Thus the film introduces its 'Russian Icarus', Nikishka, as a serf (*kholop*) who, depending on

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<sup>23</sup> Laura J. Olsen and Svetlana Adonyeva, *Worlds of Russian Village Women: Tradition, Transgression, Compromise* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), p. 48.

<sup>24</sup> Jerome Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia from the Ninth to the Nineteenth Century* (hereafter: *Lord and Peasant in Russia*) (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Kazimierz Waliszewski, *Ivan the Terrible*, trans by. Lady Mary Lloyd (Brimscombe Port, Gloucestershire: Nonsuch, 2006), p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> Blum, *Lord and Peasant in Russia*, p. 241.

<sup>27</sup> Waliszewski, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

time and place within the centuries of its development, signified a range of states of being; from people who were ‘nearly chattel slaves to men who were nearly free’.<sup>29</sup> Nikishka is introduced by reputation as a ‘vydumshik’ or ‘inventive soul’. Furthermore, as a *bobyl*, he comes from a class which exists on the peripheries of society. The film shows Nikishka’s status as someone who belongs to another; he is ‘Lupatov’s Nikishka (lupatovskii Nikishka). He is moved about like property; and he is a person in bondage. He is also one of those artist-craftsmen who exist outside the law (an outlaw), and whose invention takes the notion of ‘transport’ to the level of a magic-tale. The introduction of a serf who has more technical capability than the ‘high born’ (to whom the clock belongs and who admire it) supports an ideology favouring the proletariat. But if the ‘inventive soul’, the ‘capable person’ (umelets) and ‘*bobyl*’ is needed to repair the metaphoric shift, and break, in time (which the stopping clock, and the intertitles at the beginning of the film suggest), then the film-makers, as equivalent ‘inventive souls’, and tellers of tales, by suggesting parallelisms between violent practices of sixteenth and early ‘Soviet patrimony’ may also be subtly attempting a similar act of reparation.<sup>30</sup>

### **Devil’s Work (Satanskie dela)**

#### **First Test-flight**

The test-flight is introduced by an intertitle as ‘devil’s work.’ There are three test-flights in total, the last of which is the successful aerial display before the Tsar. Each of the test-flights is more successful than the last. They confirm the nature of Nikishka as someone who thinks scientifically by a combination of experiment and intuition. As has been recognized by other critics, Nikishka shows his nature as intuitive, hard-working, and persistent. But the first image of Nikishka’s initial test-flight is a female-peasant’s face as she looks through the wooden slats of a fence. When Nikishka jumps off the roof and lands upside down, spitting out snow through the box-slats of his wings, the

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<sup>29</sup> Jerome Blum, ‘The Rise of Serfdom in Eastern Europe’, *The American Historical Review*, 62, 4 (1957), 807-36 (p. 808).

<sup>30</sup> For an excellent account of the practices of patrimony during the period of Stalin’s leadership, see Arch Getty, *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

visual-parallelism of the box-slats of his creative invention and the slats through which he is fatefully spied upon underscores the film's dichotomic world views.

### **Kabala**

The pure snow and open space of Nikishka's first test-flight suggests a topography of *purity* which is aligned with a notion of scientific endeavour. This contrasts with the interior worlds in which the villagers work in the condition known as *kabala*. The first image of work exacted under this system is of Nikishka's hands as he repairs the clock-mechanism which breaks at the beginning of the film. His talent is put in the service of slave-labour. There is another form of slave-labour exacted by Prince Kurliatev from Fima. The sequence begins with Kurliatev crossing himself. There is a webbed pattern in the carved screens behind. The camera pulls back and exposes the tear stained face of Fima and her dishevelled chemise which she clutches while she sits on the edge of his bed. The prolonged close-up of her face communicates what has been demanded of her. Later, after Nikishka's first test-flight, she finds Nikishka in a barn and falteringly confesses her shame to him. After his initial anger with her, they embrace. Just noticeable above them is Nikishka's model bird, which was suspended in his workshop-barn at the beginning of the film. Whereas at the beginning of the film it was huge within the screen, the instrument of Nikishka's aerodynamic study is now hardly noticeable and his wings lie folded on the ground. By means of the symbolic diminution of Nikishka's flight *apparatus* in the frame, the *mis-en-scène* subtly supports the film's communication of a correspondence between love and creativity and also the increasing diminishment of their personal world and creative gifts by the 'devilry' of their society.

The following edit is to the women's abode of the boiar's household, and an almost grotesque close-up of Princess Kurliateva (K. Chebysheva) in a silk head-covering, edged with pearls, as she paints her face. The maids rush in with their gossip. They fall on their knees before the boiarina and say: 'And he had Satan's wings and he persuaded Fimka to fly across the ocean with him!' (A u nego kryl'ia satanskie [...] On Fimku za more-ocean letet!'). The servants continue: "And what's more, your ladyship, they were alone together..." It is at this whiff of erotic relations that the boiaryna reacts, and, perhaps inadvertently, the film thus adds the ingredient of contemporary denunciation to the semantic field of 'devil's work'.

The response to the denunciation of Nikishka is swift. In opposition to those traditional folk tales in which a heroic peasant-‘Ivan’ flies on a magic carpet (kover-samolet); brings back a firebird and is rewarded with marriage to a Tsar’s daughter, the Prince addresses Fima with the damning question: ‘have you slept with the devil?’ (S satanoi spoznalas’?). The film ironically points to the Prince, when he thus accuses her of erotic relations with Nikishka, as the implied ‘devil’. The question put directly to Nikishka is: ‘Did you think you could argue with God?’ (Boga peresporit’ zadumal?) But the Prince assumes the position of the Tsar, speaking for God on Earth. The sentence pronounced is that their backs should be whipped ‘until their guts drop out’ (bit’ ikh plet’mi do sedmi potu!). Edits move between a medium-close-up of a weal on Nikishka’s back, a dog barking in excitement, and the young *baryshni* watching the punishments with apparent blood-lust from a decorative screened-window above. These visual semantics of screens and enclosed spaces and protean expressive verticals contrast the metaphoric spiritual heights of Nikishka with the dark psychoses of the people in power. This sensibility is augmented when suddenly one of the daughters cries out ‘Oprichniki!’

When Drutskoi rides up on his black horse (typical of the oprichniki) and asks: ‘why is he being punished?’ The answer is that the prisoner had “gone against nature, and intended to fly” (Protiv estestva tvorit’, letat’ sobralisia). But Drutskoi’s response points to the Prince’s own offence against the *natural hierarchies*. He says that it is high-time that Kurliatev knew that it is the Tsar’s court that gives out sentences. He says: ‘You, in your estate, are not the Tsar!’ (ty v votchine ne tsar).

### **Bondage and Freedom**

Nikishka is next seen on a torturer’s rack in the Tsar’s palace at Aleksandrovskaia sloboda (much of the filming was done at the older Kremlin at Kolomenskoe).<sup>31</sup> The torturer is relishing his work and asks Nikishka if he dares fly again? The chains of torture are large in the frame. They create a v-shape which visually links to the ropes from which Nikishka’s model-bird is suspended at the beginning of the film. They also link back to the ropes by which the bell of the church is rung and to the chains supporting a candle-holder in church which vertically cross the film-frame. Between these chains we see a fresco of Christ. Following Kurliatev’s rape of Fima, the bell

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<sup>31</sup> Krasinski, ‘pp. 57-8.’

calls the oprichniki and the Tsar to the service. A priest leads the service and crosses himself: he is wearing a chain around his neck with a cross, and behind him there is the fresco of Christ. The young acolyte, Basmanov, who is later revealed to be the Tsar's lover, crosses himself. Basmanov joins in the prayer to God as one of the Lord's 'slaves' (rab). By contrasting the nature of the serf-*kholopa-bobyl'*, and the 'slave' who hypocritically prays for forgiveness, the film subtly creates a discourse on the nature of enslavement. And it signals its anti-religious position.

The 'v'-shape of the ropes, which are part of religious mis-en-scène, visually link to the ropes of Nikishka's bird-flight-model. They also link to the first images of the Tsar. There is a dissolve from the Christ figure to the top of a head of a believer in prayer who is announced (by intertitle) to be Ivan. The Tsar's face rises between the v-shape of two chains of an incense burner to replace the Christ fresco behind. The English sense of Ivan Groznyi is translated as terrible but in Russian it also signifies dreaded and awe-inspiring. Having pronounced himself 'Tsar of All Russia' in 1547, the Patriarch of Constantinople attached an epistle 'acclaiming Ivan IV 'emperor and seigneur [...] of Orthodox Christians in the entire universe' in 1561.<sup>32</sup> By these means, the film effects a representation of the Tsar as the representative of God's truth on earth, but in the context of hypocritical subservience to God by his elite, the film tars him with the brush of the nineteen twenties anti-religious zeitgeist. The semiotics of ropes and chains also suture ideas of religious slavery, the nature of sacrifice, and of the un-freedom of higher-office to its opposite: notions of spiritual freedom. By these means the location of, and nature of truth and authentic power is made a level of discourse, and this question subtends Nikishka's final successful flight before the Tsar (I return to this below). The dominant sense is that, from the Prince's private 'boiarskii sud', to the Tsar's 'dyba and zastenok', scenes of blood-lust and pleasure in torture affirm that Nikishka's desire to fly, and that his love of Fima are of a different natural order.

Nikishka's torture in the Tsar's kremlin at Aleksandrovskaja sloboda is interrupted because he has been recommended to the Tsar as someone who is able to make repairs. At the Tsarina's order Ivan's son (played by Ivan Korsh-Sablin, who also later took part in the founding of the Belorussian film studio) beheads those responsible 'for the wheel's breakage' (*Za polomku koleasa*). We see the Tsarevich laughing, he

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<sup>32</sup> Pipes, p. 73.

takes out his sabre, and the worker is beheaded. The intertitle explains that ‘the Tsarevich inherited the skill and strength of his hand from his father.’ (Snorovka i tverdost’ ruki tsarevich unasledoval ot ottsa). The earlier intertitle ‘devil’s work’, the main purpose of which was to foreground the false thinking behind this categorization of Nikishka’s creative invention, in this scene becomes a rubric for notions of inhuman practices. But the notion of ‘inherited skills’ is an important theme in the years following Lenin’s death. And the brutality shown might not be unfamiliar from the Civil War. The possibility that the film may be a contemporary allegory is suggested by Rogachevskii, who cites an extended advertisement for a double-bill of *Kryl’ia kholopa* and Dziga Vertov’s *Shestaia chast’ mira* (One Sixth of the World) (Goskino, Sovkino 1926). In the advertisement, attention is given to Ivan IV and his great-wheel, and this is juxtaposed to a scene from Vertov’s film in which: ‘Stalin gives a speech by the giant hand-wheel of the steel machine’. Rogachevskii points out that drawing attention to the use of this mutually ‘expressive symbol’ from each of the films at their showings in 1927 is, in itself, revealing.<sup>33</sup>

Learning that Nikishka has repaired the wheel, the Tsaritsa (the overseer of the factory), arrives and asks Nikishka what reward he would like. Nikishka asks to be allowed: ‘to fly on wings.’ Again foregrounding a link between creativity and personal love, when his first request is laughed away, he asks to be allowed to marry Fima. But the edit between the Tsaritsa’s darkening face and Fima’s beautiful, natural smile betokens a threat. Nikishka and Fima are left, still on their knees, just looking at each other, confused.

### **Second Test-flight – tightening nets**

In Nikishka’s second test-flight he tries-out his wings from another roof, and afterwards, while working on his wings which lie in the snow, he is interrupted by the Tsaritsa’s maid. She brings her mistress’s ring as a token that the Tsaritsa desires Nikishka to become one of her ‘grooms’. Through the criss-cross-pattern of a leaded window, we see the Tsaritsa smiling and laughing lasciviously. This recalls the *boiaryshnas* authorial view of Nikishka’s whipping. The pattern of the ring links to the pattern of the windows and screens and forms an expressive matrix that speaks to

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<sup>33</sup> Mikhail Rogachevskii, *Tragediia tragika: Leonid Leonidov: Dokumental'noe povestvovanie*, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1998), pp. 304-06.



desire and power. Nikishka innocently accepts the ring without knowing what it may imply. Echoing Plato's use of the metaphor of wings in his 'Phaedrus', which the philosopher employs in his differentiation between qualities of enslaving love as opposed to love which is a striving for a truth,<sup>34</sup> the film uses flight as a complex symbol of higher love and higher truth, to which the intimation of licentiousness is counterpoised.

The only person who may be able to rescue the young couple from their enslavement is Fima's brother. He organizes to try and hide them away in a flax convoy when it leaves the *sloboda*. But Nikishka is called by the Tsar to fly before the court and his foreign merchants who have come to buy his flax. Nikishka's final, and successful, test-flight is a result of the 'great merchant' (bol'shoi kupets), the Tsar's, desire to impress his guests. Nikishka's talents have gone from being put in the service of the *kabala* system, to being an element of the Tsar's trade. This plane of logic supports the film's pejorative depiction of pre-revolutionary practices. But it ambivalently highlights the contemporary issue of trade. On the one hand, the film negatively codes capitalism. But on the other, the identification of the 'Great Merchant' as the Tsar uneasily speaks to an idea of Stalin, who was steering the country into an economic policy of intensive industrialization (which would later draw on Western co-operation).

#### **A Sixteenth Century Aviation Day: *Den' poleta***

As a reward bestowed upon him for repairing the great wheel, Nikishka is allowed to fly before Ivan the Terrible, the court and villagers. The day is announced with the intertitle: 'V den' poleta' (the day of the flight). The first image is of outriders of the Tsar carrying his 'Great Banner (Velikii stiaq, 1560). The flag 'flies' in the wind and we see that it contains an image of Christ seated on a horse within a sphere symbolizing Heaven. From this position, Christ commands a host of angels in the battle for good against evil. Although it cannot be discerned, the flag also contains an image of St Michael on a winged horse, and it contains the text from Revelation 19:

И се конь бел, и седяй на нем верен и истинен, и  
правосудный и воинственный. Очи же ему яко пламень

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<sup>34</sup> 'Phaedrus', in Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett, II (London: Sphere Books, 1970), pp. 243-99.

огнен и на главе его венцы мнози: имый имя написано, еже нектоже весть, токмо он сам.)<sup>35</sup>

(And behold a white horse, and sitting on him was one true and just and who would make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

The flag would be one of those many elements that the film-makers are known to have researched in order to bring the historical period authentically to the screen. But the flag is also an important signifier. It evokes the battle of the apocalypse and speaks to the notion of a time before Christ's word had been established on Earth and when a final battle between forces of good and evil is being fought. It suggests the notion of the *visionary*, which is embedded in the word '*Apokolupsis*', signifying *revelation* in the sense of 'uncovering' and a 'disclosure'.<sup>36</sup> This banner suggests the Tsar's identification with Christ as Revelation, as an uncovering of truth. It also suggests Christ coming to the Tsar's aid as commander, together with St Michael, of the heavenly host. But it is not unreasonable to think that the inclusion of the banner of the apocalypse signals the film's allegorical commentary on a commensurate struggle for control of Lenin's legacy following the vacuum that was experienced after his death. If this symbolism is intended, the question arises: who is meant as the allegorical defender of Lenin's word? This question may have been felt personally by the director who was acclaimed for his resemblance to Lenin when he portrayed him on stage as the country still mourned Lenin's death.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> I. A. Kochetkov, 'K istolkovaniiu ikony "Tserkov' voinstvuiushchaia" ("Blagoslovennoe voinstvo nebesnogo tsaria")', *Trudy otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, ed. by D. S. Likhachev et al, XXXVIII (Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR: Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii Dom), 1985) <<http://odrl.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=2284>> [accessed April 2012].

<sup>36</sup> *The Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. by Trent C. Butler (Nashville, TE: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), pp. 68-69 and 73.

<sup>37</sup> Krasinskii, p. 20.



**Figure 5: Velikii stiazh**



**Figure 6: Nimbus**

### **Nimbus**

In a visual parallelism Esfir' Shub edits between the flag's image of Christ encircled in a symbolic sphere of Heaven and Nikishka encircled by the iris lens. By these means, the film suggests a parallel between Christ who leads the heavenly host in the battle to assert the word of God, and Nikishka, the free-thinking flight engineer, the man of the people. This parallelism suggests that it is the creative inventor, the artist, who is the true person to represent the revolutionary spirit. These frames, with the white wall of the architectural monument behind Nikishka, are full of light. The feeling communicated is uplifting. Bright light accompanies hosts of angels which are feared

by men. The colour links to Nikishka's test-flights in the snow and underscore him with similar fearful angelic qualities. By contrast, when we see Ivan focusing on Nikishka off-screen and above him, he is scowling. His eyes are penetrating and darting. Shub describes how she perceived from the rushes that such close-ups of Leonidov's expression as Ivan could be used as a visual refrain that would provide a signature of the Tsar's character.<sup>38</sup> But it is not irrelevant that Leonidov's expressive visage and eyes correspond with contemporary descriptions of Stalin's 'oriental', 'feline eyes', which could turn almost 'yellow' in anger, and which were characteristic of the mercurial temperament of this Sphinx-like man of 'many faces' (litsedei).<sup>39</sup> The *Velikii stiag*, as an imperial-emblem, confers sacral authority and righteousness on the Tsar. But the question of who is signified as the source of *revelation* connoted by the flag is increased by the flag's biblical citation: 'only I know who I am'.<sup>40</sup> The film subtly destabilizes the sense of righteousness which the banner emblematically bestows on Tsar Ivan the Terrible. When Nikishka is given the signal and he *flies*, the somewhat rude mechanics of his flight do not betray the film's communication of his miraculous achievement. Fima cries out and puts her hands over her face, a flock of birds bursts into the air. Nikishka soars metaphorically and literally above the hierarchies of society below him as his wings, and metaphoric creativity fatefully take him above the Tsar.

### **Feeling of Flight**

Nikishka's movement is tracked across the sky as it is followed by the movement of the people's heads watching him. His winged apparatus visually echoes the mechanism invented by early flight designers ranging from Leonardo da Vinci to Otto Lilienthal.<sup>41</sup> It pre-echoes the Constructivist, Vladimir Tatlin's; flying machine (letatlin). This was

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<sup>38</sup> Shub, 'Moia shkola kinematografiia', in her *Zhizn' moia – kinomatograf: Stat'ii, vystupleniia, neosuschchestvlennye zamysly, perepiska*, ed. by A. I. Konopleva and S. V. Drobashenko (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo iskusstvo, 1972), pp. 66-83 (p. 81).

<sup>39</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Orion, 2003) pp. 2-3.

<sup>40</sup> See: 'The Revelation of St John, the Divine', 19, 11-14, *The New Testament, The Holy Bible*, Authorized King James Version (London: Collins, 1975).

<sup>41</sup> Leonardo da Vinci's Codex on the Flight of Birds, Smithsonian National Air Space Museum, Washington, D. C. exhibit, <<http://airandspace.si.edu/exhibitions/codex/codex.cfv#page-26-27>>. See also *The Lore of Flight*, ed. by John Taylor (Gothenburg: Tre Tryckare, 1970), p. 169.

designed purely in order to replicate the sensation of gliding flight rather than for technological or industrial purposes. The wings of the serf are also the product of delight in invention and flight for its own sake. They visually anticipate the innocent contraption made by children in Vladimir Nemoliaev's *Po sledam geroia* (In the Steps of a Hero, Mezhrabpomfil'm, 1935). (This will be discussed further in Chapter Four.) The successful flight is something never seen before. It not only puts the *outsider/bobyl'* in a position 'outside' his world, it also suggests the possibility of a new world order. The Tsar and his court are a damning indictment of the old world which he rises above.



**Figure 7: Flight: Freedom from earthly hierarchies**



**Figure 8: Shadow of flight**

As Nikishka flies we see mixed reactions of amazement from courtiers, visiting noblemen traders and from the peasantry. Drutskoi looks with a cynical hunger for catastrophe. In a cinematographic trope used in films as varied as *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* to Iulii Raizman's *Letchiki* and chronicle films of air parades, we see the shadow of Nikishka's 'aircraft' pass across the buildings and land below him. The people who are gathered look up at the figure of Nikishka in flight: his figure and wings again make a cruciform shape. The film asserts Ivan the Terrible as a leader in the battle against evil according to the emblem created for him. But it identifies the young *vydumshik* as a 'true' and 'loving' person, and the viewer is invited to recognize Nikishka as the authentic visionary who can reveal the world of truth.

### **Raven**

The subliminal idea of Nikishka as the un-recognized revealer of truth is further supported by the semiotics of his wings. Near the beginning of the film, the outstretched wings of a stuffed crow which Nikishka studies pre-figure the cruciform shape of his flying apparatus, but the ornithic image carries its own symbolism. The crow is a member of the raven family, and the crow shown in the film is a species typical of the Moscow region which has two-tones, black and grey. The raven was sent by Noah to see if land had emerged from the flood in Genesis, and for this reason the raven has become a symbol of 'clear-sightedness'.

When Nikishka lands with a hard jump it suggests the paradigm which Roman Jakobson quotes from a folk tale of the peasant who climbed to Heaven: 'ne to chto iz chudes/ Chto muzhik upal s nebes,/A to chudo iz chudes,/ kak tuda on vlez'.<sup>42</sup> After the miracle of his flight Nikishka has to return to earth. The sense of the leather of the wings, of the solid wood which has been worked by his hands is present when he is helped out of them as the crowd and Fima rush over to congratulate him. But then the Tsar's negative response is perceived. When Nikishka stands before him, the Tsar pronounces that 'a man is not a bird/he does not have wings', and that 'this is not God's work'. He is accused of having dealings with unclean powers. The Tsar orders that

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<sup>42</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'On Russian Fairy Tales', 'Their Characteristic Features', in Aleksandr Afans'ev, *Russian Fairy Tales*, trans. by Norbert Guterman (London: Routledge, 1946), pp. 643-51 (p. 651).

Nikishka should be beheaded. And the fate of the serf's wings are to be burnt after prayers have been said. One of the foreign traders asks to buy them, and the Tsar turns in a fury on the wings: it is as if Ivan the Terrible is stamping on the spirit of truth, and the purity of the quest for knowledge.



**Figure 9: 'A man is not a bird...' - Leonid Leonidov as Ivan**

### **Icarian Fall**

The last night is as fateful as his sentence. The Tsaritsa is overcome by her desire for the serf and goes to his prison cell. But being rejected by the serf, the Tsaritsa satisfies another form of lust instead, and she instructs first Nikishka and then her former lover, Drutskoi, to kill each other after the oprichnik discovers them alone in the cell.

At the cost of her own life, the Tsaritsa's maid helps Nikishka to escape. He reaches the height of the *sloboda*, but without wings he can only look out. As we see the sweep of the vista below an aerial point of view is suggested. It speaks to the notion of the 'vid s ptichego poleta' (bird's eye view), and to the symbolism of the raven. Nikishka sees the flax caravan (with Fima hidden in it) heading out of the *sloboda*. There is a beautiful vista of the snowscape below. It is the dénouement of Fima's narrative, but the dominant sense is of Nikishka's desolation. The christological symbolism of clear-sighted-ness of Noah's raven, of the sense of the visionary of St Michael and of an all-sacrificing Christ support a communication of a presentiment of Nikishka's soul in transcendence in this image.



**Figure 10: Aerial premonition**

The *boby!* then runs again, and as he enters a room we recognize it. It is a room where Prince Kurliatev was led to his death by impalement after having been debased in front of the court earlier in the film. Following the Prince's transgression in personally passing a court-sentence on Nikishka (in place of the Tsar), Ivan the Terrible ordered Drutskoi and the oprichniki to pay the boiar a 'visit', during which they ransacked the home and raped his daughters and wife, before requesting the Prince's presence at court. At court the Tsar humiliates the Prince, asking him to sit beneath his rank. And having been forced to dance wearing the hat of the court jester before the whole court, Kurliatev was offered an escape, only to be ushered into a room in which a trap-door plunges the victim down onto the spikes below. At the end of the film, Nikishka steps into this room and triggers the mechanism which propels the serf towards his Icarian fall.

The film ends with an image of the priest and the Tsar's lover, Basmanov, once more saying prayers. There is no noticeable horizon in the frame. There is just a pervading sense of the black surround as a sly, and just perceptible smile hovers on Basmanov's lips. The people who are left in the frame are those who have pandered to Ivan the Terrible's every wish. The visionary-engineer, Nikishka, lies dead on the stakes. His wings were burned (off-screen) after a liturgy had been said at the order of the Tsar.



### Vampiric Invention

Nikishka's invention of wings for flight and the trap-door which leads to death by impalement are linked within the film's expressive matrix based on technology. The film shows a form of execution which was not known in Russia before or after Ivan IV, and he apparently used it only when he was feeling most vindictive.<sup>43</sup> Ironically, Ivan had introduced the printing-press to Russia, which had allowed the circulation through Europe of the original tales of Dracula. One historian suggests that the stories of Vlad Tepeş Dracul, Vlad the Impaler, which Efrovsin compiled at the monastery at Beloozero where Ivan stayed, were read by the Tsar.<sup>44</sup> The shadow of Ivan the Terrible as he walks to the Tsaritsa's bed-chamber in order to 'execute' her resembles the iconic shadow of Count Orlok as the eponymous vampire in F. W. Murnau's film; *Nosferatu: a Symphony of Horror* (Prana Film, 1922). The visual nod to the German film may simply have underscored the sense that the Soviet film industry could compete in vampires; and put them 'in the service' of the proletarian cause. Viktor Shklovskii, who contributed extensively to the rewriting of the script, said the film-makers tried to get away from the negative depiction of Ivan the Terrible of Aleksei Tolstoi's *Kniaz' Serebrianyi* (*Prince Serebrianyi*, 1862). Shklovskii's approach was important in persuading the reknowned actor from the Moscow Arts Theatre, Leonid Leonidov, to accept the role. In an early review in *Pravda* he received high praise for revealing 'the essence of the man and the era'. Writing in 1974, Shklovskii said that at the time of the film's making, the film-makers wanted to base their portrayal on historical truth. Their Ivan IV had 'the first mechanized flax factory in Russia', and 'even founded a monopoly in the flax industry'.<sup>45</sup> But the film subliminally colours the Tsar with tales of unnatural flight of creatures who never die, and of the unnatural death of his victims. The dominant sense of Ivan the Terrible is closer to the notion of Ivan the Terrible as Chronos, the god which ate its progeny, than to the notion of an enlightened tsar.

As much as the film-makers may have desired to show-off Ivan's systemized flax operations, the film communicates a quality of industry which is closer to the founding of labour camps at Solovitskii islands in 1923. The notion in the Tsar's

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<sup>43</sup> Isabel de Madariaga, *Ivan the Terrible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 45.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Kryl'ia kholopa', *Za 60 let, raboty o kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), pp. 46-7.

equipment and his introduction of technology anticipates the introduction of a form of torture and questioning known as the 'konveier' during Stalin's purges. The father of liquid-fuel rocket propulsion programme, Sergei Korolev, survives it in Iurii Kara's biographical film *Korolev*, (Studiia 'Master', Kinokompaniia L.S.D. Films, 2007). Tarich's film is structured on a poetic 'matrix of machines',<sup>46</sup> and mechanisms which bring together notions of time, industry, torture, and creative invention (wings). The juxtaposition of mechanisms which represent the fulfilment of innovative dreams in technology is of a different category to technology which serves indifferent and dehumanized progress. This film shows that the fates of the young Nikishka, and his invention are decided by the socio-religious context of Nikishka's birth. He is the *kholop* first of the boyar Lupatov, and then of Prince Kurliatev. But Nikishka's fate is also influenced by Ivan IV's relationship with his nobility. Ultimately, the serf's fate is decided by the self-legitimization of the Tsar, who sees his own word as the only valid representation of God's judgement on earth. The use of flight and aviation in this film highlights the difference between social, psychological and physical abuse and hope. And if its portrait of the sadistic Tsar who puts industrial progress together with fear and cruelty at the centre of his powers is an allegory of contemporary rule, it is a very subtle film.

### **Spirit of Icarus in Soviet Film**

At the beginning of *Andrei Rublev* (Andrei Rublev) (Mosfil'm, 1966), Tarkovskii, chose a leather air-balloon rather than wings as a means to express his fifteenth century peasant's independent will and spirit when, he jumps off a bell tower and momentarily flies while escaping the Tsar's men.<sup>47</sup> The film begins with a scene which shows a first attempt at flight by a peasant who 'all his life had been thinking of himself flying.'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Julia Vaingurt, author of *Wonderlands of the Avant-garde: Technology and the Arts in Russia of the 1920s* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), has alerted me to the fact that she has also formulated this phrase, for which I thank her.

<sup>47</sup> The comparison is made in Alistair Renfrew, 'The Wings of a Serf (*Kryl'ia kholopa*), directed by Iurii Tarich (Sovkino, First Factory, released 16 November 1926)', in *A Hundred Years of Russian Film: The Forgotten and the Under-rated*, special edn, *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, ed. by Julian Graffy, 2.3 (2008), 332-33.

<sup>48</sup> Andrei Tarkovskii, *Sculpting in Time: Reflections on the Cinema*, trans. by Kitty Hunter Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), p. 79.

Similarly, in *Kryl'ia kholopa*, this urge is as vital to Nikishka as life itself. Under torture his attempts to fly are equated with sin, and he is told to refuse to have anything to do with the devil. The torturer demands; 'Will you fly again, you dog, speak!' The response is an emphatic: 'I will'. The fires of a branding iron are shown, and the ropes of the torture rack are tightened. Tarkovskii's film is based on the life of the eponymous icon painter who subtly transformed this religious art form. In the final episode of the film, burning embers speak to the fires of destruction which accompany the pillage of villages and cathedrals, and to the fires involved in torture which are shown in the film. The charcoal embers on screen are cinematographically transmuted into the charcoal marks of Andrei Rublev's icon. Organically they are the means to express, and a constituent of all the destructive and transcendent forces shown in the film, and by these means Tarkovskii suggests art as a communication of that 'will' which exists 'in earth as it is in heaven'. His film suggests that that which compels the invention of flight by a peasant at the beginning is the same as that which impels the spiritualization of life in the art of Andrei Rublev. The notion of the peasant's flight invention, Andrei Rublev's transformation of life into icon, and also, Tarkovskii's transformation of Rublev's life into film suggest that life is intrinsic in art, and that the urge to create, like the urge to fly, is essential in man.

### **Soviet Icarus**

Tarich's paradigm of the 'flier' and inventor who is faithful to his creative spirit in the face of state and religious persecution also looks forward to Paradjanov's last film project, which took Icarus (*Ikar*) for its final title. Paradjanov's Icarus reflects the desire to show 'first and foremost, a flight of man's soul and thought, the endeavour to pull back the seemingly unmovable limits of human possibility.'<sup>49</sup> In this film project Paradjanov created a collage of material based on aviation heroes from Russian history, including the theoretical 'father' of rocket technology, Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovskii (1857-1905), Chkalov and, also, creative artists such as the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii and the film director Aleksandr Dovzhenko, who thus are each symbolic of his Icarus. Steffens says that Paradjanov included heroes who would fulfil the Socialist-Realist model 'by depicting pilots, aeronautical scientists, and astronauts as worker heroes who risk their lives, hence the association throughout with the figure of

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<sup>49</sup> Iurii Morozov, '*Ikar: Istoriia vzleta i padeniia*', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 62 (2003), 4-12.

Icarus.’ He points out that one Icarus of Paradjanov’s is the great test pilot and record-breaker of the nineteen thirties, Valerii Chkalov (who is returned to in Chapter Three and Four). There is also a statue by Vera Mukhina of Chkalov which is given the name of ‘Icarus’, which she made at the time of his fatal crash in 1938. The figure of the falling Icarus is thus perceived as an official icon of risk-taking self-sacrifice. But it is also a figure of potential resistance: Paradjanov may have attempted what amounted to fulfilment of contemporary *narodnost*’ and Socialist Realism, but, as Steffens says, nevertheless he ‘continued to work within his usual poetic, associative style.’<sup>50</sup> This suggests that the Icarian, self-sacrificing risk-taking, which his characters share, is also actualized in the director’s cinematographic choices. In this way, the director’s approach affirms his own, as much as his characters’ revolutionary spirit. Paradjanov thus reappropriates that spirit which the political requisites of Socialist Realism had transformed into a clichéd symbolic constituent of contemporary heroic mythology.

Morozov suggests that the importance of Icarus to Paradjanov is revealed not when the ‘General Constructor’ (General’nyi konstruktor) rhetorically describes the meaning of the Icarus myth, but in episodes which clearly correspond to episodes in Paradjanov’s own life. He suggests that his story-telling is ‘life reflected in art’. Each of the figures to whom Paradjanov points is a type of Icarus because their fates describe not only a take-off (*vzlet*) but also a ‘fall’ (*padanie*).<sup>51</sup> In relation to this paradigm, it is not insignificant that Tarich himself had to defend *Kryl’ia kholopa*, not in a *boiarskii sud*, but in the government organ, *Pravda*. Under the newspaper’s rubric ‘Court’ (*sud*) he says that the film’s over-spending was influenced by the industry’s administration which caused delays.<sup>52</sup>

### **Affinitive Icarian Falls**

Shklovskii described Aleksandr Blok’s (1880-1921) fate in relation to the Revolution as a ‘flight’ which was transformed into a fall because of his disappointment in the

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<sup>50</sup> James Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2013), p. 181.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> ‘Delo Goskino i Proletkino’, *Pravda*, no. 86, 16 April 1927, p. 8.

Revolution.<sup>53</sup> Part Two of Eizenshtein's conceived trilogy based on Ivan was made in 1945; it was screened for Stalin and the Politbureau in February 1946 and, encountered difficulties for creating a possible subversive parallel with the purges. (Its general-release was in 1958.) Nikishka's invention in *Kryl'ia kholopa* is perceived as an assault on the hierarchical order of God, Tsar, and on natural order. The aviation inventor and explosives specialist Nikolai Kibalchich (1853-1881) wrote an idea for a jet propulsion vehicle while he was in prison for killing Aleksandr II. His pursuit of freedom from social oppression, together with an interest in aeronautic and explosives invention, has an affinity to that Icarian model in which a pursuit of scientific and social revolution are found together. Some historians suggest this is a characteristically Russian combination.<sup>54</sup> But from the perspective of the twenty-first century, the paradigm of the artist-inventor as the figure sacrificed by the tyrannical rule of his times suggests a wider allegory which points to the stultification of many artists and writers. Mikhail Bulgakov, Evgenii Zamiatin and Mikhail Zoshchenko, and directors such as Vertov, Eizenshtein, Dovzhenko and Paradjanov are just a few examples. The meta-allegory in *Kryl'ia kholopa* suggests that the Russian Revolution, which was perceived as a 'flight', had already, at the time of the film's making, been perceived as a fall.

*Kryl'ia kholopa*'s theme of the artist as Icarus pre-echoes 'crippled' fates of artists in the 1930s whose roles include free-spirited fliers, or whose film-work involved important aviation themes such as the director Mikhail Dubson *Bol'shie Kryl'ia* (Great Wings) (aka, *Tebia liubit Rodina*, Lenfil'm, 1937), the actor Ivan Koval-Samborskii, as Beliaev in Raizman's *Letchiki*, and the cameraman Vladimir Nil'son who was arrested in October 1937. But the metaphor of *raspravliat' kryl'ia* which Tarich's film involves could apply to the fates of the future great comic director Ivan Pyr'ev and future documentary film director, Esfir' Shub, who worked as assistant, and editor (respectively), on *Kryl'ia kholopa*.

### **The Metaphor of Wings**

*Kryl'ia kholopa* illustrates one of the most important symbolic complexes signified by the metaphor of *gaining wings* in Soviet film. As in Iakov Protazanov's *Aelita*

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<sup>53</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, *Eshche nichego ne konchilos'*, *Sentimental'noe putestvie*, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Propoganda", 2002), p. 234.

<sup>54</sup> Harford, p. 8.

(Mezhrabpom-Rus', 1924), it gives an early Soviet example of the entwined nature of the creative impulse in man which is linked to different kinds of love for another person; these are communicated by the metaphor and themes of flight. It has been shown how Tarich's film uses flight and aviation technology as a means of differentiating between desires which bind (including lascivious eroticism, which is signalled by means of screens, filigree, ropes and chains); and love, which gives rise to a sense of self-expansion, freedom and truth (which are signalled by the invention of wings, movement in flight, light on snow, light playing on Fima and Nikishka's faces as he shows her what it might mean to fly, and light in the circle of the iris-lens in which Nikishka ascends the church tower). In this, the film echoes Plato's categorisation of different kinds of love, moral approaches to language and to knowledge of the world in the 'Phaedrus'. In this dialogue the highest striving of man is likened to a soul before it lost its wings.<sup>55</sup> In *Kryl'ia kholopa* the notion of the invention of wings is the means by which the film-makers communicate more than one allegory, and this approach enables the topics of the film to be viewed from different points of view in order to better understand their essence. In this regard, the film is comparable to a Platonic metaphorical *wing* as discourse, and also the wing of the serf as creative invention. And the striving of the creative inventor of such wings, whether Icarus or film-maker, is towards a higher truth.

#### **Icarus Tradition in Russian film**

The Russian characters who embody this spirit are found in a broad range of films from early to post-Soviet films. They include Protazanov's *Aelita*, in which the designer Los's ominous vision of Mars and entwined passionate longing for the Queen of Mars creates a discourse on private and public values. They also include Mikhail Kalatozov's *Valerii Chkalov* (Lenfil'm, 1941), which shows the indomitable spirit of the commander of the first polar and record-breaking long-distance flight from Moscow to Vancouver (in Washington state, USA) in 1937. (The significance of this feat is discussed more fully in Chapter Three.) Chkalov's particular spirit is expressed in a phrase which signifies his instinctual approach to flying; 'like Chkalov!' He will not change, regardless of imprisonment, and the loss of work as a pilot, which his sense of flight and his approach to flying incurs. And Mukhina suggests the fate of such a spirit

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<sup>55</sup> Plato, 'Phaedrus', pp. 243-299, and D. B. R., 'Introduction to Phaedrus', *Ibid.*, pp. 239-43.

by creating a memorial statue of Valerii Chkalov in the form of a winged Icarus (1938) in a last graceful fall.

Films in the Icarus tradition also include Pudovkin and Vasil'iev's biographical film *Zhukovskii* which features the 'eccentric-professor'-archetype. This film charts the life of the aerodynamic theorist and engineer, Nikolai Egorovich Zhukovskii (1847-1921). It shows him in relation to the development of Russian aero-technology; from the first moment that a bird's flight into his study inspires an understanding of the aerodynamics of a wing, through to a display of first-generation turbo-jets of the Soviet aviation industry. This film communicates the message that the Russian 'Father' of aerodynamics, who built the first wind tunnel in 1902, just outside Moscow, and whose name honours Russia's foremost aviation academy, owes the fulfilment of his scientific findings to the freedom bestowed on him by the Bolshevik Revolution.

Films in the Icarus tradition were not confined to the Soviet era. In Iurii Kara's 2007 film, *Korolev*, the retrograde forces of the late 1920s and 1930s are not capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Instead they are NKVD officers and self-serving Party bureaucrats. These officials hamper and finally betray the man who was to become the 'Father' of the Soviet Union's rocket-science and space programmes. Korolev was purged and sent to Magadan, and after his return was publically known only as 'Chief Constructor' even during the period when Iurii Gagarin was launched into space by means of 'R-7' rocket technology which was engineered by his design-team.<sup>56</sup>

What these films share in common is a communication of the passion of men who push themselves beyond the limits of human knowledge. All their main protagonists are 'dreamers' and are often affectionately called this by their more disbelieving relatives and friends. The unstoppable spirit of Tarich's serf links forward to children's films such as Nemoliaev's *Po sledam geroia*, which delightfully portrays the creative invention of a flying machine by five orphans (this is discussed more fully in Chapter Four). In Vasilii Zhuravlev's *Cosmic Flight (Kosmicheskii reis)* (Mosfil'm, 1935), the academic Sedykh (S. P. Komarov) disobeys orders to pursue his desire to prove that man's (and a test-kitten's) heart will not explode in space, so that he can fly to the moon himself.

*Kosmicheskii reis* includes extremely convincing rocket models and space technology a few years after the first liquid-fuel engine attached to a rocket was

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<sup>56</sup> Harford, pp. 160-61.

successfully lifted just a few feet in the air (on the basis of Fridrikh Tsander's (1887-1933), and the research group GIRD's (Grupa izucheniia reaktivnogo dvizheniia) work. Korolev was a founding member of this *Group for Studying Rocket Propulsion*. The consultant on *Kosmicheskii reis* was Korolev's mentor, Tsiolkovskii. The academic Sedykh's exclamation; 'Forward to the cosmos!' (vpered v kosmos) reflects Tsander's phrase: "Forward to Mars!" (vpered na Mars!) which was the slogan of GIRD. By 2007 'Vpered na Mars' and 'k zvezdam!' had become a cinematic trope in *Korolev*, which identify the period of the 1920s and 1930s by its enthusiasm for and avid experimentation in rocketry. These phrases also express the spirit of the aerodynamic engineer, Korolev, and they are pre-echoed by Nikishka's emphatic 'Vot uvidesh', polechu!' in *Kryl'ia kholopa*. The sub-current of cosmological enthusiasm was evidenced in Tsander's 1924 publication of *Flights to Other Planets*, in Goddard's first successful liquid-fuel rocket in 1926, and in the interest that led to the 1927 'First World Exhibition of Interplanetary Apparatus and Devices', which featured Tsiolkovskii's work.<sup>57</sup> And it is very likely that this aeronautic enthusiasm of the 1920s contributed to the re-emergence of the Russian Icarus myth at this time.

Other films whose main protagonists include 'mechtateli' of flight of different degrees include Iulii Raizman's delicate film, *Letchiki* (this film is discussed more fully in Chapter Four), and Iakov Protozanov's *Semiklassniki* (Soiuzdetfil'm, 1938). Whereas *Zhukovskii* mythologizes the revolution as 're-birth', and hypernymically relates the father of Soviet aviation with the *fathers* of the Soviet Union (Zhukovskii/ Lenin and Stalin), Kara's film, *Korolev*, involves an exposé of Stalinist purges. In different ways they each speak to the triumph of the spirit of those men who transcend the problems of their times and affect history.

Tarich's film creates a paradigmatic *test pilot*, aviation-engineer, and Icarus (Ikar), and also a mythological aviation day (Den' poleta). They represent a complex of ideas which signify the highest striving in man which comes up against those laws that bind the soul. But Tarich's communication of the story of the Russian Icarus accords with his reported desire to show his characters in historically accurate detail.<sup>58</sup> He also wanted to move Soviet film away from the agit-films with which the industry had

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-37.

<sup>58</sup> Krasinskii, p. 57.



begun.<sup>59</sup> This desire to show the texture of the lived moment also informs the work of Abram Room (who participated in productions of the Kursantskii theatre in which Tarich was one of its leaders).<sup>60</sup> In Room's film, *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, the notion of gaining wings is present as a young woman's desire to find her metaphoric voice in the face of oppression, not on the part of autocracy, but on the part of the patriarchy found in her personal life. She can be seen as an *outsider* and slave, not as a result of her social standing as a *boby!*, but because of her psychology. It is during an air-parade that she is seemingly given an altered view of her world which ultimately leads to the opening of her metaphoric and actual horizons.

### *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*

The personal transformation of Liuda (Liudmila Nikolaevna Semenova, played by Liudmila Semenova) experiences in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* into 'A strong, free citizen, not inferior to man in anything' and 'a human being, the builder of a new life'.<sup>61</sup> is the kind that the feminist activist Aleksandra Kollontai (1872-1952) might have wished for in a main protagonist. The film shows how Liudmila's circumstances evolve such that she finds herself living with two men. But despite having the social freedom to be part of this three-way relationship, she nevertheless finds that she feels a sense of personal enslavement within it. Her transformation into an independent woman is born when she rejects this enslavement and liberates herself from the relationship. Although Kollontai would have approved of this transformation, it is worth noting that the necessity for the transformation only comes about because of Liudmila's involvement in the sort of unconventional relationship that Kollontai's theories on sexual freedom could be seen to have promoted.

In the film, notions of flight and aviation are important elements in the depiction of Liudmila's psychological development and self-liberation. As we shall consider in detail, she is taken on an Aviakhim joy-ride-flight by her husband's ex-army friend from the Civil War, and recent lodger, Volodia/Vladimir Fogel (played by

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Barbara Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', *Slavic Review*, 51 (1992), 485-96 (pp. 486-87).

Vladimir Fogel’).<sup>62</sup> This functions as a metaphor for the opening of horizons away from her basement flat and the domestic bonds to a husband who abuses her of her self-worth. But in spite of this, the sense of freedom of the aerial journey proves to be at best a temporary, if not a *faux*, liberation.<sup>63</sup> It is a performed freedom. Liuda’s flight, in microcosm, demonstrates that even with a new possibility of love, it is the men in her life who determine the boundaries of her world. She is incapable of profoundly influencing their definition until she leaves them.

Liudmila’s husband, Kolia (Nikolai Batalov) is a foreman (*desiatnik*) on the reconstruction of the Bolshoi Theatre.<sup>64</sup> Vladimir is a printer (*pechatnik*) who comes to Moscow and finds work but not somewhere to live. When the two friends from the Civil War days meet unexpectedly, Kolia invites Vladimir (without consulting Liuda) to make his ‘kingdom’ on the Batalov’s couch (*‘na divan tsarstvui!’*). Vladimir is concerned about staying in the flat when Kolia is not there. But after Kolia has left, Vladimir brings Liuda gifts and takes her for a day out to an *Aviakhim* aviation display and a cinema. This leads to their romantic liaison. After her husband returns and is told what has happened, he leaves their home to the new lovers and is forced to sleep at his office due to the shortage of housing in Moscow. When Kolia returns for his things, Liuda takes pity on him and invites him back. Eventually, Liuda, Kolia and Volodia live as a threesome until she finds that she is expecting a child. The two men insist that she has an abortion, but at the last minute she changes her mind and flees the clinic. She leaves the men and Moscow for good.

Although it is a minor element of the film, the bird imagery plays a delicately expressive role. An early spontaneous flight of birds in the film stands in opposition to the monuments which feature in *Tret’ia Meshchanskaia*, and this dichotomy contributes

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<sup>62</sup> In May 1925 ODVF (*Obshchestvo družsei vozdušnogo flota*) created at Trotskii’s instigation in 1923, became *Aviakhim* when it merged with Society of Friends of Chemical Defence (*Dobrokhim*). In 1927 it became *Osoaviakhim* when it was combined with the Defence Support Society. See: Boyd, p. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Julian Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, KINOfile Film Companion 5 (London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 2001), p. 46. Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question: Feminism and Soviet Silent Film*, (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1989), p. 123.

<sup>64</sup> The director intended Batalov to be a foreman working on the Lenin Institute construction. Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 12.

to the gendered significance of mobility in the film. The vertical and horizontal spatial relationships in the film are important in this regard.<sup>65</sup> These relationships are created by means of: the film's mis-en-scène, visual connections across edits, the sensibility projected by the actor, and the relations of the protagonist to his/her environment as communicated by the dynamics of the camerawork. For instance, Liuda's position at her basement window looking upwards towards the city streets and sky, and edits from this to the aviation-day celebration, are means by which the film articulates an underlying discourse on freedom and love.

Elements of flight and aviation enhance gender topographies by underscoring the common ground or borders between what is communicative of feminine and masculine identity. These psychological impulses are expressed in the depiction of visual upwards trajectories, in Liuda's first experience of flight, and in the spontaneity of the camerawork. Philip Cavendish describes the fluidity of the 'unfettered', hand-held camera sequences which visually echo flight.<sup>66</sup> Although Cavendish describes the camera's liberation from the tripod as a parallel freedom to that which Volodia experiences while moving through the city, the idea of freedom and spontaneity embodied in flight, and the camerawork, are also interesting to examine in relation to Liudmila. In relation to her, the visual communication of a psychological impulse by means of various qualities of flight, stands in opposition to what is communicated by the monuments, state displays, and the aircraft, themselves, which become symbols of male hierarchy, male power, a male-governed aviation industry and the state. There are four expressive elements in which flight and/or aviation are significant in the communication of Liuda's emotional journey which this analysis broadly employs: bird imagery, an aviation-day display, vertical and horizontal spatial relationships, and particular modes of cinematography which act as kinetic symbols of flight.

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<sup>65</sup> Graffy stresses the importance of vertical spatial dynamics, and Philip Cavendish stresses the importance of the significance of the horizontal plane. See: Philip Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography: The Silent Era* (hereafter: *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*), (London: University College London, Arts and Humanities Publications, 2007), p. 50.

<sup>66</sup> *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, pp. 48-49.

### **Spatial Identities and Spontaneous Flight**

Although the different versions of the film begin with variations in the opening sequence, all show the city as it awakens. We see images of pigeons in upwards flight, an edit to the Freedom Obelisk, a pan upwards over the Hotel Luks, along the Moscow River, and images of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.<sup>67</sup> In 1918-1919 Nikolai Andreev and Dmitri Osipov created a two-part monument in Moscow which includes an obelisk and a statue called 'Svoboda (Sovetskaia konstitutsiia)'.<sup>68</sup> The edits to the Freedom Obelisk include the image of a female statue in classical garb (with one arm raised to the sky) which is integrated into the monument. The statue is an emblem of Revolutionary and constitutional freedom, which was incorporated into the Moscow coat-of-arms.<sup>69</sup> The statue creates a multivalent, feminine emblem (of the city). It symbolizes Revolutionary-utopian traditions which give rise to the film's contemporary attitudes towards 'love, marriage, family/sexual morals'.<sup>70</sup> Room says these are the 'themes of daily life', the communication of which was a primary concern to him.<sup>71</sup>

### **Horizontals and lack of horizon: Meshchanstvo**

In contrast to the verticality of the Freedom Obelisk which, although static, projects an idea of Revolutionary fervour, Liudmila is first seen lying asleep in bed next to her husband. A cat startles her awake. The cat represents 'the coming of a guest' in Russian folk lore<sup>72</sup>. As Julian Graffy says, this links paradigmatically to the guest, Volodia,<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For details of the two versions of the film, see notes four and five of this chapter.

<sup>68</sup> Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (hereafter: *Iconography of Power*) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 70.

<sup>69</sup> Caroline Brooke, *Moscow: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 72; Graffy notes that the Obelisk was installed on the anniversary of October Revolution, in Graffy, 'Commentary'.

<sup>70</sup> Abram Room, "'Tret'ia Meshchanskaia" (Beseda s rezhisserom A. M. Room) 1926', Abram Matveevich Room, 1894-1976, ed. by V. Iu. Zabrodin and I. Grashchenkova (Moscow: Muzei kino, 1994), pp. 13-15 (p. 14).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Graffy, 'Commentary', for the DVD release of *Bed and Sofa*, dir. by Abram Room, Blackhawk Films Collection, Image Entertainment, 2004. See also Abram Room, 'Tret'ia Meshchanskaia', p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, p. 50.

whose arrival will be instrumental in lifting Liudmila from her slumbers, and from her dormant sense of self. This awakening is brought about, in part, by the flight that Volodia takes her on during a day out.

The day out also involves a trip to the cinema, and it is one of several gifts, including a radio and a magazine, tellingly named *New World* (*Novyi mir*), which are catalysts to Liudmila's 'awakening' in its broadest sense. They all provide links to a public world beyond her private basement domain where we see her consistently portrayed amongst household elements (bed clothes, pillows, wash basin, primus stove, crockery).<sup>74</sup> Liudmila is engulfed by her married role. Philip Cavendish describes her life as 'domestic servitude'.<sup>75</sup> Although she is not depicted as having a 'fever for possessions',<sup>76</sup> her identity is based on the topography of material domesticity. This *meshchanstvo* overwhelms Liudmila's life in the same way that 'metaphoric weeds' envelope Irina and her sisters in Anton Chekhov's *Tri sestry*.<sup>77</sup> In their pre-revolutionary bourgeois world Irina's unseen tendrils (*sornaia trava*) symbolize arbitrary forces of society and nature which prevent life turning out as it should, and prevent the women from fulfilling their early aspirations and dreams.<sup>78,79</sup> The post-revolutionary presence of *meshchanstvo* became emblematic of the period of the New Economic Policy (1921-1928), and it is its topography, and her stultifying life, that Liudmila temporarily leaves behind when she is taken in a flight above Moscow and its Meshchanskaia Street. The French title of Room's film, *Trois dans un sous-sol*, gives

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<sup>74</sup> Maia Turovskaia, "'Zhenskie fil'my' – Chto eto takoe?", *Iskusstvo Kino*, 1981. 5, pp. 28-36 (p. 30); Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, pp. 45- 56. Judith Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question*, pp. 110-29; Graffy, 'Commentary'.

<sup>75</sup> Cavendish, p. 51.

<sup>76</sup> Françoise Navailh's cites Vera Dunham, who argues that 'fever for possessions is a key trait of *meshchanstvo* which, in many ways in fact, is a familial and feminine affair', in 'The Image of Women in Contemporary Soviet Cinema', *The Red Screen: Politics, Society, Art in Soviet Cinema*, ed. by Anna Lawton, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 211-31 (p. 229n18).

<sup>77</sup> Julian Graffy gives an overview of the cultural importance of *meschanstvo* and its cultural relation to the utopian ideology (and the *ménage à trois*). See Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 21.

<sup>78</sup> *Tri sestry*, in Anton Chekhov, *P'esy*, ed. by T. A. Sotnikova (Moscow: Drofa, 2007), pp. 111-77, Act I, pp. 111-30 (p. 127).

great semantic weight to the idea of the basement.<sup>80</sup> Moving upwards out of it is a metaphor for Liudmila's inner self being released. The idea of flight forms part of a description of process and transformation, from 'prone-ness' to a sense of transcendence (and this pre-echoes a similar dichotomy in Kozintsev's and Trauberg's *Odna* which is examined in Chapter Two.)

### **Eros and Self-creativity**

Volodia's gift to Liudmila of a flight in an aeroplane also serves the universal association of flight, since Roman paintings of the *eroty*, with love. But it is important to draw out the subtle difference in register between Eros which is coded with the danger of entrapment, and Eros born of longing for self-growth in the film. We see Liudmila's curiosity when Volodia produces the gift of a radio. When he offers her *Novyi mir*, she turns away from him and immediately starts reading it. She makes herself comfortable on the marital bed and continues to focus on the magazine. With delicate succinctness Room gives a presentiment of Volodia's usurption of Kolia in the marriage bed. Room's choreography of Liudmila's actions subtly evokes a sense of erotic potential and its two different originating impulses. Liuda's flight not only communicates Liuda and Volodia's romantic possibility, it also serves as a symbol for an underlying thirst for experience and knowledge which predicates romantic feeling.

As Liuda reads she looks up at Volodia, and he appears not to think his time more valuable than hers: he clears away the tablecloth, breakfast things and tea cups. His attentiveness is novel and touching to her. Cavendish argues that the gift of the magazine will lead to Volodia's seduction of Liudmila.<sup>81</sup> She smiles to herself, and settles back to reading. At this point, her desire to know the world is the primary impulse. Liuda's reading, her then looking upwards through the window, followed by an intertitle announcing the aviation day, combine in a communication of her extending self-creative desire.

In contrast, an erotic connectivity is indicated when Volodia first arrives unannounced in the flat. At this point, Liuda cowers half-dressed beside a cane rocking-

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<sup>80</sup> Graffy, Commentary.

<sup>81</sup> Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, p. 21.

chair. Her face is marked by a shadow of the wicker-work.<sup>82</sup> Its pattern suggests a prison mesh or a stain. The dark tones link forward to a sequence in which Liuda mends Volodia's shirt while rocking in this chair. Their erotic connection is suggested by means of a similar shadow which appears on Volodia's face as he works at the printing press.<sup>83</sup> A cut to Liudmila as she mends Vladimir's shirt signals their intimate thoughts of each other during the course of the day.<sup>84</sup> Mayne says that the shirt becomes a synecdoche of him.<sup>85</sup> It could be argued that, similarly, in this earlier scene, the magazine metaphorically stands in for Vladimir.<sup>86</sup> But Liuda's absorption in her reading expresses a different dynamic altogether. Although she looks up towards Volodia, who has rolled over with his back to her, and is asleep, her gaze is not full of longing for him. This sequence ends with her looking up through her basement window. Light shines down on her face and torso. The expressive use of her physical position and the lighting communicate an indeterminate yearning for something above and beyond her present life. It may be argued that the printing press and a first experience of flight in an aeroplane are not only linked in a visual expressive field based on machinery as symbols of modernity. They also become symbols of erotic dynamism associated with Volodia. However, the subjectivity of Liuda's upwards gaze after she has been reading her magazine suggests that she simply longs for something which corresponds to her inner world.

### **Aviakhim Day**

The subsequent sequence is introduced by an intertitle which announces the Friend's of the Air Fleet Day and the date on which it was historically also inaugurated: '14<sup>th</sup> of July' (1926).<sup>87</sup> An intertitle announces this first 'gift' outside the home to which

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<sup>82</sup> Graffy, 'Commentary'; Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, p. 53. Mayne describes the shadow from the 'cane chair' and links this to the use of shadow and light to underscore Liudmila's 'isolation from the social world'. See Mayne *Kino and the Woman Question*, p. 116.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> In his 'Commentary', Graffy uses the example of Kolia turning his back away from Liudmila while he settles Vladimir on their sofa, to demonstrate this expressive trope of Room's.

<sup>87</sup> Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, p. 160.

Volodia gives Liudmila. It is to a trip to see the aerial display in honour of the newly formed volunteer organization, Aviakhim. Aviakhim was the result of the merging of the Friends of the Air Fleet the ODVF (Obshchestvo druzei vozdushnogo flota) and Dobrokhim (The Friends of Chemical Defense) (Obshchestvo druzei khimecheskoi oborony). The ODVF which was formed in 1923 in order to help raise awareness of the need for military defence, and also to raise money for a Bolshevik air fleet. Dobrokhim was founded in 1924 with the intension of raising awareness of chemical defence of the country. The work of these two groups merged and was celebrated on the newly created Aviakhim Day.<sup>88</sup> Graffy says that an earlier version of the film included an air parade and an appearance by Marshal Budennyi.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, it is not unreasonable to speculate that the documentary footage included is of this inaugural display. But the first edit of the Soviet aviation celebration does not continue the line of Liuda's gaze to reveal a flight of aeroplanes. If the extended air parade had remained, or if the edit had been to an aerial formation of aircraft, the aeroplanes, as signifiers of the state, would become the logical symbol of fulfilment of her personal longing. Personal voicing would have found expression in public symbolism.

Instead there is a shift in register when, after the introductory intertitle, there is an edit to a group of uniformed men saluting as they walk in unison past a row of what appear to be de Havilland 9 aircraft (which form the basis of the Polikarpov, R-1 aircraft) at Khodynka field near Moscow.<sup>90</sup> These images are in keeping with the idea that masculinity is expressed in terms of industry, hierarchy, productivity, technology and progress in the film.<sup>91</sup> This idea is demonstrated not only in the association of the

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<sup>88</sup> Palmer, *ibid.*; Vladimir Ipatieff, *The Life of a Chemist: Memoirs of Vladimir N. Ipatieff* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1946), p. 541.

<sup>89</sup> Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, note 123, p. 84.

<sup>90</sup> This was considered the first Soviet mass-produced aircraft. See *Osprey Encyclopedia*, p. 286. Julian Graffy identifies the airfield in his 'Commentary', 2004.

<sup>91</sup> Turovskaia, 'Zhenskie fil'my', p. 30. Graffy stresses the quasi-military function of Aviakhim activities, and its predominantly male membership. Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 45. Graffy also compares the dynamic of the industrial processes associated with Volodia to their representation in Eizenshtein's *Stachka* and Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*. See Graffy, 'Commentary'.



train with Volodia at the beginning as he arrives in Moscow, but also when we see him at the printing press, with his hair rising with static electricity as he works.

Images of the Aviakhim celebration at the airfield include an aerial formation of aeroplanes, and a pan across the aerodrome which shows off lines of aircraft in the field. The camera communicates the point of view of an aviation-day spectator. The audience sees a small aircraft flying loop-the-loops in a demonstration of aerobatics (pilotazh). There is an edit to billows of black smoke on the airfield from which a group of men emerge in gas masks. The smoke may well be from staged aerial bombardments, which became a standard feature of annual Aviation Day celebration parades of the 1930s.<sup>92</sup> This documentary footage is also interesting for indicating that mock defensive battles were a feature of Soviet aviation display before it became incorporated into the order of the national annual event. Here, the agitprop-plane, by its name alone, demonstrates that the aeroplane functions as a symbol of the state. In the film an image of a male pilot looking outward as he sits at the controls in the cockpit further accentuates the idea of masculine control of space and technology. But in a seeming contradiction of documentary film's power to communicate unique and ephemeral lived moments,<sup>93</sup> here documentary footage pre-echoes the repetition of aviation display images in the annual chronicle footage of the 1930s. While these views of aircraft historically precede the official designation of the Soviet 'Aviation Day' (Den' aviatsii) in 1933, like many sequences of aerial acrobatics shot from the ground, they could be spliced into any Aviation-Day celebration of the following decade. And the documentary footage of the aerial display puts the cinema viewer in the same position as Liuda, and communicates a sense of *public* delight. Liuda's *personal* responses are fully communicated later, from within the aircraft.

In this way, the flight serves both a psychological function and a public ideological function in the film. This is 'the first time' that Liudmila has ever been in an aeroplane and is, in this sense, an *aerial baptism*. The term was used in connection with first parachute jumps (pryzhok), and/or first flights in an aeroplane (vozdushnye

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<sup>92</sup> Julian Graffy suggests that the smoke may be either from military exercise, or from an 'accident'. Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 84n123.

<sup>93</sup> Julian Graffy translates Room's article, 'Cinema and the Theatre', *Sovetskii ekran*, 19 May 1925, in *Bed and Sofa*, pp. 10-13. Cavendish underscores the use of "found material" in the film which Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, p. 46.

kreshcheniia). (I return to this subject in Chapter Three.) The introduction of aeroplanes and parachute jumping to the wider community, were part of the promotional work of Aviakhim. But Room uses this important national occasion as a backdrop to tell the story of Liuda's psychological journey. In terms of the plot, the flight is an important catalyst of change in Liuda's life. And what becomes striking is the attention that Room and his cameraman, Grigorii Giber, give to the dynamic sensations of flight.

### **State and Feeling**

Following the establishing sequence of the Aviakhim display, Liuda and Vladimir line up to board a plane. The pleats of her skirt resemble the pleats of the curved kolchug-metal aeroplane fuselage as she climbs onto the wing to enter the cabin. It creates a fleeting visual harmony between the external fabric of the aeroplane and her own femininity whilst at the same time accentuating their difference. The wind blows through the grass of the airfield. It pulls at Liuda's scarf, and through Vladimir's hair. Vladimir gives Liuda a resounding, affectionate shove to help her up the wing of the aeroplane to the cabin door. We see her face momentarily when she is sitting at the window. It is quickly superseded by Volodia's. Her excitement and fear at take-off is registered in close-ups of smiles, and squirms. They are caught by using a hand-held camera for the first time inside an aeroplane-cabin in Russian film.<sup>94</sup> Volodia takes a leading role. Showing off the feeling of wind on his face as he leans partially out of the window, he encourages Liuda to follow his example. As the camera responds to changes in the aircraft's direction and altitude, a sweep of aerial views over Moscow are shown. Liuda finds herself above the landmarks of Moscow, which include the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.<sup>95</sup> Light plays in different measure on the faces of the would-be lovers in the cabin. Bravely, Liuda also leans slightly out of the window. Holding on to her cloche-hat, she experiences the exhilaration of speed and height. The dynamic movement of air, the movement of the aircraft, the dance of sunlight, and the aerial views, all convey a sense of potential freedom. The quality echoes the flickering light on rails, and the movement of sleepers, which rushed under and away from the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>95</sup> The cathedral was destroyed by Stalin to make way for the Monument to Lenin (which was designed, but never built). The cathedral was rebuilt in 1994-1997.

camera at the beginning of the film, when Volodia looked out from a train on the approach to Moscow. It communicates a sense of new beginnings.

### **Death Loop**

Cavendish says that there was a sequence of a ‘death loop’ ride at a funfair which was filmed for, but edited from, *Tret'ia Meshshanskaia*.<sup>96</sup> *Mertvaia petlia* (death loop) is a Russian name given to a particular spin in aerobatics. Cavendish cites the film’s camera operator, Grigorii Giber, who describes ‘revolving earth and sky’ material which was edited from *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*.<sup>97</sup> Giber’s description anticipates sequences in later films such as Raizman’s *Letchiki*, and Iakov Urinov’s *Intrigan* (1935). In many flier films of the pre-war period, revolutions of the earth, which are seen from a cockpit when the main protagonist performs this feat, function as a communication of the chaotic state of mind of the protagonist-flier, who is both in love, and who is deemed in need of acquiring social consciousness. Cavendish underlines the link between this edited material and Kozintsev and Trauberg’s *Chertovo koleso* (Devil’s Wheel, 1926). In *Chertovo koleso*, Valia (again Liudmila Semenova) tempts a young sailor to stay on land beyond his allotted shore-leave. We see them in a sequence where they are circling on funfair rides in an effect close to flying. In *Chertovo koleso*, this effect overtly stands in for an erotic dizziness and excitement, which links the protagonists. The expressive function of funfair rides such as The Devil’s Wheel and the aerobic Death Loop, on an ideological level, may be coetaneous in their symbolic eroticism. The thrill of their experience can be seen to be equivalent to Liuda’s public flight in an aeroplane, which is a kind of ‘joy ride’. However, had the edited material remained in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, it is possible that the delicate link between the excitement of flight and Eros, which Giber’s hand-held footage within the aircraft communicates, would have been coloured with a darker sexuality. In ideological terms, a chaotic state of Liuda’s mind (in need of social consciousness) would have been more strongly foregrounded. Instead, Liudmila’s flight communicates her excitement and joy, and, in contrast to the inky blacks of the fun-fair ride in *Chertovo koleso*, it is full of light.

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<sup>96</sup> Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, p. 49.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

Volodia is associated with the symbolic function of the train in the 1920s as mediator of Soviet construction, and as a 'dynamic vision' of a new Soviet world in which divisions between town and country are reversed. The aeroplane may also signify this.<sup>98</sup> But in the Aviakhim sequence, the hard static rows of aircraft, and the metal and wood of the aircraft themselves, contrast with the fluidity of the 'unfettered' camera inside the cabin.<sup>99</sup> The aeroplane, and its motor and propeller, were used positively not only as symbols of defence but as creative cultural symbols of revolution and social transformation in the poetry and art of Futurists and Suprematists such as Vladimir Maiakovskii and Kazimir Malevich. Maiakovskii wrote many agitp-poems dedicated to aviation such as 'Izdatel'stvo letchika' (1923) 'Aviadni' 'ODVF' (1925), 'Daesh' motor' (1925), and his more complex 'Letaiushchii proletarii' (1925). The inspiration of aviation is seen in Malevich's pre-Revolutionary works such as 'Aviator' (1914), 'Suprematist Painting: Aeroplane Flying' (1914/1915) and 'Sensation of Flight' (1914/1915). (This is returned to more fully in Chapter Two). In the aviation-day sequence of Room's film, the aircraft on parade embody structures and doctrines of the state which ambivalently stand in opposition to Liuda's personal aspirations by virtue of the male controlling, 'solar gaze' of the aerial view, and because they are identified with male hierarchical state structures. But also in contrast to the exterior view of the aircraft (usually in its totality) whose metal (or wood) shell concretizes ideas of the state, the cabin is a psychological space. Here it is the space of Liuda's and Volodia's mutual attraction. It is a space of delicate erotic awakening in which her feelings of excitement in flight also represent delicate libidinous forces at play. But Liuda has had

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<sup>98</sup> Graffy also links a similar symbolic use of the dynamism of the train in the 1920s in Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoaparatom* and Iakov Protazanov's *Aelita*. Widdis describes the train as a model of 'mobile vision'. Here it is identified with Volodia. Graffy, 'Commentary'; Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 24; Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land, Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (hereafter: *Visions of a New Land*) (New Haven: Yale University Press), pp. 121 and 125.

<sup>99</sup> Cavendish highlights the use of the *liberation* of the hand-held camera in capturing Moscow's streets and daily life. He and Turovskaia demonstrate the way in which these images palpably communicate the dynamic of the city. It can be seen that this sense of dynamic is repeated in the cabin of the aeroplane and, in this, the freedom communicated is more psychological than spatial. Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, pp. 48-49. Turovskaia, 'Zhenskii fil'my', p. 30.

to ask Volodia to let her sit by the window, and, as is critically acknowledged, she only moves there as they begin their descent.<sup>100</sup> In the cabin Vladimir asserts his control, and she remains, as Graffy says, an ‘observer’ of the world.<sup>101</sup>

The aircraft begins to descend, and we see the landscape growing in detail below. The texture of the grass blurs as the camera (presumably attached to the underside of the fuselage, or wing) captures the moments just before touch-down. The grass moves with the rush of the passing aeroplane, in close-up. It is a ‘haptic’ experience which we see at take-off and at landing. These images transform speed into image, and they frame the flight in a sensual experience which supersedes the aerial views and promise of freedom. The aeroplane taxis to a stop, and we see an unsteady Liuda emerge onto the wing, from the cabin door. Rather than having given her strength, this new experience of the world, and the new subliminal feelings which have been awakened during her flight, make her physically less sure of her own footing. Her unsteadiness points to her susceptibility to Volodia. After Liuda has been helped off the aeroplane by Volodia, his touch, and a look which passes between them imply the possibility of the liaison which is to come.<sup>102</sup>

From the airfield there is a cut to a cinema. Technology and entertainment are the twin channels to the outside world, and to modernity. Vladimir appears to be inviting Liuda to share in both. An image of a pair of swans on a decorative plate is presented in juxtaposition to cinema posters as Liuda looks at herself in the mirror after they return home. A sense of self-creative fantasy and romance is communicated. As Graffy says, by this means, embedded in the image is an idea of her ‘blossoming’.<sup>103</sup> Rather than a decorative ‘propaganda’ porcelain plate with a typical modernist design such as Alisa Golenkina’s ‘Flying Red Horse’ (1922),<sup>104</sup> which shows Il’ia Muromets flying over a flaming skyline, and proclaims: ‘We shall set the world ablaze with the fire of the Third International’, the plate above Liuda’s dresser echoes miniature works

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<sup>100</sup> Graffy, ‘Commentary’.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Nina Lobanov-Rostovsky, ‘Soviet Propoganda Porcelain’, *The Journal of Decorative and Propoganda Arts*, 11, 2 (1989), 126-41 (p. 137).

by artists of the Palekh Art Institute depicting romantic scenes.<sup>105</sup> It depicts two white swans in the foreground, and a young couple who sit on a fallen tree beside a river framed by a black background. In another undated lacquer box with the same name by Zinov'iev a couple sit in a field which lies between their two castles. They are surrounded by flocks of sheep, and the man is playing his flute while the long neck of a goose is almost hidden as the bird looks towards her petticoats. The juxtaposition of these porcelain representations of bucolic love and the film posters enhances a sense of Liuda's inner world of idealized romantic union, and her dreams of fulfilling love.

Rather than being the metaphoric pilot who steers Liuda towards a new future, Volodia becomes a symbolic 'knave' in the cards which Liuda uses to tell her fortune when they return home. He suggestively lays the Jack on top of her representative Queen, and after a fade out, the subsequent cut is to Liuda waking up in bed next to him. But ultimately, after the three members of the relationship have established a routine, Volodia and Kolia become more interested in their game of chess than in Liudmila. And once Volodia has become Liuda's lover, he orders her to get tea for him, and locks the door of the flat so that she is unable to leave. Near the end of the film, neither of the men can bear to bring a child, whose paternal line is uncertain, into the world, and they insist that Liuda has an abortion. Her personal horizons seem destined to be limited by the 'homo-social' kinships which bind her movements and decisions.<sup>106</sup> So, whilst Liuda's first-flight experience held out the hope of self-development, freedom and fulfillment in love, the ensuing 'utopian' ménage à trois with Volodia, and her husband, Kolia, only serves to expose the deeper levels of entrapment which govern her world.<sup>107</sup>

In the film, flight fulfills a metaphoric function, communicating the powers of attraction between two people. But in a stereotypical feminine/masculine dichotomy, Liuda is defined in terms of *pathos*, and Volodia in terms of action. Instead of developing herself through love, and through expanding into the broader horizons which Volodia seems to offer, in the end Liudmila's flight shows that what is offered to

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<sup>105</sup> Dmitri Butorin, 'Idiliia, baul'chik, 1926', <[http://palekh.narod.ru./b/butorin/butdn\\_28.jpg](http://palekh.narod.ru./b/butorin/butdn_28.jpg)> [accessed 2 January 2010].

<sup>106</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 1-3.

<sup>107</sup> Turovskaia, 'Zhenskie fil'my'. Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, pp. 16-21.

her by the men in her life can as easily be withdrawn by them. In Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna*, Kuz'mina's flight in an aeroplane expresses the victory of that force in man which strives for good. We never see her landing and, by this means, Kuz'mina's trajectory is infinitely transcendental. Liuda's, by contrast, brings her back to earth, and to a circular stultification of her inner life.

#### **Questing feminine spirit and ornithic comparisons: Chekhov**

The themes of Eros and self-creativity which are underlined by aviation and flight images in Room's film are similar to the expressive function of bird and wing imagery in Chekhov's *Tri sestry*. In Chekhov's play, as in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, flight and ornithic imagery metaphorize the twin notions of libidinous impulses; the self-creative and the erotic. They delicately contribute to an expressive tension between these instincts and between systemized notions of social and technological advance. And the contrast in significance of aviation and bird elements for men and women in the play, anticipates the contrast of male and female psychologies in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. In the play, Irina communicates the inexplicable joy she feels on her name day by comparing it to the feeling of lying in a boat looking up at white birds flying above in a wide blue sky ('Tochno ia na parusakh, nado mnoi shirokoe goluboi nebo i nosiatsia bol'shie belye ptitsy').<sup>108</sup> The feeling of happiness links backwards in the play to a similar feeling of joy at the memory of childhood when the sisters' mother was still alive.<sup>109</sup> Irina's imagined space is also linked in her mind to a sense of personal epiphany concerning a right way to live, and also to her longing to work at something with all of her being ('Chelovek dolzhen trudit'sia, rabotat' v pote litsa, kto by on ni byl, b v etom odnom zakliuchaetsia smysl' i tsel' ego zhizni, schast'e, ego vostorgi (...) kak mne zakhotelos' rabotat').<sup>110</sup> Being an active working person, even if only a shepherd, a railway mechanic or a teacher of children, is felt to be better than a young woman who wakes at twelve o'clock and takes two hours to dress. Her 'oceanic' feeling is signified by sails, height and space and white birds.<sup>111</sup> Interestingly, the

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<sup>108</sup> Chekhov, *Tri sestry* (Act I), p. 114.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Irina is also addressed by Chebutikin as 'his little white bird' (Ptitsa moia belaia). For him the metaphor represents his 'joy' (radost'), and also feelings of love like those of a father to a

combined signification of flight and sailing is present in the morphological composition of the Russian word for aeronautics: *vozdukhoplavlenie*. The idea of an oceanic feeling which the sky symbolizes and which is accessed by flight of the imagination is reflected in the choice of title of Isidor Annenskii's *Piatyi okean* (The Fifth Ocean) (Kievskaiia kinostudiia, 1940), which I will be analysing in more detail in Chapter Four). The delicate, yet expansive feelings expressed by Irina in the description of the white birds' flight above her suggest an impulse towards self-transcendence.

Arthur Koestler analyses self-assertive (ego-centric) principles and self-transcendent principles. He says that at the level of poetic image there is a height in creative impulse. At the level of exploration the individual harnesses the 'oceanic' feelings inspired by the 'wonders or "mysteries of nature" (...) to a specific purpose.'<sup>112</sup> Liudmila's experiences suggest these contrasting and entwined impulses. Her skyward projection of inner thoughts, and her flight, reflect a Jungian self-creative impulse which is the desire to expand personal horizons, and to extend a sense of connection with the world ever outward from the family circle.

In Chekhov's drama, themes of flight have a different significance for men than for the main female protagonists. On the one hand, themes of flight highlight a tension between the forces of progress that are associated with male social-systems and engineering sciences. On the other, for women, aspiration and enquiry is understood as a force of nature and this is exemplified by the significance Masha attaches to a flight of cranes. For Tuzenbach, a baron of German descent, who is in love with Irina, the idea of a flight of cranes is a symbol of an insensate and mindless force of nature which compels the birds to migrate every year. Tuzenbakh believes that man's technological progress, symbolized in aerial balloon technology, will make no difference to the way man is in two, three hundred, or even a million years. For him the essence of life will not change, just as cranes migrate without having a conscious thought in their heads.<sup>113</sup> For Masha, the question of happiness is linked to that drive which compels a person to

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daughter ('dochka moia'). Ibid., p. 113 and 114. Arthur Koestler also uses 'oceanic' to describe a quality of 'self-transcending absorption' in the 'wonders' of nature.' See his: *Insight and Outlook: An Enquiry into the Common Foundations of Science, Art and Social Ethics* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1949), p. 242.

<sup>112</sup> Koestler, *Insight and Outlook*, p. 242.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 138.



seek the answer to why cranes migrate every year, why children are born, why the stars shine in the sky.<sup>114</sup> Masha expresses a spirit of enquiry and curiosity about life which is as important as man's search for faith, and without which there is no point in living.<sup>115</sup>

She says:

Мне кажется, человек должен быть верующим или должен искать веры, иначе жизнь его пуста, пуста... Жить и не знать, для чего журавли летят, для чего дети рождаются, для чего звезды на небе... Или знать, для чего живешь, или же все пустяки, трын-трава.

For Masha, life has become moribund. Citing Gogol', she says: 'skuchno zhit' na etom svete'.<sup>116</sup> Like Liuda in Room's film, Masha also seeks 'freedom' from a stultifying relationship with her husband by finding fulfilment in a love affair. But for Masha, as relentless as elements of her life may seem, the flight of the cranes represents a vital force, and mystery of life. Irina's metaphoric birds express hope and link forward to her ideological notions of work. For Masha, the phenomenon of the migration of the birds is a symbol of a re-generational spirit in Man.

Liudmila's aviation experience does not serve as a personal expression of a utopian longing linked to Kollontai's revolutionary sexual freedoms, and ideologies of work;<sup>117</sup> nor is it purely a function of romantic connection. Rather, it is a function of an eupsychian longing. But whereas Liuda's longing ultimately leads to release from psychological oppression, Chekhov resolves his play with profound changes within the siblings' circle, yet nothing has spiritually or emotionally improved for them.<sup>118</sup> Symbolically, their ownership and freedom of their family home has been diminished

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid. With special thanks to Philip Cavendish for bringing this passage to my attention.

<sup>115</sup> As is the case with Liuda, Masha's erotic impulse stands in for this transcendent urge, rather than the other way around, which Freud's analysis of libido suggests. See Sigmund Freud, *The Penguin Freud Library*, 15 vols, ed. by James Strachey, Angela Richards and Albert Dickson (London: Penguin Books, 1991-1993), V (*The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*) (1991), ed. by James Strachey and Angela Richards, pp. 212-23.

<sup>116</sup> Chekhov, *Tri sestry*, p. 138.

<sup>117</sup> Graffy analyses the socio-political importance of the ménage à trois in the communist project. See Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>118</sup> I wish to thank Julian Graffy for this insight.

and usurped by their sister-in-law. At the end, their sense that they once had that there can be fulfilment in work and in love by means of a reconnection with the past in the form of a rehabilitating trip to the place of their childhood, Moscow, has been lost.

Near the end of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, Room links Liudmila's upwards projection of longing through her basement window (while her two 'husbands' ignore her), and her vying with Volodia for a place at the window of the aircraft, with her gazing out from an abortion clinic window alone.<sup>119</sup> She looks out, not at the abstract terrain of Moscow from an aerial view, but at a child at play with a doll, which is seen in medium close-up, followed by a child in its pram.<sup>120</sup> Mayne suggests that the inconsistency of the images of the children outside the window indicates that they are created in Liudmila's imagination.<sup>121</sup> But whether imagined or perceived, they function as a representation of Liudmila's maternal longing, her sense of justice, and a self-creative drive. These are the dynamic source of her authentic freedom. They constitute a liminal feminine active dynamic. She rushes out, packs her belongings, and leaves a note that she will never return to her husbands' ('your') Meshchanskaia Street, and she assures the building manager that she will find work and be fine.

In the last sequence of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, the image of Liuda standing on the moving train, with the play of light, and her proud outward gaze, links back to the sudden flight of birds and also to the syncretistic symbolism of the female statuary of the Freedom Obelisk at the beginning of the film. In a continuation of that independent empathetic drive, which impelled her to run out of the flat for the first time after her husband,<sup>122</sup> and also out of the abortion clinic, we see Liuda on a train departing from her life in the basement and from her ménage à trois. The light on her face is comparable to the beauty and dynamism of the female statue in 'white flowing

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<sup>119</sup> Graffy, 'Commentary'.

<sup>120</sup> Graffy in his 'Commentary' says that the aerial views render the landscape 'dolls houses', and Widdis, explaining the difference between the dynamic experience of views from a train which enable one to know the landscape as it 'unfolds in time', says that the aerial gaze 'is not subject to movement but is abstracted and framed'. Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, pp. 122 and 125.

<sup>121</sup> Mayne, *Kino and the Woman Question*, p. 122.

<sup>122</sup> In his Commentary, Julian Graffy observes that this is the first time Liuda leaves the flat of her own volition.

classical' garb incorporated into the Freedom Obelisk. The 'irreconcilable' principles of femininity, and freedom symbolized in the statue, and also the promise of personal freedom communicated from within the aeroplane, visually come together with her departure from Moscow. The horizontal dynamic of freedom of movement through the city, which is associated with Volodia and his arrival by train at the beginning, is transferred to Liuda as she leaves it. As Graffy says, Liuda's departure is 'a rejection of all Soviet systems.'<sup>123</sup>

At the end of *Tret'ia Meshshanskaia*, Liuda's gaze projects an idea of 'territory' which she moves towards as a symbol of space and freedom. As Widdis says, in Russian these two sensibilities come together in the word (*volia*).<sup>124</sup> The Latin root of the Russian word, *volia*, links to the verb *volo*, meaning either to fly, or to wish or to want, and also to *volatilis*, winged. Etymologically, volition takes its root from the Latin word *volito* to fly, to speed. In this film the aviation-day celebration draws attention to male hierarchal sub-structures, but a sense of true freedom is predicated on Liuda's maternal impulse, and on her discovery of a deeply personal dynamism. Both that spatial plane associated with her prone, unconscious state at the beginning of the film, and that vertical plane associated with her sense of longing and *faux* freedom in aviation, are transformed into self-determined movement when she takes the train out of Moscow.

Paradoxically, an impulse which is not erotic but part maternal, part self-assertive, has enabled Liuda to become outwardly and inwardly independent, and she reveals characteristics of Kollontai's new woman, 'kholostaia zhenshchina' who is a 'samotsennyi chelovek, s svoim sobstvennym vnutrennim mirom'.<sup>125</sup> Yet, at the point at which the film leaves her, Liuda is not, as Kollontai envisaged, motivated by interests of mankind.<sup>126</sup> Room's concern has been to reveal the inner world of his female protagonist, and even though it is ultimately mediated through the technology of the train and not the aeroplane, Liuda personifies a Russian phrase signifying 'to begin to manifest one's strengths', 'to act independently', or 'to spread one's wings'

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<sup>123</sup> Graffy, *Bed and Sofa*, p. 74.

<sup>124</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 5.

<sup>125</sup> 'Novaia zhenshchina', in Aleksandra Kollontai, *Novaia moral' i rabochii klass* (Moscow: Izd. VTsIK Sovetov r., 1919), pp. 3-35 (p. 17).

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

(razpravliat'/raspravit' kryl'ia).<sup>127</sup> As a visual expression of this, in the final frames the camera tilts upwards from the train, and the camera takes the viewer with Liuda's gaze up through the iron bars of a railway bridge as if in flight towards the sky.

The final frames of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* show how a sense of flight is communicated by the camera's movement which signifies emotion *vitally*. The spontaneous flight of birds, the delicate sense of love and delight communicated by the movement of light on the faces of Liudmila and Volodia, the sense of new beginnings as Liudmila looks out from the cabin of the aircraft on Aviation Day is not dissimilar to the communication of love and creative impulse in *Kryl'ia kholopa* when Nikishka and Fima 'swing' on his flight simulator near the beginning of Tarich's film.

In this chapter we have seen how cinematographic flight and aviation have been used to show the universal impulse which is part of the psychology of any 'inventor' of wings whether that 'inventor' be a creative artist or a confined house-wife. Regardless of their genre, the display of aerial technology (and its invention) in these films speaks to universal cognates of the realization of dreams. The notion of gaining wings speaks to a broad semantic sphere of transformation which is linked to ideas of freedom from oppression.

*Kryl'ia kholopa* and *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* have shown how flight and the metaphor of gaining wings communicate a sense of the inner world of the individual protagonists in a trajectory towards external expression. We have seen that, because flight semiotics speak to, and communicate emotional and socio-ideological sensibilities, they are particularly productive for an analysis of levels of allegory and psychology in the films discussed. We have seen how the cinematographic communication of flight, and of the invention of wings speaks to an ability to have manifold views of the world and the means by which this is expressed. At the air parade the individual's inner self is exposed and meets with public and official spheres. The following chapter looks at the impact that the fact of heavier-than-air flight and the introduction of aviation and aerial display into Russia had on creating a new consciousness by which the old world was transformed into the new.

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<sup>127</sup> S. I. Lubenskaia, 'K-433', *Russko-angliiskii frazeologicheskii slovar'* (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1997), p. 319; and A.I. Smirnitiskii et al, *Russko-angliiskii slovar'*, (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1991.)

## Chapter Two: Air-mindedness and the Opening of New Worlds

Now in literature, what is needed are expansive horizons from masts, aeroplanes and philosophy, what is needed is the ultimate and most terrible and fearless “why?” and “what next?”<sup>1</sup>

Evgenii Zamiatin

‘The Communist dream is not a flight from the earthly but a flight into the future.’<sup>2</sup>

Anatolii Lunacharskii

### Aerial Display and Early ‘Air-mindedness’

The place of aviation in the Soviet imagination is inextricably linked to the impact of its introduction into Russia. The pre-revolutionary legacy of air parades and races extends back to the earliest presentations of foreign aviation technology in Russia. The Admiral, Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich, perceived that future wars could not be won without an aerial fleet and that an air fleet could not be created without public support. For this reason, besides lobbying for funds for a military *vozdushnyi flot*, the Grand Duke Aleksandr Mikhailovich promoted aviation by supporting the organization of a series of exhibitions and competitions. In 1909 the Wright Brothers received a patent for their flying machine in Russia and in the same year their aircraft was put on public display in St. Petersburg and was inspected by the former Finance Minister and builder of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, Sergei Witte.<sup>3</sup> The Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Sergei Stolypin, having been taken up in a demonstration flight, became convinced of the technological and practical possibilities of aviation.<sup>4</sup> In the same year

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<sup>1</sup> Evgenii Zamiatin, ‘O literatury, revoliutsii i prochem’, *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Kniga, 1988), Lib.ru/Klassika < [http://az.lib.ru/z/zamjatin\\_e\\_i/text\\_1923\\_o\\_literature.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/z/zamjatin_e_i/text_1923_o_literature.shtml) >.

<sup>2</sup> Anatolii Lunacharskii, ‘Synopsis of a Report on the Tasks of Dramaturgy (Extract)’ in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, p. 327.

<sup>3</sup> Von Hardesty, ‘Early Flight’, pp. 21-22.

<sup>4</sup> Scott W. Palmer, ‘On Wings of Courage: Public “Air-mindedness” and National Identity in Late Imperial Russia’ (hereafter ‘On Wings of Courage’), *Russian Review*, 54 (1995), 209-26 (p. 213).

the pre-revolutionary pilot, Mikhail Efimov (1881-1919) became famous when he performed the first 'steep turn' (*krutoi virazh*) at the first public aerial display in Odessa. The crowd he attracted was so vast that eight thousand soldiers were required to keep order. For his act of bravery Efimov became known as Russia's first 'aviator'.<sup>5</sup> Air shows became a feature of pre-revolutionary Russia when, in 1910, Moscow held the 'first aeronautical exhibition' and St. Petersburg held its own, and the first, All-Russian Aviation Week (sponsored by the Imperial All-Russian Aero Club). This was followed by an 'All-Russian Festival of Aeronautics', which was held in St. Petersburg in September and October of the same year.<sup>6</sup> Interest in French technology burgeoned. Voisin, Blériot and Farman machines were imported. And record-breaking traditions took root as pilots such as Il'ia Rudnev (1892-1969) flew a 'breathtaking' twenty-five miles non-stop from St. Petersburg to Gatchina.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as Scott W. Palmer, demonstrates, in pre-revolutionary Russia the 'air-mindedness' that such events and record-breaking flights helped to create was not only an awareness of the new technology and of the need for an Imperial air fleet. 'Air-mindedness' also connoted a sense of national self-identity on different levels. Palmer describes pre-revolutionary aero-consciousness as having several strands. It created a sense that the heroic spirit of the legendary 'bogatyrs' warrior of eleventh to sixteenth century tales was still alive (and the proof of this was in the successes of pilots such as Makarevich, Efimov and Piotrovskii).<sup>8</sup> This particular public consciousness refracted the awareness that in the aeronautical industry Russia had the potential to compete with, and exceed the West. 'Air-mindedness also involved a growing sense that if the *dikost'* and *stikhiinost'* of the

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<sup>5</sup> Liudmila Korolenko, 'Letat', kak letat', *Zerkalo nedeli*, (2004) <<http://www.zerkalo-nedeli.com/nn/show/233/21088/>>, [accessed April 2005]. For a description of the early pilots, Efimov and Piotrovskii, demonstrating their skills see Hardesty, 'Early Flight', pp. 21-22.

<sup>6</sup> David R. Jones, 'The Beginnings of Russian Air Power 1907-1922', in *Soviet Aviation and Air Power*, ed. by Robin Higham and Jacob W. Kipp (London: Brassey's, 1978), pp. 15-35 (p. 17). See also Scott W. Palmer, citing Sankov, 'The first Petersburg Aviation Week (...) from 15 April to 2 May 1910', in 'On Wings of Courage', p. 213n15.

<sup>7</sup> Hardesty, 'Early Flight', p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> Palmer, 'On Wings of Courage', p. 221. See also 'Byliny', in *Russian Folk Literature, Skazki, Liricheskie pesni, Byliny, Isotoricheskie pesni, Dukhovnie stikhi*, ed. by S. Konovalov, D.P. Costello and I. P. Foote (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 61-75 (p. 66).

hinterlands and of the air could be overcome by record-breaking crossings of the country, then heavier-than-air technology could also provide an answer to “overcoming the obstacles of its (Russia’s) own modernization””.<sup>9</sup> To people such as Vasilii Korn, the founder of the Imperial Aero-Club, ‘air-mindedness’ also connoted the development of a civic consciousness modelled on that which existed in the West. For him, the notion of social association which lay at the heart of Europe’s institutions (and which could be seen in the development of Western aviation circles) needed to be emulated in Russia.<sup>10</sup> Aviation’s appeal crossed all levels of society; and it unified the country in grief for the first, tragic death of a Russian pilot (Lev Makarovich Matsievich) at an air show near St. Petersburg in 1910.<sup>11</sup> Thus the development of pre-revolutionary ‘air-mindedness’ reflected an awareness of heavier-than-air flight on a technological and social level, and it was nurtured for the purpose of creating support and financial sponsors for an air fleet. Testifying to Scott W. Palmer’s suggestion that pre-revolutionary ‘air-mindedness’ presaged the myth-making of the Stalinist period, Russia’s achievements were reported in increasingly hyperbolic terms, and an aeronautical lexicon that had been stripped of foreign borrowings was created.<sup>12</sup> Yet ‘air-mindedness’, generated more than a patriotic national self-identity. For artists, poets, writers and philosophers of the day aviation was emblematic of the transformative powers of man.

### **The Inspiration of Aviation Display**

Air shows attracted writers such as Russia’s great poet, Aleksandr Blok, who attended the aviation week in St. Petersburg in 1911, and Leonid Andreev, who had been at the very first event the year before.<sup>13</sup> Artists’ responses to the new technology could be divided into two categories. Either they were amongst those, such as Blok, who saw in the risks of aviation; loss, suicide and death, and were to be thrown off the ‘Ship of

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<sup>9</sup> Palmer, ‘On Wings of Courage’, p. 216.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 218-19.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 209 and 226.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>13</sup> Elena Zheltova, ‘Daesh’ nebo!’, in *Rodina, Aviatsiia 100 let*, special issue, 8 (2004), 40-42 (p. 40).

Modernity' by those writers who considered themselves modernity's 'face'.<sup>14</sup> Or they were amongst those, such as Igor' Severianin, Vasili Kamenskii, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Andreev, Aleksandr Kuprin, and Kazimir Malevich, who perceived themselves as pilot-poets and seers of the new age. While Blok saw the aeroplane as a 'demonic machine' and was condemned for 'seeing nothing in the future wings of man except the 'soullessness of these wings', for others the fulfilment of the dream of flight suggested the possibility of fulfilling the dream of a new world.<sup>15</sup> In Blok's poem 'Aviator', the pilot's crash signals a longing for death and oblivion. In his poem 'Dva veka', Blok equates life in the new age with a yet darker and greater 'Ten' Liutsiferova kryla'.<sup>16</sup> Valerii Briusov saw in the new technology a dawning of a joyful era in which the dissolving of borders would create international harmony, and with the onset of World War One, his poem 'K Stal'nym ptitsam' (1915) deplored the use of the aeroplane in its capacity as a killing machine.<sup>17</sup> Futurists such as Maiakovskii and Kamenskii saw flight as a metaphor for the transformation of consciousness, for liberation from the constraints of normal day to day existence and for the re-definition of time and space. They saw the poet as a creator of a new life and 'without doubt he was an aviator'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the poet Kamenskii actually trained and received his license as a pilot. For him the dynamic technology was commensurate with the power released in new expressive forms of language and art. Khlebnikov developed a language, *zaum*. The morpheme (za) means beyond, and (um) means mind and it sought meaning which

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<sup>14</sup> David Burliuk, Aleksandr Kruchenykh, Vladimir Maiakovskii and Viktor Khlebnikov, 'Poshchecina obshchestvennomu vkusu', in Vladimir Maiakovskii, *Polnoe sobranie sochineniia*, 13 vols (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1955-1961), XIII (1961), pp. 244-45.

<sup>15</sup> Zheltova, pp. 40-41.

<sup>16</sup> Aleksandr Blok, 'Aviator', *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i pisem*, ed. by M. L. Gasparov, 20 vols (Moscow: Institut russkoi literatury, Pushkinskii dom, 1997-2003), III (1997), ed. by Ia. K. Gerasimov, pp. 20-21. See also 'Dva veka', *ibid.*, IV (1999), ed. by M. L. Gasparov, pp. 208-09.

<sup>17</sup> 'K stal'nym ptitsam', in Valerii Briusov, *Izbrannyye stikhotvoreniia*, ed. by Ioanna Briusova (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1945), pp. 395-96, and reference to this in Zheltova, pp. 40-41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.



lay outside the constraints of linguistic norms.<sup>19</sup> In his authoritative book on the cultural significance of aviation, Robert Wohl analyses Malevich's painting, 'Aviator' (Aviator, 1914). In the great painter's work, Wohl argues, the pilot is symbolic of the opposite of the 'ordinary' 'bourgeois' 'pharmacist' associated with the 'KA' letters of 'apteka' (found in the upper-right of the painting). Victoriously at the top of the work is the letter 'A'. In the centre of the painting is a white fish which is placed so that it appears to be flying. White is a colour that the ground-breaking painter associated with transcendence. And a fish is a Christian symbol of resurrection.<sup>20</sup> The emphasis on these letters in this context also suggests the semantic spheres of *kosmos* and *aviator* and, possibly, *Kammenskii*. Taken together with the fact that the word aviation derives from the Latin *avis* – a bird, which is a traditional symbol for the soul in many countries,<sup>21</sup> the flying fish is a symbol of both eternity and of resurrection. It suggests that the symbolic aviator transcends the past both by symbolically cutting it away and by flying. The *flight* depicted in the painting breaks with all traditional notions of perspective. Thus the notion of flight itself is expressive of a break with the perspectives of a passing culture into a realm of intuition and transcendental truth.<sup>22</sup>

### **Form of the Future**

For the Russian Futurists, humanity's ability to fly inspired a notion of the fusion of the pilot with his machine. This was central to a new idea of harmony between man and the elements. The Italian Futurist, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), also exulted in the idea of the unification of man and machine. But for him the aeroplane was one of the new technologies which was affecting the human psyche, and it was a death-wielding, all-powerful instrument of war which he linked to ideas of the pilot as a 'Superman' of speed who could kill time and space.<sup>23</sup> For Malevich speed was an emotion and the aeroplane its concretization. For him the aeroplane and flight reflected

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<sup>19</sup> John Milner, 'Zang Zaum!', in John Milner, *A Slap in the Face: Futurists in Russia* (London: Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 2007), pp. 9-42 (p. 12).

<sup>20</sup> Robert Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, pp. 169-70.

<sup>21</sup> See the entry entitled 'Bird', in *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, ed. by Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, trans. by John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 86-91 (pp. 86-89).

<sup>22</sup> Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, pp. 171-78.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-44.

man's innate 'yearning for speed to take on external form'. For Kamenskii, the aeroplane, which was central to his lecture 'Aeroplanes and Futurist Poetry' (and which would be drawn on his neck or forehead) was a symbol of a new and 'universal dynamism'.<sup>24</sup> Wohl explains that Malevich's aviator represented 'ascension towards a new system of perception'. Thus the idea of 'ascension' was ineluctably symbolic of a new way of seeing.<sup>25</sup>

The ability the aircraft gave to man to distance himself from the earth's surface created new views of the world. From the early days of aviation and of cinema through the period of the first two Five-Year Plans, their simultaneous ability to offer altered perspectives of the world, and the fact that both offered transformed experiences of life were part of aviation's, and of the camera's, 'magic' qualities. Six years before the Bolsheviks took power, Andreev said "The miraculous cinema! What is there to compare with it: aerial flight, the telegraph and the telephone, even the press itself?"<sup>26</sup> Philip Cavendish, drawing on the memoirs of Mariia Slavinskaia, whose father was a pre-revolutionary camera operator, notes that at the dawn of aviation technology, if a cameraman appeared at an aeronautical event, it was the cameraman, rather than the fliers and their machines, that drew the attention of the crowds.<sup>27</sup> It can be seen that the miracle of the aeroplane and of the camera was not only in their 'modern technology', but also in their mutual ability to overcome time and space as instruments of communication. In the practical means of transportation of people, and in the ability to offer new representations of life, they were able to unite the country and they gave the

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<sup>24</sup> Zheltova, p. 41; Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, p. 145; Milner, 'Zang Zaum!', p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, pp. 175 and 171.

<sup>26</sup> Leonid Andreev, 'First Letter on Theatre (Extracts)', in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Taylor and Christie, pp. 27-31 (pp. 30-31); and in Nicholas Reeves, *The Power of Film: Propaganda Myth or Reality?* (London: Casell, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Cavendish, 'The Hand that Turns the Handle: Camera operators and the Poetics of the Camera in Pre-revolutionary Russian Film', *Slavonic and East European Review*, 82 (2004), 201-45 (p. 209n3).

nation new perspectives of itself on the ground and from the air.<sup>28</sup> A pilot who took on the role of cameraman as well as ‘flier’ must have seemed a ‘magus’ indeed.

### **Aerial Perspectives and ‘Imaging’ Ideology**

On 14 August 1913 Petr Nesterov performed the first aerial loop, and it is said that he was also the first Russian pilot to take a camera into an aircraft.<sup>29</sup> He directs the camera’s view outside the cockpit and the film conveys a sensation of speed when the texture of the grass of the airfield blurs under the aeroplane as it gathers momentum just before lift off. The spectators in the mist disappear off the left of the frame as the camera travels past them. This early image captures the feeling of speed of the new technology. A palpable moment of ‘lift’ is not conveyed; rather, the viewer is suddenly air born. It could be seen as a precursor of Dziga Vertov’s desire to show ‘air travel as a gift of technology to the nation.’ In its ‘capturing of reality’ and in its speed it conveys something of what Emma Widdis, analyzing Vertov’s *Daesh' vozdukh* (1924), suggests is Vertov’s desire to communicate ‘the contingent’ and the dynamic of the experience. She cites Aleksei Gan, who says ‘And we see aeroplanes and at the same time watch them from the earth below. But the earth is running, as streets, houses and newspapers shift to another perspective.’ She contrasts the sense of ‘oshchushchenie’ which is associated with the experience of the world through train travel, and the ‘all encompassing’, authorial, pilot-centred and dominant ‘view’ which becomes predominant in film of the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> In Nesterov’s film the earth seems to be both retreating and expanding beyond the tail of the plane. The next sequence is of the city below. These are reported to be the first aerial views of Kiev, and they are possibly the first views of a Ukrainian city filmed from an aeroplane.<sup>31</sup> *Razvedchik* in English means both reconnaissance and scout, and emphasizing Vertov’s use of the aerial ‘gaze’ as a tool with which to explore new perspectives of reality, Widdis notes that in the 1920s

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<sup>28</sup> Aleksandr Aizenberg and Maksim Zolotukhin, *Rossia. Zabytye gody. Istoriia russkoi aviatsii. Rossiia v kosmose*, four films (hereafter: *Istoriia russkoi aviatsii*) (Krupnyi Plan, Castle Communications, Eastern Light, 1993) (documentary serial), 1 (*Stanovlenie*).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. See also Hardesty, ‘Early Flight’, p. 32.

<sup>30</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 128.

<sup>31</sup> *Istoriia russkoi aviatsii*.

one cameraman/director Il'ia Kopolin, was described as a 'kino-razvedchik'.<sup>32</sup> This term could also be applied retrospectively to Nesterov when he first took a camera above Kiev in 1913.

In Nesterov's film the streets create a pattern of small white lines and the varying shades of grey suggest a form of aerial photography called *deshirovanie*.<sup>33</sup> The verb of the same root word, *deshirovat'*, means to decode. Rather than a symbolic cultural 'coding' of the landscape, this kind of photography 'decodes' the two dimensional landscape into measurable patterns on a page. Malevich included *deshirovanie* amongst a personal collection of images of groups of airborne aircraft. He felt this photographic material was suitable for the stimulation of works of 'zero form' and 'objectless creation'. For him, the ascent of an aeroplane mirrored 'the path to abstraction'; and the upwards flight was an expression of man's inborn desire to take-off from the globe until 'the world (and) "everything we loved and by which we have lived" – is lost to sight'.<sup>34</sup> The idea of 'take-off' signified the release of the soul to the creative corners of the universe.<sup>35</sup> And the abstract patterns of the earth in the *deshirovanie* that he collected for inspiration can be seen to reflect Suprematist notions of escape from the tyranny of the material objects of the earth.<sup>36</sup> Widdis explains that the literary scholar and founding member of the Formalist Circle, Viktor Shklovskii, also recognized that the aerial view or extreme 'long-distance' perspective 'erased the "individual fate from the landscape" leaving a uniform geometry (odnoobrazna i geometrichna).'<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 136.

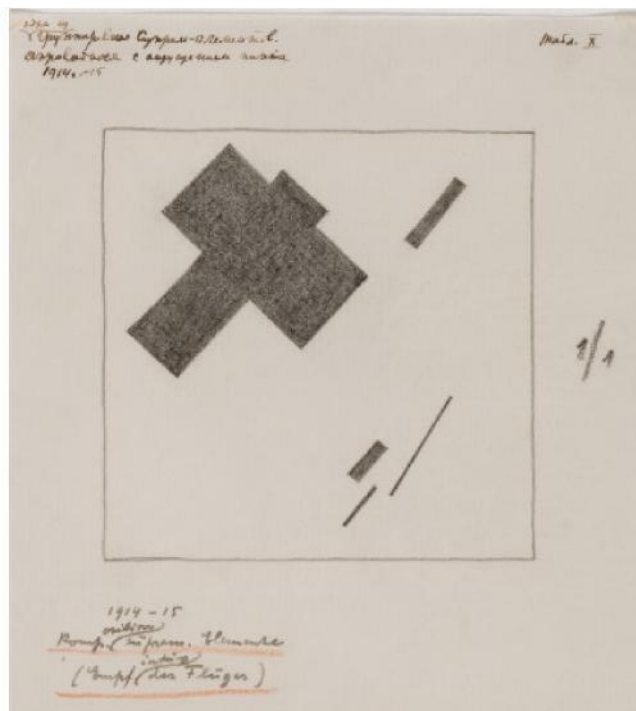
<sup>33</sup> 'Deshirovanie', *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 51 vols, ed. by S. I. Vavilov and S. L. Shaumian (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia), XIV, ed. by B. A. Vvedenskii (1952), pp. 194-96.

<sup>34</sup> Wohl, *A Passion for Wings*, p. 175.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 121.



**Figure 11: Vladimir Malevich, ‘Composition of Suprematist Elements Expressing the Sensation of Flight’ (pencil on paper, 1914/1915)<sup>38</sup>**

Shklovskii’s sense of the aerial view equates with the practical use of *deshirovanie* and of the pilot/*razvedchik*. That is, to gather and to communicate information. The word *razvedchik* shares its root word with the verb *vedat’* which is an archaic form of the verb meaning ‘to know’ and ‘to manage’. A person who is a *razvedchik* does not have to be air-borne, but *razvedchik* is also the name given to a particular class of aircraft used for reconnaissance. The idea of ‘knowing’ and ‘managing’ is incorporated in *deshirovanie*, which shows the lie of the land, the location of important buildings and elements of geography and other large man-made structures. It endeavours to reflect a ‘scientific’ truth. *Deshirovanie* is both topographical and tactical, and it serves construction planning, the study of natural resources and the military.<sup>39</sup> This usage can be seen as part of the diegesis of played film such as Iakov Protazonov’s *Sorok pervyi* (The Forty-first) (Mezhrabpom-Rus’, 1926, released 1927) in which a scout aeroplane is sent by the White Army to find a lieutenant who is carrying important information. The audience sees the flight over water and experiences the aerial view which enables

<sup>38</sup> In gratitude for image reprint permissions: Kunstmuseum Basel, Kupferstichkabinett. Photo credit: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin P. Bühler.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Deshirovanie’, *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, pp. 194-95.

the identification of an island where the Lieutenant, Govorukha-Otruk (Ivan Koval-Samborskii), is shipwrecked. This sequence communicates a documentary sense of the integral beauty of nature when viewed from above. It also accentuates the topography of isolation in which love is able to exist between the White Army Lieutenant and the female, Red Army sniper (Ada Voitsik). She directs her fatal forty-first shot at the Lieutenant when the White Army subsequently arrives to save him. Thus the use of the aeroplane adds to the film's communication of the tension between public and private spheres. However, in spite of the nuances which the aerial footage gives to the film, the dominant function of the aeroplane is not poetic. In this film the aeroplane is a *razvedchik* and its primary purpose is to drive the narrative forward.

Since before World War One, efforts were made to develop aerial photographic equipment, and publications such as the 1907 *Metric Photography and its Application in Flight* were produced by the Military Engineering Academy.<sup>40</sup> The importance of aeronautics to the old regime's military extends back to the first recorded hot-air balloon flight in Russia when, in 1831 the military governor of Riazan witnessed a subdeacon being 'lifted above the birch trees by "the powers of darkness"'.<sup>41</sup> Dmitrii Miliutin, the War Minister under Aleksandr II, established a 'flying school' for balloonists in 1885 and, perceiving the value of the 'aerial view' for reconnaissance, established a balloon battalion by the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05).<sup>42</sup> When, in 1909, debates raged over the value of the aeroplane, 'young officers' felt that 'on the battlefield, a dwarf who can see will conquer a blind giant.'<sup>43</sup> Thus 'the aerial view' was one of the most powerful tools that the new technology had to offer.

Lenin understood its importance, and in 1918 aerial photography was used to update and create new maps.<sup>44</sup> In 1919 he signed a decree for the creation of the Higher Geodetic Institute, which was succeeded by the Main Administration for

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<sup>40</sup> Jones, 'Aerial Photography and Map-Making', in *Soviet Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 246-48 (pp. 246-47).

<sup>41</sup> Jones, 'The Beginnings of Russian Air Power', p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Hardesty, 'Early Flight', p. 21.

<sup>43</sup> Jones, 'The Beginnings of Russian Air Power', p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> David R. Jones, 'The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot: Civil Aviation in the Soviet Union., 1920-9' (hereafter 'The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot'), in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 236-69 (pp. 246-48).

Geodesy and Cartography. Importantly, also in 1919, the Workers' and Peasants' Red Air Force Photogrammetric School was opened. By the time of the first Five-Year Plan aerial photography had been used in the planning of collective farms in Ukraine and in the region of Moscow, and it continued to be used throughout the first two Five-Year Plans in this way.<sup>45</sup> Thus from the earliest experience of the aerial view it had a multi-valenced reception. For the varying strands of Russian Futurists it held an association with the dynamic of speed, and with an essentialism which demanded a break with traditional forms of expression. For the Futurists the new age demanded an overcoming of indifference. And, for many, such as the painter Marc Chagall (whose bride and grooms fly from rooftops and not only look out over, but are part of a rural landscape) the future could not exist without incorporating Russia's folkloric past. The aerial view was part of an elemental and mystical cosmology.<sup>46</sup> For the Suprematists it expressed the soul's transcendence into an expansive, abstract and intuited space of revealed truth. For the military it was a means of decoding the landscape and of control. The aerial view afforded the widest field of vision over a terrain. And for the Bolsheviks it became a useful tool for the re-envisioning and re-structuring of the Soviet world. Although its benefits were immediately perceived in military terms, it can be seen that notions of 'seeing' and alterations in 'perspective' as a metaphor for 'transformation' and 'dynamism' simultaneously became identified with the 'aerial view' and with aviation itself.<sup>47</sup>

### **Aerial-mindedness in Film**

This chapter looks at four films in which flight and/or aviation comprise only small sequences of feature-films. But their semiotics and poetic function have the originality of a given speech act in language usage and they illustrate the multi-valenced use of flight as topic, as semiotic and form. They are: Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*; Eizenshtein's (dir.); *General'naiia liniia*, Dovzhenko's *Zemlia* (Earth) (Vseukrainskoe fotokinoupravlenie, 1930); and Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna* (Alone) (Soiuzkino,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>46</sup> Milner, 'Zang, Zaum!', pp. 10-11.

<sup>47</sup> Widdis introduces her analysis of 'imaginary map[ping]' of the Soviet Union, in terms of 'competing visions of social organization', in which the aerial view plays an important part. See Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 2.

1930, r. 1931). These short sequences are essential to their director's communication of new perspectives, and of new ways of knowing the world. They are important to the dominant communication of the transformation of the country into a modern Soviet socialist country. But they also communicate several other types of transformation, including the elemental, folkloric and mystical. Cinematographic flight and aviation are used to express complex nuances in the directors' understandings of the relation between the future and the past. In these films, flight and aviation involve a sub-structuring metaphor of gaining wings in the Platonic sense of gaining form and articulation and striving towards truth. Plato uses wings as a metaphor which he enlists as part of his delineation of categories of love. The highest of which is the striving of the 'winged'-soul towards higher knowledge.<sup>48</sup> In chapter one this platonic metaphorization is played out on the level of plot, and it sheds light on the differentiated qualities of love, and supports the idea of an Icarian inventor of wings as a higher seeker of truth with whom the director identifies. This chapter shows the platonic metaphorization on the level of form. In these films unique moments of flight and aviation are used to create and to reveal a revolutionary space in consciousness. They communicate the autonomous voicing of each director in his striving for truth and authenticity. Each of these films is analysed below, and it will be shown how these directors use flight and aviation semiotics in a way that mirrors the dialogic capacity of language and the highest strivings of man to know the world.

### *Chelovek s kinoapparatom*

In his Cine-Eye manifesto, which was written in August 1922, Dziga Vertov announced the virtues of documentary film and highlighted the conceptual role of the aeroplane and flight for him. The manifesto counters the popularity of fiction film which represented the old artistic values of theatre. In it the notion of 'gaining wings' can be seen as a mental flight which signifies philosophical enquiry. The Cine-Eye distinguished, as did Gan and Maiakovskii, between 'cinematography', which described the current and undesirable state of affairs, from 'cinema', which described a pure, precise and perfect future form. For Vertov's group, cinema was to be a science-

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<sup>48</sup> Plato, 'Phaedrus', pp. 243-99 (p. 263) and D. B. R., 'Introduction to Phaedrus', *Ibid.*, pp. 239-43 (p. 241).



based art form, derived from machine technology, a science that would improve man so that he too became a finely tuned precision instrument. As he writes:

The cinema is also the *art of inventing the movement* of objects in space responding to the demands of science, the incarnation of the inventor's dream, whether he is a scientist, an artist, an engineer or a carpenter, the realization by the Cine-Eye of what cannot be realised in life.

Drawings in motion. Blueprints in motion. Projects for the future.

The theory of relativity on the screen.

WE welcome the ordered fantasy of movement.

Our eyes, turning like propellers, take-off into the future on the wings of hypotheses.

WE believe that the moment is at hand when we shall be able to toss into space hurricanes of movement reined in by the lassos of our tactic.

Long live the dynamic geometry, the race of points, of lines, planes, volumes.

Long live the poetry of the propelling and propelled machine, the poetry of levers, wheels and steel wings, the iron screech of moments and the dazzling grimaces of red-hot jets.<sup>49</sup>

*Chelovek s kinoapparatom* follows a man with a camera as he films the daily life of a composite city (including Moscow, Kharkiv and Odessa), and its citizens. The film is introduced as being the 'excerpts from a cameraman's diary' (otryvok s dnevnika kinooperatora). Before the first image of the film a title declares that:

Настоящий фильм  
представляет собой  
ОПЫТ ПЕРЕДАЧИ  
ВИДИМЫХ ЯВЛЕНИЕ

This is translated in subtitles as 'An experiment in cinematic communication'. The film also describes itself as a film which is made without the aid of sets, actors and

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<sup>49</sup> Vertov, 'We. A Version of a Manifesto', in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Christie and Taylor, pp. 69-72 (72).

intertitles These preliminary, and only, intertitles foreground Vertov's concern with communication itself, and with what constitutes understanding as triggered by life's 'visible' phenomena. He also accentuates the notion of capturing time, as in a diary. This speaks to Andreev's and Lenin's association of speed and geography involved in aviation technology and electricity in what can be understood as a chronotope of communication.

In the first image of the film, a man appears on top of a huge camera which is part of an indeterminate horizon. The man climbs out and onto this composite 'landscape' as if climbing out of the mists of creation onto a new world.<sup>50</sup> He looks up towards the sky above an arc of a cinema roof. Vertov thus creates a horizon which is divided not between 'Heaven and Earth' but between a sky of clouds in dynamic movement and a cinema which metaphorically substitutes for 'Earth'. Furthermore, filmed as it is from on top of a building, it communicates an 'aerial perspective'. The new world (the horizon) can thus be understood to rest on the ability to 'see' (it appears to rest on the huge camera). The ability to communicate the nature of the world from its visible facts determines a 'true' film for the director, and in *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* the world is realised by being seen consciously through the lens of a camera.

Near the beginning, a hangar door opens and in this it mirrors (at a slower tempo) a frame from the previous sequence in which a woman's eye (in close-up), and a window blind open in rapid succession. This, in turn, is linked to the opening of the 'eye' of a camera lens near the beginning of the film. The syntagma describes the city awakening and includes images of the opening of windows and the camera lens, wind in the streets, the city coming to life, homeless people on the street and an affluent young woman in her bed as she wakes up. From out of the hangar two bi-planes are pulled forwards and past the camera by groups of men who are running. The aeroplane is one of a type based on the de Havilland, and would have been amongst the first to go into Soviet mass production. The film thus dynamically links ideas of awakening forces of mass production with the awakening of man's consciousness, and associates them both with forces of nature. Vertov intercuts images of fashionable families in pre-revolutionary-style carriages. Bourgeois ladies are holding parasols; they order servants to carry their suitcases; and later, similar women have their hair washed and nails manicured. The instruments of their self-absorption are counterpoised with images of

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<sup>50</sup> This frame is singled out for attention in *The Film Factory*, p. 274.

instruments of industry. The idea of the struggle of the forces of modernity against the perceived retrograde effects of the New Economic Policy is an expression of the 'ideological horizon' and the 'vision' of the director.<sup>51</sup>

The tempo and kinetic dynamism of the sequence link forwards and backwards in the film to sequences that further connote ideas of 'seeing'. An image of a female eye blinking is edited into a sequence of predominantly 'overhead' views of the city which appear to spin. The revolutions imitate the circular movement of cogs of the machines and the speed and the dynamic of the edits imitate the rhythm of individual working machine-parts which have been seen earlier in the film. The action of spinning combined with the overhead views (which equate with aerial perspective) subliminally create an effect equivalent to that of the rotations of a propeller and the blurring of an image through its blades. The spinning and blurred aerial views of the city speak to images of transformation or alchemy on an atomic or organic level. Vertov not only makes 'visible' notions of the base level of dialectical change according to a Marxist-Leninist *mirovozrenie*, he communicates his own world-view which was revolutionary in a multivalenced sense.

### **Revolutionary Forces: Flight and the Pilot**

In a later sequence, we see the cameraman racing up the wall of a dam, and then, as it were, 'in flight', he glides in a cabled vehicle over the torrents of water below. Vertov 'makes strange' the universal notion of flight as 'man's conquering of the elements' and subtly plays with the notion of his mastery of gravity (controlling the pull of water to the sea) as metaphor for control of all the elements through his productive engineering. This leads to a dramatic sequence near the centre of the film in which the forces of production are portrayed in a dizzying sequence from within a smelting works. It includes edits to cogs of a variety of machines, including a thread spinning machine, a camera, and heavy industrial mechanisms. In the centre of a close-up of the moving machinery the cameraman appears wearing goggles. Although they may be

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<sup>51</sup> The New Economic Policy (NEP) was the tolerance of private retail and small industry in order to alleviate the hardships and famine of the Civil War which was introduced in 1921 and was curtailed after Lenin's death in 1924.

protective goggles, the film critic Vlada Petric suggests they are identified with those of a pilot.<sup>52</sup>

When we see a montage of images of the film editor Svilova at work, and the image of the cameraman-pilot in silhouette, superimposed against the dynamic motion of the white hot sparks of the spinning cogs, it suggests that the pilot-cameraman 'sees' to the heart of the forces of production which are the basis of modernity. At the same time the superimposition of his figure places him 'above' the cogs and machinery and thus he is metaphorically 'flying'. Furthermore, drawing on the archetypal sense of 'freedom' that is universally associated with flight, these cinematic means create a sense of 'liberation'.<sup>53</sup> Liberation is understood to be the result of the mastery of forces of production and nature, and comes from the ability to see and make sense of the world. Moreover, as forces of modernity they are also forces of change. Thus the artist/pilot-cameraman, like his Futurist predecessors, is the seer of modernity and for this director, modernity suggests a sense of liberation and transformation.

The pilot-cameraman, by virtue of his 'all seeing' position (as demonstrated in his numerous positions above the crowd throughout the film) is at the vanguard of the forces of modernity and of history. Near the end of the film the cameraman directs his gaze (and the camera) at a flight of three aeroplanes in a v-formation (klin) formation across the screen. This marks the beginning of a sequence which climaxes in the use of a split-screen image of the Bolshoi Theatre which cinematically implodes. Although there is a long sequence of edits between the two images, the planes can be understood to be the source of the 'explosion' and destruction of the theatre. The aeroplane as a symbol of modernity is understood in direct opposition to the institution which represents the 'Old World'. The destruction of the old order is comparable to the challenge to the natural order by man in his achievement of heavier-than-air flight.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Vlada Petric, 'Cinematic Abstraction as a Means of Conveying Ideological Messages in *The Man with the Movie Camera*', *The Red Screen*, pp. 90-113 (p. 104).

<sup>53</sup> N. E. Livanova, N. E., 'Sny o poletakh', in her *Sny i videniia v narodnoi kul'ture: Mifologicheskii, religiozno-misticheskii i kul'turno-psikhologicheskii aspekty*, ed. by Ol'ga Khristoforova and S. I. Nekliudov (Moscow: Russian State University of the Humanities (RGGU), 2002), pp. 116-42.

<sup>54</sup> James Harford, *Korolev, How One Man Masterminded the Soviet Drive to Beat America to the Moon* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997), p. 8.

The implosion on screen speaks to a tradition which links creative revolution and violence, rocketry and heavier-than-air flight-invention. Nikolai Kibal'chich the assassin of Tsar Aleksandr II, saw the importance of "“slow burning explosives” (...) for a flying machine’ and put his knowledge of explosives to use in the cause of bringing down the Russian Empire. The ‘Revolution of the Cine-Eye’ which Vertov set out in 1923 was a dynamic of motion. The destruction of the Bol’shoi Theatre on screen is emblematic of Vertov’s desire to do away with the sort of cinema which is based on the inherited tastes and techniques of the theatre. According to his credo, ‘the mechanical eye’ - the camera - should be constantly moving in its desire to know the world.

Vertov’s revolutionary ‘emancipation’ was to be from ‘human immobility’: the cameraman approaches and moves away from objects; clambers over objects; moves ‘alongside the muzzle of a running horse’; ‘tear(s) into a crowd at full tilt’; ‘flee(s) before running soldiers; rise[s] up with aeroplanes’.<sup>55</sup> ‘The machine-eye is assisted by the Cine-Eye-Pilot, who not merely directs the movements of the camera but trusts it with experiments in space and in the future.’<sup>56</sup> Vertov thus wanted the Cine-Eye pilot to lead a revolution in film.’

We have seen how the aerial view employed in reconnaissance (*deshirovanie*) abstracts information about the visible landscape and decodes this into accessible factual knowledge and maps. Vertov’s use of the aerial view is part of his ‘decoding’ of the world to discover the meaning of its facts. Responding to a call for a centralized studio of non-played film in 1926, he wanted this studio to be a ‘Factory of Facts (...) Flashes of Facts!/Masses of facts. Hurricanes of facts. And individual little facts.’<sup>57</sup> Vlada Petric cites Vertov’s article ‘From the Cine-Eye to the Radio-Eye’ (Ot kinoglaz do radioglaz), in which he says ‘Film-Eye (is) the documentary cinematic decoding of the visible world invisible to the unarmed eye’ (which is naked without a camera). This suggests that Vertov takes apart what is superficially accessible to the eye and reveals the essence of the objective world. Vertov believed that ‘material phenomena’, that is to say, the ‘visible’ facts of life are predicated first. But his creative working and

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<sup>55</sup> Vertov, ‘The Factory of Facts’, in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Taylor and Christie, pp. 150-51 (p. 51).

<sup>56</sup> Vertov, ‘The Cine-Eyes. A Revolution’, in *ibid.*, pp. 89-94 (p. 93).

<sup>57</sup> Vertov, ‘The Factory of Facts’, in *ibid.*, p. 51.

layered associations of 'visible' *facts* also stimulate an innate revolutionary dynamic which exists in the consciousness. It only requires objective stimuli to awaken a spirit of transformational dynamism and creativity by which the world can be interpreted. This duality mirrors the dynamic of language acquisition in which innate knowledge combines with layered and repeated association of external objects. The aeroplane and its flight are an important element in this poetic matrix which communicates material and cognitive transformations.

In *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* an edit of a biplane flying straight towards camera is as descriptive of the exhilaration of victory as it is of speed. From the opening of the hangar doors to the victorious flight of the aircraft towards camera, Vertov's film communicates a sense that social change is covalent with productive creative consciousness and its transformation. In this film, rather than suggesting Malevich's 'transcendence' and a 'breaking through to "revealed truth"', flight suggests the dynamic of revolutionary *sila* and the inspiration to build modernity. The cameraman both 'sees' (the cameraman guides his lens at the material facts) and 'perceives' (the pilot-director/cameraman guides the thought). The role of the pilot-artist is understood in relation to his importance to society, that is, as a leader of social transformation. And 'flight' describes the perspective of the cameraman who is at once 'above' and at the heart of the 'visible' world.

Near the end of the film, we see an audience on screen who sits watching a film in which the 'cameraman-pilot' directs his and the audience's gaze towards aeroplanes which fly off-screen. This leads to a sequence that demonstrates further 'facts' of modernity. This syntagma is centred on a theme of the dynamic of speed and includes split-screen images of trams and the tracking of motorcars and bicycles. Within this semiotic matrix aeroplanes contribute a sense of the opening up of a revolutionary space, the location of which is implied to be off-screen, and thus exists primarily only in the consciousness. The sense of the opening up of the space by a movement which breaks through the border of the film-frame links back within the film to images of the female eye opening, and the hangar door opening and thus speaks to a notion of the awakening forces of production, and simultaneously the penetration or breaking into the realm of consciousness. These forces in turn are understood as part of the forces of opposition and sudden organic change that motivate material and historical dialectics in the Marxist-Leninist world view. 'Flight' in this film is predominantly a cinematic symbol which signifies the mastery of the forces of both nature and of history. And, in

a period of recovery and of building Soviet industry, Vertov's use of flight and aviation communicates a sense of *freedom* which the mastery of these forces releases.

Dreams in which the subject flies are often interpreted as signifying an ability to surmount all odds, and they typically involve a sense of freedom experienced as movement through space.<sup>58</sup> These sensibilities are echoed in the 'imaging' of aerial movement (for example, gliding above the torrents of water) and aerial views in Vertov's film. By means of the parallelism of the waking eye and the camera, and with the positioning of the artist as the 'pilot' above the world, rather than remaining in a dream, or realising a dream, the cameraman comes to know the world by means of movement similar in freedom to that experienced in dreams of flight. For Vertov, the cameraman as a *kino-razvedchik* and the notion of the horizon he moves into from the top of his giant camera (as if from the top of a giant cock-pit) at the beginning of the film are means by which the new Soviet world is made known. The flight of the aircraft speaks to the ability of man to destroy the old world, and to move into limitless, and as yet unknown spaces (of the future) off-screen. The trajectory is given by the direction of the camera which visually echoes a machine gun, and binoculars. As the cameraman surmounts all odds in his capturing of the world on camera, Vertov makes clear his personal 'ideological horizon' and communicates a sense that the future is innate in all consciousness, and that the objects 'found' by the camera in its flight are the triggers that release the forces of creativity, industry and meaning. In poetic relation, Vertov's use of the aeroplane and flight also mirrors the dynamic relationship of a noun (a found fact) and a verb (the action). And they link notions of transformations in consciousness with transformations in industry. More broadly, transformations in consciousness are linked to transformations in the material world. In this film aviation is a semiotic plane in which several semantic spheres which signify an array of life forces intrude and extend from each other. By these means, the aircraft is a sign of the material realization of awakened consciousness in the film. For Vertov, aviation technology was a fact of modernity which spoke to transformations in consciousness and the material world.

Perhaps surprisingly, despite his different approach to cinema, Sergei Eizenshtein's use of aviation and flight semiotics shares these sub-structuring semantic spheres. In Eizenshtein's *General'naiia liniia*, the use of cinematographic flight, and elements which speak to the sphere of aviation, also communicate or stand in for a

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<sup>58</sup> Livanova, p. 118.

dynamic of thinking and transformation. A close analysis of the transformation of the main female protagonist, Marfa Lapkina (played by herself), in *General'naia liniia* from a small land-holding peasant to a member of a kolkhoz speaks to a poetic matrix based on machines which links the tractor, the aeroplane and the camera. Although it is a 'played' film, as in Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* the use of flight and aviation recalls the notion of the Futurists' pilot-creator of the Soviet world. The unique use of flight and aviation in this film sheds light on the importance to Eizenshtein of the notion of flight to his cinematographic philosophy.

### ***General'naia liniia*, The General Line**

In Eizenshtein's *General'naia liniia* a climactic transformation of the heroine on screen, from one of many oppressed peasant women at the beginning to a quiet leader of social change at the end, is communicated by means of highly symbolic aviational and sartorial coding.

Near the beginning of the film we see the female protagonist, Marfa Lapkina as herself, in a full peasant-skirt, sitting on the ground in a court-yard of a small farm-holding. Her gaze is slightly averted before she looks towards the viewer. At the end, she is an empowered figure, who drives a tractor up a lane towards the camera, and then, in close-up, dressed in a black leather jacket and flying cap, she looks through a pair of protective goggles, like those of a pilot, directly into the camera. These aviation semiotics comprise only two minutes at the end of Eizenshtein's feature-length *General'naia liniia*, but they are a visual key to several layers of discourse in the film. On one level, the film portrays Marfa as the embodiment of (proletarian) heroism fighting a battle with back-sliding kulaks in order to bring collectivization and modernity to her village.<sup>59</sup> On another level, Marfa's transformation into a tractor-pilot reveals not only a cinematographic metaphor for the opening of new worlds in the mind of the main female protagonist, but also demonstrates how a cinematographic flight is a

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<sup>59</sup> Al LaValley, 'Maintaining, Blurring and Transcending Gender Lines in Eisenstein' (hereafter: 'Gender Lines in Eisenstein'), in *Eisenstein at 100: A Reconsideration* (hereafter: *Eisenstein at 100*), ed. by Albert LaValley and Barry P. Scherr, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 52-65 (p. 54).



signifier of creative transformation and cognition.<sup>60</sup> By doing this the film illustrates the notion of flight as a metaphor for an aesthetic means of knowing the world.

In this analysis Marfa's symbolic metamorphosis into a Bolshevik is analysed according to four cinematic structures of its composition: a sequence which shows her driving a tractor which is the culmination of the symbolic description of her transformation in movement; a close-up of Marfa as a 'pilot' of a tractor; a short montage sequence communicating Marfa's memory of stages in her own development; and her final image in the arms of a peasant (as seen in a sequence of eleven seconds duration at the end of the film). There is overlapping significance in each of these structuring elements, and Marfa's memory as a pilot-figure recalls biological, socio-political, and formal levels of transformation and creativity which are shown previously in the film. Eizenshtein, and his cinematographers, Eduard Tisse, Vladimir Popov and Vladimir Nil'sen visually imbue these processes with a cathectic, magical and numinous aura which speak to two categories of metamorphosis: 'biological' and 'magical'. This, in turn, informs the highest level of metamorphosis in the film: Marfa's metaphoric transformation into a pilot figure. The four structuring elements of Marfa's imaging as a tractor-pilot (and generic Soviet winged-person) reveal significant relationships between expressive elements and modes of cinematography. One expressive pattern of signification is centred on the image/words; flight-wing-machine. Another is Eizenshtein's cinematographic aesthetics of flight, and its role in the communication of her transformation.

In a period when the battle for consciousness was being fought, Eizenshtein makes strange a Stalinist code centred on aviation, transforming it into a personal cinematographic language.<sup>61</sup> Flight informs Eizenshtein's theory of ecstasy, and in turn,

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<sup>60</sup> I am indebted to Julian Graffy and Daniel Levitsky for bringing this film to my attention with regard to pilot imagery, and also for the formulation; 'tractor-pilot'.

<sup>61</sup> The battle for the supremacy of collective consciousness is understood, but also in his prologue Jerome S. Bruner uses this phrase to contextualize Vygotskii's problems with ideologies. His theories were deemed an unorthodox explanation of the dynamics of the acquisition of consciousness. Jerome S. Bruner, 'Prologue to the English Edition', in *The Collected Works of L. S. Vygotsky* (hereafter: *The Collected Works*), 2 vols, ed. by Robert W. Rieber and Aaron S. Carton, trans. by Norris Minick, (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), I (*Problems of General Psychology*), pp. 1-16 (p. 2).

this corresponds to Lev Semenovich Vygotskii's (1896-1934) dynamic process of speech and understanding, and also to Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) relation of will and representation. In his early adult life Eizenshtein read both Leonardo Da Vinci and Schopenhauer.<sup>62</sup> And although throughout his life the former's influence was readily acknowledged, he seldom refers to Schopenhauer, and in his book *Non-indifferent Nature* (Neravnodushnaia priroda) he denies the philosopher's influence on him. Nevertheless, there is a clear correspondence between Eizenshtein's imaging of myriad forms of transformation which communicate a unified originating dynamic. (Eizenshtein's denial of Schopenhauer's influence may well have been due to the fact that the philosopher's anti-historical materialistic dialectical philosophy does not agree with Marxist-Leninist historical dialectics.)

The final intertitle underlines the film's socio-political message, demonstrating how 'borders are broken down between the cities and the country' (tak stiraetsia grani mezhdu gorodami i derevnei). Covalently, Eizenshtein's image system leads to an ideational flight which actualizes a cognitive breaking down of barriers between subject and object. Flight for Eizenshtein is the movement between the barriers of the film-frames, signifying both upwardsy evolving, and leaps in, creative transformation. His treatment of Marfa's metamorphoses, in conjunction with his theoretical works, suggests that flight for Eizenshtein signifies not only a dialectical path to a communist future, but also creative chaos. Visually this chaos is compared by the director with flights described by Antoine de St Exupéry (1900-1944). Marfa's image as a tractor-pilot is a sign for which the object is flight. Eizenshtein's theoretical flight recalls Schopenhauer's process of a sublime 'aesthetic way of knowing'.<sup>63</sup> It is a sign that

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<sup>62</sup> Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein: A Biography* (London: Bodley Head, 1952), p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> Eizenshtein's communication of the sublime as a religious, dialectical and aesthetic dynamic is widely discussed. Rosamund Bartlett; 'The Circle and the Line: Eisenstein, Florenskii and Russian Orthodoxy', in *Eisenstein at 100*, pp. 65-77 (p. 62). See also Katerina Clark, 'Eisenstein's Two Projects for a Film about Moscow', *The Modern Language Review*, 1, 101 (2006), 184-200 (p. 196). See also Vance Kepley Jr., 'The Evolution of Eisenstein's "Old and New"' (hereafter: 'Eisenstein's *Old and New*'), *Cinema Journal*, 14, 1 (1974), 34-50. Eisenstein also questions the comparison saying who needs a Spanish vessel (Holy Grail) when you have a separator. See 'Seperator i Chasha Graalia', in Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 6 vols, ed. by S. I. Iutkevich (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1964-1971), III (1964), pp.

represents ‘that mysterious process in which a phenomenon of nature becomes a fact of art’.<sup>64</sup> Rather than serving the rhetoric of a general (ideological) line on the transformation of the countryside, Marfa’s transformation into a tractor-pilot serves Eizenshtein’s polemics on ways of knowing the world and on the contemporary *general line* in cinema.

### **Walking to Flying; Ideological Transformation**

When we see Marfa drive forwards up a country lane on a tractor near the end of the film, it is a total transmutation of her identity in terms of movement. Her introductory portrait shows her seated as if rooted to the ground, and her figure echoes the choreography of other peasant women who are filmed at the beginning, almost as monuments, passively watching their homesteads being divided by their men-folk. For Eizenshtein this backward ‘lot’ of women’s fate is coeval to the ‘passive resistance’ of strikers who are locked into the ‘darkest years of reaction’ in *Stachka* (Strike, Goskino, 1924, released 1925).<sup>65</sup> Eizenshtein precedes his introduction of Marfa with an intertitle-list of her farming equipment and animals which identifies her with lack of ownership rather than wealth. From the initial sedentary image of Marfa, the camera follows her as she walks slowly out of her gates in order to go and ask a local kulak for the use of a horse with which to plough the fields. She walks quietly and barefoot through his courtyard, and approaches his bloated body while he lies asleep on a bed made up near his animals. Then she walks behind a plough, until her cow collapses with the effort of breaking the stubborn earth. In later sequences we see her walk in a straight line angled towards camera as she moves to prevent members of the collective from sharing out the first profits of the cooperative between themselves. We see her walk through fields of grain wishing that the collective had a tractor (‘mashinu by’).

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72-91 (p. 73). Schopenhauer writes on the beautiful and sublime as an experiential knowledge of, and ‘second aspect’ of, the will and representation. ‘The World as Representation: Second Aspect; Third Book’ (hereafter: ‘The World as Representation’, in Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. by E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols, (New York: Dover Publications Ltd., 1969), I, pp. 194-212 (p. 195).

<sup>64</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, ‘The Psychology of Art’, in *The Psychology of Composition*, ed. and trans. by Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 1-15 (p. 2).

<sup>65</sup> Eisenstein and Aleksandrov, ‘An Experiment Intelligible to the Millions’, in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Christie and Taylor, pp. 254 -57 (p. 255).

Her walk is followed again when she is asked to represent the collective's appeal to the Agricultural Credit Bureau. She goes to the city to ask for a tractor, travelling in a cart, and then a train, and then she approaches the manager of the building site (for whom she has worked) on foot; together they go to the Bureau to ask for the release of a tractor for the collective. Her felt boots are tracked as she and the manager walk purposefully along the parquet floors of luxurious bureaucratic offices. After she and the manager are successful in getting the tractor permit, there is a superimposition of an animated tractor arriving in the cooperative. The superimposition creates a simulacra of flight. It is a moment which liminally fuses a sense of Marfa's dream and its realization. Later, we see Marfa calmly move down a hill towards the (now) real, but marooned, tractor in order to help a male peasant 'tractor-pilot' as he fixes it. Finally, at the end of the film, she is at the controls of a collectively owned tractor. Her climactic drive as a tractor-pilot is a transformation in movement of Marfa's stasis at her introduction, and of her barefoot and felt-booted walking, into the active dynamic of the modernizing machine. This sensibility links to the idea of the heart as a symbolic aeroplane's 'plamennyi motor' of Pavel German and Iulii Khait's song; 'Ever Higher, Avio-March' (Vse vyshe, Avio-marsh) (1923).<sup>66</sup> As she moves forwards up the lane the transformation of her movement is a psychological sign for personal exhilaration, and driving forwards along 'Put' oktiabria' (the name of the kolkhoz) seemingly at one with the machine, she also becomes the embodiment of revolutionary dynamic itself.

This ambivalently relates to socialized aviation semiotics of German and Khait's song. It proclaims that reason has given Soviet man the means of making dreams come true and this is his destiny. The emblem of this identity is that 'Reason has given us steel-winged-arms,/And instead of a heart an engine's fire'. The transformation of the individual, Marfa, into an ideological signifier pivots on the metaphor of her having gained symbolic wings. These aviation semiotics represent a psychological state of magnificence and potential, but the absence of human-ness from this identity is a crucial ambivalence at the centre of her heroization.

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<sup>66</sup> The date of this song's first publication varies but centres on the establishment of the first air fleet in the early 1920s. For details see note fifty-four in the 'Introduction' to this thesis.

### **Imaginary Flights and Realising Dreams**

Earlier in *General'naia liniia* Marfa dreams of a sire for the creation of the collective's cattle-farm, and in her vision, the sire develops from a calf to a grown animal which rises above a field at the same time. She also imagines a tractor hovering outside the collective shed after she has fought for one to be released to the collective but before it actually arrives. The visions are experienced as a kind of flight, and link forwards to an intertitle question; 'You think this is a dream?' ('vy dumaete, chto eto son?'), which is put to Marfa (and the audience) at the sight of a modern working sovkhov when she goes to collect the calf. The tractor she drives is the realization of Marfa's personal and ideological dream, and in this way the personal and social become fused. This imaging seemingly looks forwards to Anatolii Lunacharskii's sense that 'the Socialist Realist (...) does not accept reality as it (...) is', and that 'a Communist who cannot dream is a bad Communist.'<sup>67</sup> Even while subliminally, Eizenshtein may ambivalently suggest a question concerning the degree of reality of the dream-like, modern sovkhov which is also a stage-set.<sup>68</sup> Marfa's drive in a tractor, and the imaging of her as a tractor-pilot, communicate a dynamic of personal transformation and, simultaneously, the transformation of Marfa into a symbolic signifier of an ideal Bolshevik.

### **Gaining Wings: Metaphor and Release from Oppression**

Grigorii Aleksandrov wrote the first script plan and co-wrote *General'naia liniia*. He also co-wrote the later version which was released as *Staroe i novoe*.<sup>69</sup> In Eizenshtein and Aleksandrov's explanation of *General'naia liniia*,<sup>70</sup> they cite the poet A. N. Maikov's poem 'Haymaking' (Senokos) (1856); 'Rows of women raking/Women turning the hay' (Baby s grabliami riadami/Khodiat, seno shevelia), together with an 'inexact' quotation from a poem by N. A. Nekrasov to form part of their explanation of

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<sup>67</sup> Anatolii Lunacharskii, 'Synopsis of a Report on the Tasks of Dramaturgy', in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Christie and Taylor, p. 327.

<sup>68</sup> James Goodwin, *Eisenstein, Cinema, History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>69</sup> The first scenario by Aleksandrov with notes by Eizenshtein is dated the 23 May 1926 and called *General'naia liniia*. N. I Kleiman, L. K. Kozlov, V. P. Korshunova, Iu. A. Krasovskii, E. S. Levin, and M. S. Shaternikova, "'General'naia liniia" (Kommentarii)', Sergei Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, 6 vols, ed. by S. I. Iutkevich, V (1974), pp. 530-33 (p. 531).

<sup>70</sup> Eisenstein and Alexandrov 'Eksperiment, poniatnyi millionam', p. 255.

the positive impact (especially on women) of the introduction of machine harvesters. He writes: ‘There are no women. No songs. The light arms of the spreader toss the hay a long way./In the depths of history. Where the ‘fate of Russia, a woman’s lot has its place.’<sup>71</sup> Commenting on the film, Eizenshtein refers to combine-harvesters’ blades as ‘wings’;<sup>72</sup> thus, for Eizenshtein, the introduction of the tractor and the combine harvester were the means of liberating the women of Russia from the rural fate of long days of back-breaking labour which had been their lot through history.<sup>73</sup> Eizenshtein’s notional combine-harvester-wings suggest modernity flying across time to the rescue of Russia’s agricultural women, with Marfa at the agricultural helm.

During the harvesting sequence near the film’s end, we see these *blade-wings* in close-up. Eizenshtein also edits to a close-up of the wing of a ‘grasshopper’.<sup>74</sup> A grasshopper and a locust are the same genus, Orthoptera, and this association links to the metonymic battle between retrograde forces in nature and society described in the 1926 script plan in which ‘Locusts retreat from crop-dusting attacks’.<sup>75</sup> Crop-dusting was carried out by the civil air services. Therefore this reference to ‘crop-dusting attacks’ creates a mental picture involving aircraft. The notion of insect flight also links to Eizenshtein’s interest in the development of flies from larvae and this ascension through stages of development is part of the expressive sphere centred on wings in the film, to which Marfa’s development is also linked. The notion of aircraft wings, the image of wings of the grass-hopper, and the metaphoric wing of the combine harvester manifest a dynamic of cognition centred on the word/image: wing.<sup>76</sup> This dynamic is not purely associative. Eizenshtein describes a cognitive process which echoes Vygotskii’s understanding of ‘inner-speech’ which the linguist worked on in the 1920s

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Eisenstein, ‘The Filmic Fourth Dimension’, *Film Form, Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (London: Dobson, 1949), pp. 64-71, p. 68.

<sup>75</sup> This line is from Kepley’s citation of the script in; ‘The Evolution of Eisenstein’s “*Old and New*”’, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Eisenstein, ‘The Psychology of Art’, p. 1.

and which was published in the 1930s.<sup>77</sup> Inner speech is a whole system of layered social and personal contextualization and relation which is at the centre of meaning of each word. Inner speech also describes the extending interconnectivity between any of the functions and systems of meaning contained in the word (at each point of usage) that enables further meaning far beyond the word's denotative function.<sup>78</sup> Eisenstein writes: 'Give Coleridge one vivid word from an old narrative; let him mix it with two in his thought; and then (translating terms of music into terms of words) 'out of three sounds he (will) frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.'<sup>79</sup>

### **Expressive Matrix of Machines**

Eizenshtein's expressive matrix of machines links tractors, a cream separator, machinery used in pig slaughter,<sup>80</sup> machines for the incubation of chicks, milking machines, seed cleaners, combine harvesters, type-writers, a rocket launcher, and, as one French critic who saw the film in 1929 says, also the camera.<sup>81</sup> All the machines in *General'naiia liniia* lead to generation, reproduction or transformation and all are linked to a visceral communication of processes in nature and industry. Eizenshtein says that this 'entourage of machines' surround his 'brilliant leading actor' - the sun.<sup>82</sup> The camera transforms movement and light, and the 'phenomena' of nature, into

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<sup>77</sup> Lev Vygotskii, 'Myshlenie i rech', *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by A. V. Zaporozhets, 6 vols (Moscow: Pedagogika, 1982-1984), II (*Problemy obshchei psikhologii*) (1982), pp. 336-62, and 'Vospriatie i ego razvitie v detskom vozraste', in *ibid.*, pp. 363-81. See also Vygotskii 'Mysl' i slovo', in *ibid.*, I (*Voprosy teorii i istorii psikhologii*) (1982), pp. 279-342. See also A. R. Luria, 'Afterword to the Russian Edition', in *Collected Works*, pp. 359-73.

<sup>78</sup> Vygotskii, 'Vospriatie i ego razvitie', p. 363.

<sup>79</sup> Eisenstein, 'Word and Image', *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. by Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 13 -59.

<sup>80</sup> Anne Nesbet, *Savage Junctures: Sergei Eisenstein and the Shape of Thinking* (hereafter: *Savage Junctures*) (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), pp. 94-115 (p. 108).

<sup>81</sup> Eizenshtein quotes an article from a Belgian catholic magazine, *La Nouvelle equipe*, 1 (1930), in which the milk separator sequence is described in terms of exultation of nature and machines (including the camera), the season and the "atmosphere itself". See also: Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Milk Separator and the Holy Grail', in 'Pathos', in Eisenstein, *Non-indifferent Nature*, trans. by Herbert Marshall, pp. 38-53 (pp. 39-40).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

cinematographic meaning. By virtue of the suggestion of a pilot, and also, by virtue of its place within the film's expressive matrix of machines, the camera, as much as the tractor, is suggested as a metaphoric aeroplane. Marfa's drive forwards in a tractor as a pilot is a dynamic sign for flight. Its signification extends outward from one system to other systems of meaning involving ideological and communicative notions of freedom. Her image as a tractor pilot communicates that she has achieved a revolutionary freedom from kulak oppression and a poverty of farming methods, and also from superstition. Her drive up Put' Oktiabria communicates a sense of freedom in terms of the self-expansion which is metaphorized in the notion of 'gaining wings'. Furthermore, on the level of form, the idea of flight stands in for the dynamic of creating and communicating meaning.

In Eizenshtein's *Stachka*, Vertov's *Chelovek s kinoapparatom* and Room's *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* the forces of modernity (of production, technology and construction) are identified with a male-active dynamic. In *General'naiia liniia*, the forces of modernity are identified with Marfa, a dairy worker. Marfa's symbolic transformation is not born of a freedom found in the pleasure of erotic individual relations or dreams of romance. Nor is it born of an obvious maternal impulse, which is similar to that which predicates Liuda's transformation and release from domestic oppression in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*. In keeping with Kollontai's sense of the Soviet 'New Woman's' socialized values, Marfa's transformation is born of a desire for change in her community. Marfa's drive forwards as a pilot-figure in the collectively owned tractor signifies the emancipation of Soviet New Woman who is described by Kollontai as 'a strong, free citizen, not inferior to man in anything', and 'a human being, the builder of a new life'.<sup>83</sup> If Vertov's cameraman in his predominantly urban environment is a pilot-figure at the heart of industry, Marfa is a pilot figure spear-heading collectivization. Each metaphorically pilots the country towards the future.

#### **Marfa's Close-up as a 'Tractor-pilot': Ambivalent Androgyny**

Throughout the film Eizenshtein's cinematographers capture Marfa in details such as her peasant blouse and apron in the dairy, and her felt overcoat, and in numerous close-ups which capture nuances of her emotional responses and thoughts. In the penultimate sequence of the film these personal details are replaced by an image of two huge oval

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<sup>83</sup> Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', pp. 486-87.



lenses, a smooth leather helmet, and a dense black leather jacket. Against Marfa's pale skin, her darkened lips and goggles become abstract shapes in a spatial relation. This image of her as a pilot in close-up is both de-humanized and eroticized. At first, this androgynous figure is not recognized by the male peasant when he leaves his cart to greet the seemingly unknown driver of the tractor.<sup>84</sup> Not only on the level of plot is Marfa not recognized, but in formal terms, as a tractor-pilot, Marfa is made strange. When Marfa's tractor comes to a stop opposite a hay-rick which is carrying a peasant and a child who are known to her, the cut to the close-up of Marfa's face in goggles (and leather-pilot cap) presents an image which, on a surface level, draws on socialized representations of the pilot: and she has become a socialized symbol.

One poster of 1923 shows a male pilot's head, the eyes of which are transmogrified by enormous goggles, and his pointed finger emphasizes the printed ideological message: 'What have you done for the Air Fleet?' (Chto ty sdelał dlia vozdushnogo flota?)<sup>85</sup> The poster relates to Trotskii's call for support for the creation of an air fleet with the establishment of a public lottery, and the founding of The Friend's of the Air Fleet in 1923. The poster's slogan incorporates a Soviet collocation which is incorporated in Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna*. The main protagonist, the newly graduated teacher, Kuz'mina (Elena Kuz'mina) is addressed by a public loudspeaker which tells her that before each person the questions stand: 'What have you done? What are you doing? What will you do?' (for the country). Lilya Kaganovsky demonstrates that these loudspeakers are identified with slogans, commands, and exhortations by the state. She further shows how these means of ideological communication create a public conscience within each individual, and thereby create a socialized person out of a 'mere individual'.<sup>86</sup> This can also be said of this poster. The use of a visual code of aviation and flight manifested in Aviation-Day parade films, and in poster art of the 1930s represented the transformation of women (and men) into

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<sup>84</sup> This is also noted by LaValley in his study of gender in Eisenstein's film. See 'Gender Lines in Eisenstein', p. 54.

<sup>85</sup> Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, figure 20, p. 139.

<sup>86</sup> Lilya Kaganovsky, 'The Voice of Technology and the End of Silent Film: Grigorii Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg's *Alone*', *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 1.3 (2007), 265-81 (pp. 269-70).

symbolically perfected, 'winged' Soviet people.<sup>87</sup> By the late 1920s the pilot figure had already gained socialized significance to the degree that the mere presence of Marfa's leather helmet and goggles suggested a code of positive Soviet construction and defence.

In her comparison of the political and literary theories of Hannah Arendt and Viktor Shklovskii, Svetlana Boym explains Arendt's understanding of freedom as being a transformation of the ordinary into a consciousness of the 'infinitely improbable'. And Shklovskii thought of his theory of *estrangement* as 'a cornerstone of artistic unpredictability and freedom that reflected the transformations of the modern world'.<sup>88</sup> But Marfa's image is not exhortative. Rather than repeat a visual trope centred on aviation and signifying a perfected level of transformation into a Soviet New Woman, Eizenshtein has made a productive image in the linguistic sense of an 'open-ended', non-repeatable use of 'discrete' units of language. This 'open-ended', unpredictable creativity is comparable to Shklovskii's 'ostranenie' which forces the viewer to look at the raw material of life anew. It is also differentiated from the use of signals which alter only in the degree of shifts in the intensity by which the referent (subject of communication) is signalled or communicated.<sup>89</sup> Eizenshtein image not only transforms a common signification of aviation semiotics, it ambivalently strips Marfa of her humanity and thus poses a question concerning the effects of modernity. In this he makes strange the ideological signifiers of the modern world, and Marfa's transformation demonstrates Eizenshtein's cinematography as a site of freedom.

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<sup>87</sup> See Bri-Bejn, *Zhenshina Proletarka, Ovladevai aviatsionnoi tekhnikai* (Proletarian Woman, Master the Art of Aeronautical Engineering!) (1931) <<http://eng.plakaty.ru/posters?cid=1&sort=year&part=1931&id=1199>>, [accessed 5 December 2009]; and G. G. Klutsis, *Molodezh na samolety* (Youth to the Planes!) (1934) <<http://eng.plakaty.ru/posters?cid=1&sort=year&part=1934&id=1814>>, [accessed December 2009].

<sup>88</sup> Svetlana Boym, 'Poetics and Politics of Estrangement, Viktor Shklovsky and Hannah Arendt', *Poetics Today*, 26, 4 (2005), 581-611 (p. 582).

<sup>89</sup> I am drawing on Iurii Lotman, *Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki* (Tallin: Isdatel'stvo Eesti Raamat, 1973), pp. 5-6; Susan Langer, *Feeling and Form*, p. 26, and Noam Chomsky, 'Cartesian Linguistics' in *Innate Ideas*, ed. by Stephen P. Stich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 89-103 (pp. 98-99).

Addressing the psychologist A. R. Luria's collaborative request for a lecture series on 'The Psychology of the Creative Process', Eizenshtein begins by saying that 'the most interesting problem in the psychology of art (...) is neither theme nor content, but how this theme or content becomes, from an object of reality – an object of art. (...) What constitutes the process of this transformation from a fact of life into a fact of art?'<sup>90</sup> It is worth remembering that Eizenshtein and Aleksandrov originally conceived of a fictional peasant character; Evdokiia Ukrainitseva, but Eizenshtein discovered Marfa Lapkina when researching film locations.<sup>91</sup> He not only chose her for her ability to behave naturally in front of the camera, but also decided to use Marfa's full name for the character. When Marfa is the sole person to raise her hand to support the establishment of a milk cooperative she is visibly pregnant.<sup>92</sup> The artistic transformation of a peasant, who was discovered by Eizenshtein when she was working on a collective farm into a tractor-pilot is an aesthetic transformation of the real. In terms of Shklovksii's theory of estrangement, Marfa's image as a tractor-pilot transforms a familiar sense of a peasant-woman and also of agit-aviation-semiotics and is thus an 'experiment in thinking, acting and judging', and her image speaks of freedom of 'imaginative recovery'.<sup>93</sup> Thus on an ideological level her story and image communicates freedom from kulak oppression, and formally it demonstrates the freedom of language as a unique moment in film. In this freedom Eizenshtein communicates subtle and profound philosophical questions about his world. Marfa embodies qualities of Kollontai's ideal who 'greedily drink(s) in knowledge.'<sup>94</sup> Having achieved her goal, the drive forwards in the tractor ambivalently communicates a feminine active dynamic. It conveys the emotional energy of her victorious experience, but paradoxically, she has now been transformed into what LeValley describes as an

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<sup>90</sup> Eizenshtein, 'The Psychology of Art', in Eizenshtein, *The Psychology of Composition*, ed. by Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 1-15 (p. 1), and Jay Leyda, 'Introductory Note', Eizenshtein, *The Psychology of Composition*, no page number given.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, note 100, p. 590.

<sup>92</sup> Marie Seton reports that Evdokiia became pregnant when they were filming. *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, p. 114.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 582.

<sup>94</sup> Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', pp. 486-87

androgynous figure which poses questions about the social changes which the film promotes.<sup>95</sup>

### **Aerial Views and Close-ups**

The goggles fill the screen, and Marfa's transformation reflects a changing means of perception which the technologies of the camera and the aeroplane introduced. In 1925 Shklovskii's response to the aerial view was that it made the earth uniform, and geometrical, and that it absented human relation from what was viewed.<sup>96</sup> By means of an opposite optical angle to that of the aerial view, Marfa's extreme close-up in pilot hat and goggles nevertheless has a similar distancing and alienating effect. This optical view of Marfa not only asks the viewer to look at Marfa anew, it poses questions about the alienating affect concerning a new mode of production. As the first collective is established Marfa is a simple, pregnant, young peasant woman. The replacement of her recognizable features with pilot-gear poses a question concerning the nature of her transformation from a palpable human figure to a symbol of perfected-Soviet being devoid of readable gender qualities. Marfa's story promotes the collective principle, but her image as a tractor-pilot is a precursor to images of female pilots and Heroes of the Soviet Union which reflect problems of gender identity in post-Stalinist and post-Soviet film. Notably; Nadezhda Petrukhina, in Larisa Shepit'ko's *Kryl'ia* (Wings) (Mosfil'm, 1966) and Evdokia/Evdokim Kuznetsov in Sergei Livnev's *Serp i molot* (Hammer and Sickle) (MMM Studiia, Lenfil'm, Komitet po kinematografii et al, 1994).

### **Flight of Memory; Absence of an Aeroplane<sup>97</sup>**

In *General'naia liniia*, after the male peasant recognizes Marfa, there is a sequence of edits which stands in for the flight to which the suggestion of a pilot logically leads.

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<sup>95</sup> LaValley, Al and Barry P. Scherr, 'Introduction: Rethinking Eisenstein', *Eisenstein at 100*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>96</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, "'Velikii perelet" i kinematografiia', in *Za 60 let: Raboty o kino*, ed. by E. Levin, (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), pp. 76-77 (p. 76). Emma Widdis, drawing on Shklovskii, discusses the contrast between the experiential perception of space from the train, and the remote, possessing and consumer orientation towards the world from the aeroplane. *Visions of a New Land*, p. 121.

<sup>97</sup> I also presented these ideas in 'Unique Moments in Aviation, Flight and Transformation in Early Stalinist Film', PhD Research Group Seminar Series, SSEES, UCL, 3 June 2010.

The seven edits show Marfa as she remembers herself during the course of her filmic life. All the frames are close-ups which are taken from key episodes in her life (as portrayed on screen). This sequence of memories shows her personal transformation into the heroic figure of the tractor-pilot, and it is metaphoric flight in her mind. The first frame of this sequence is a close-up of Marfa as she is introduced in the film; the second is a medium angle of Marfa as we see her struggling under the heat of the sun behind a hand-held plough; the third is an image of her emphatically gesturing as she cries '[tak] zhit' nel'zia'; the fourth is an image of Marfa as she rapturously smiles with the success of the milk separator; the fifth is her tear-streaked face as she looks up from the floor of the artel' when she tries to stop other members from taking its first earnings; the sixth is a composite of two edited portraits of Marfa as she asks, and learns about the death of the bull, Fomka (which had been bought to seed a cattle herd); the seventh is her memory of the peasant who now stands opposite her. The seven close-ups communicate Marfa's memory of each stage of her personal development into a tractor-pilot and the movement between the frames is a metaphoric flight.

### **Eizenshtein's Aesthetic of Flight**

Each of Marfa's memories link to episodes in which Tisse and his camera assistants, Popov and Nil'sen, capture processes of transformation in nature and in agricultural and industry by means of spiralling fragments of moving light, and also by means of a lack of perspective or horizon. Eizenshtein describes how, in a famous sequence depicting the introduction and first use of a cream separator, the film-makers achieved the desired effect by placing shards of mirror on spinning apparatus for the filming of the milk-separating process.<sup>98</sup> In this sequence we see images of swirling light on milk being spun in the cream separator; this echoes the play of light in puddles at the beginning of the film when the camera is positioned as if 'between two worlds' and we see reflections of sky and clouds churned up by a horse's hooves and a plough-blade. Images of shimmering flowing liquid create a pre-echo of a perfected moment of the bull and of a cow's mating later in the film. Their union is communicated by means of quivering, wet, light-reflecting movement of the bull's backside, sprays of water, and whorls of liquid in close-up. In his book *Film Sense*, Eizenshtein defines the Jazz Age

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<sup>98</sup> Sergei Eizenshtein, 'Seperator i Chasha Graalia', p. 84.

as one without perspective, and in which movement through different planes can be compared to a flight. He says that:

the headlights on cars, highlights on receding rails, shimmering reflections on the wet pavements – all mirrored in puddles that destroy our sense of direction (which is top? which is bottom?), supplementing the mirage above with a mirage beneath us, and rushing between these two worlds of electric signs, we see them no longer on a single plane, but as a system of theatre wings, suspended in the air, through which the night flood of traffic lights is streaming.<sup>99</sup>

He further suggests an idea of flight when he likens this ‘mirage’ to a description of another starry sky in Gogol’s story ‘Strashnaia mest’ (*A Terrible Revenge*). In this story, according to Eizenshtein, characters imagine that ‘the world floated down the Dneiper River between the real starry sky above them and its reflections in the water’.<sup>100</sup>

Both the placing of the camera in order to capture the reflection of the sky in the pools of water, as if between heaven and earth, and the horizon-less close-ups which visually immerse the viewer in spirals of shimmering or flickering light, pre-echo Eizenshtein’s theories in *Film Sense*, and speak to the importance of a sense of flight to his conception. The fluid movement and light within the frames serve for the communication of processes of inception and transformation, and they invite an experience in which the barriers between subjective and objective are broken down. These cinematographic approaches to the filming of processes of transformation by means of ‘splinters of light’ and horizon-less spinning illustrate Eizenshtein’s description of flight as aesthetic experience.

### **Flight as Will and Representation**

For Schopenhauer the artistic experience is that dynamic process when the viewing subject’s boundaries are dissolved in contemplation of the object to the extent that it is experienced as essence. The individual is freed from laws of causality, time and space, and, by means of this experiential, ‘emotional’, unification, the object of contemplation is made known. Eizenshtein’s horizon-less spiralling movement connotes both a liminal

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<sup>99</sup> Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. by Jay Leyda (London: Faber and Faber, 1943), p. 83.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

state of chaotic creativity and also freedom - the breaking down of barriers between object and subject. This sense of flight communicates an aesthetic union between the viewer and the viewed.<sup>101</sup> In Schopenhauer's idea of the 'world as representation of a unified non-differentiated will', the will is a dynamic which motivates blood to flow as much as it governs the attractions of opposites. It is that essence which forces life to manifest itself in material form (as phenomena). Marfa's transformation into a pilot figure is a key to perceiving the underlying unified creative energy which motivates all the transformative processes in the film. These processes are highlighted and specifically linked by means of Marfa's memory sequence which stands in for an actual flight.

Marfa's transformation into a pilot figure is the ultimate of the myriad processes of transformation which are shown on screen. The plenitude of visual echoes between them correspond to Schopenhauer's explanation of the relationship of myriad phenomena and the underlying force they represent. As he writes:

We shall then see how one and the same Idea reveals itself in so many phenomena, and presets its nature to knowing individuals only piecemeal, one side after another. (...) We intend to consider this by way of example on the smallest scale, and then on the largest. When clouds move, the figures they form are not essential, but indifferent to them. But that as elastic vapour they are pressed together, driven off, spread out, and torn apart by the force of the wind, this is their nature, this is the essence of the forces that are objectified in them, this is the Idea.

Bryan Magee explains Schopenhauer's principle:

Everything that appears to our organs of sense and intellect as matter in motion is, in its unknowable inner nature, this unconscious force – they and it are the same thing manifested in different ways, just as my physical movement and my act of will are the same thing manifested in different ways. The whole universe is the objectification of this force. It constitutes gravity, which is everywhere, and is everywhere the same; it forms the

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<sup>101</sup> David Bordwell explains Eisenstein's sense of fusion of subject and object in his: *The Cinema of Eisenstein* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 194.

chicken in the egg. And the child in the womb; it pushes up the plants; it sweeps along the winds and the tides and the currents; it crashes through the cataracts; it is the go in the running animal, the pull of magnetism, the attraction of electricity, the energy of thought. All these are phenomenal manifestations of a single underlying drive which ultimately is undifferentiated.<sup>102</sup>

For Schopenhauer ‘the highest grade of the will’s objectivity’ is its manifestation as Idea. Rather than the film as an equivalent Platonic shadow on a wall, the non-presentation of an aeroplane, and Eizenshtein’s stylized and poetic treatment of Marfa’s transformation into a tractor-pilot, focuses attention on his essential idea of a creating dynamic.

In his film, Eizenshtein conveys a unitary essential energy by means of the visual parallelisms between varying processes, from light spinning in vats of milk to the reflecting light of passing clouds, and the spiralling movement of tractors circling in a field, which are shown on screen. These multiple significations reflect an invisible process animating all levels of life, including the generation of a memory of transformation in the mind of Marfa, the tractor-pilot. This process corresponds to Schopenhauer’s sense of will, and by these means the film also demonstrates itself as ‘will as representation’. Moreover, according to one translator, the use of Schopenhauer’s ‘Vorstellung’ is important, for it occurs in the German title (of the *World as Will and Representation*). Its primary meaning is that of ‘placing before’, and it is used by Schopenhauer to express what he himself describes as an ‘exceedingly complicated physiological process in the brain of an animal, the result of which is the consciousness of a picture there.’<sup>103</sup> Eizenshtein’s cinematography demonstrates Schopenhauer’s sense that the highest objectivity of the creative dynamic which propels life is the Idea. And this dynamic corresponds with what Eizenshtein calls his principle of ecstasy involving a creative dynamic which he later theoretically identifies as flight.

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<sup>102</sup> Bryan Magee, ‘Will as Representation’, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, New York, Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 139; Schopenhauer, ‘The World as Representation’, p. 169, and pp. 170-73.

<sup>103</sup> E. F. J. Payne, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, pp. v-xi (p. ix).



In Russian, the translation of *The World as Will and Representation* is *Mir kak volia i predstavlenie*. Citing Arthur Schlegel, Noam Chomsky says that; ‘So characteristic of language is this freedom from external control or practical end, for Schlegel that he elsewhere proposes that “anything by means of which the inner manifests itself outwardly is rightly called language”’. From this conception of language it is only a short step to the association of creative language use to true artistic creativity.’<sup>104</sup> The sequence of Marfa’s memory is a metaphoric flight which represents ascension in her development towards becoming a pilot-figure. Eizenshtein’s flight across frames and the communication of development within Marfa’s consciousness mirrors this sense of will and representation, and also a dynamic of ascension in language by which what is internal finds external form.

#### **Flight: De-limitation of Means. Unity, Explosions and Flight**

Eizenshtein’s ‘delimitation’ [razmezhevanie] of means of expression is linked to his notion of breaking through to a fourth dimension.<sup>105</sup> Speaking of the evolution of a creative work into a great work of art, Eizenshtein says that ‘in this sequential system of expressive means there was a similar displacement (a ‘leap’) from one dimension to another – from the dimension of cinema-acting (‘theatrical’ cinematography) to the dimension of “pure” cinematography, of independent, unique, and unmatched means and possibilities.’<sup>106</sup> These moments of transition are variously likened to a ‘jump’ (skachok), an explosion (vzryv) and a flight (vzlet) in his examples of ecstasy described in *Non-indifferent Nature* and in his description of *General'naia liniia*.<sup>107</sup> And, emphasising the importance of flight in this conceptualization it is interesting to note that the verb to fly (letat') is etymologically linked in Slavic culture (through Lettish language) to jump (prygat').<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics and Chapter in the History of Rational Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 68.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Seperator i Chasha Graalia’, p. 83.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid..

<sup>107</sup> See *ibid.*. See also ‘Piranesi ili tekuchest' forma’, in Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedennye*, 6 vols, ed. by S. I. Iutkevich, III, pp. 156-92 (pp. 162 and 165-66).

<sup>108</sup> *Etimologicheskii slovar' Fasmera*, <<http://vasmer.narod.ru/p361.htm>>, [accessed 5 September 2011].

One moment of such a shift in cognition which is likened to flight, leaps and explosions by Eizenshtein, is communicated when Marfa looks at a poster on the wall above the Director of the Agricultural Credit Bureau. It shows what appears to be an open flower-head. Its petals are constituted of wing-blades of combine harvesters which form a circle. The daisy-like image echoes close-ups of circular flower-heads in fields from earlier in the film. It recalls the extra-filmic aeroplane propellers which symbolise the dynamic heart of Soviet New Man found in the poetry of Maiakovskii. As Marfa contemplates the poster a visual premonition of modernity seems fused with familiar rural details from her life. These frames lead to the image of a rocket launcher firing just at the moment when the head of the Agricultural Credit Bureau's consternation is transformed, and he perceives the justice in releasing a tractor to Marfa's kolkhoz. He is reminded of the truth of the 'general line'. Eizenshtein counters an implicit banalization of what Lenin stood for at the time of the film's making with the Chairman's moment of revelation. Eizenshtein discreetly makes this clear by means of close-ups of a Lenin statuery-ink-stand, which, together with a close-up of a bureaucrat's hand and pen, are used to sign a refusal of a release of a tractor until after the harvest is already completed. There is also a huge statue of Lenin which fills a corner of the room behind Marfa and the construction manager of the collective as they stand opposite the Head of the Agricultural Credit Bureau who is seated at his desk. Topographically this suggests Marfa and Lenin stand for the same truth. Both Marfa's perception of the daisy head/propeller/combine-harvester poster, and the head of the Agricultural Credit Bureau's transitional moment of understanding the ideological 'general line' are marked by the rocket launcher's flames which arc across the screen.

These moments of perception are covalent to a psychological breaking through to a new dimension. That is to say, they demonstrate a *vyrz*, a *skachok*, and a *vzlet* into new levels of understanding. Eizenshtein communicates moments of cognition in visual terms which link to his theory of cinematography. This highlights processes of transformative thought as a theme of the film. It is a theme in which Eizenshtein's depictions of Marfa's contemplative walking and dreaming are linked. They actualize a mode of cinematography which Eizenshtein likens to flight, and foreground cinematographic thought as a level of discourse in the film.

The evolution towards, and the explosive experience of, inspiration is the predicate of transformation. In describing his ecstatic formula, Eizenshtein's dominant metaphor is architecture but he also gives importance to the process of an aircraft

which releases another, which, in turn, is capable of achieving supersonic speeds. This he associates with a work of art which is present in its precursor, and bursts forth in a new, inspired form.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, in the microcosm of portraits of herself at different stages in her life, we see Marfa break through her former states into a new dimension of being as a tractor-pilot. These moments of cognition reflect Eizenshtein's principle of the evolution of creativity by which one level of consciousness pushes through another to a level of greater understanding. This aesthetic of flight is not only a means of communicating cognition as both evolutionary and revolutionary; it informs and describes a new dynamic in the development of his artistic form.

### **Lyrical and Physiological Flight: Twin Aspects of Libido**

Beneath the surface of the fluid, gentle movement (flight) between frames showing Marfa's memory of her transformation into a tractor pilot is the linking of all the chaos and passion of the creative processes of life represented in the film. By means of the communication of this quietly 'ecstatic' transformation and seemingly romantic outcome in Marfa and the peasant's final embrace, Eizenshtein points to the close relationship between libidinous impulses: as an erotic, and also as a self-creative, dynamic. For Eizenshtein, a difference is made between emotion which is a connection between two individuals, and *emotsional'nost'*, which is a dynamic life-force.<sup>110</sup> For Eizenshtein, plot-centred film corresponds to the kind of emotion which arises between two individuals. It is an approach he did not wish to perpetuate. Emotional'nost, on the other hand, is at the centre of his theory of ecstasy.

### **Eroty**

Erotic and self-creative dynamic forces are manifest in the film in various ways. One episode involves a novel example of a trope of flight. As agreed already, flight and

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<sup>109</sup> Eizenshtein speaks of the aesthetic of 'vozdushnost' and the 'zakonodatel'naia ideia – vysota'. He also describes the process of flight and rocket propulsion in terms which are likened to the creative principle of imagination. See Sergei Eizenshtein, 'Piranesi ili tekuchest' forma', pp. 190-92. See also 'Gotika' in Eizenshtein, *Izbrannye proizvedenie*, 6 vols, ed. by S. I. Iutkevich, III, pp. 192-98 (pp. 194 and 198).

<sup>110</sup> Eizenshtein's new approach also inadvertently demonstrates that Freud's privileging of Eros in the workings of libido, notwithstanding the psychologist's own contradictions on the subject, is only one part of a multivalent phenomenon.

aviation themes are often a means of expressing an erotic or an emotional connection between the main protagonists of the film. In *General'naia liniia* the first time that we see the male peasant is when he is about to introduce the tractor to the villagers. In these frames the peasant is dressed in pilot goggles, helmet and jacket. There is an immediate flirtatious edit between Marfa and this pilot-figure. Eisenstein playfully edits their eye contact so that it is as if he is winking at her from behind his helmet. He plays with the idea of the romantic hero by means of an image that is a delicate parody of the idea of a knight in shining armour. Eisenstein plays with the idea of a 'hero of the day' (geroia dnia); by means of this straight-forward verbal formulation in the intertitle he suggests heroism may only last a day. When the peasant has to repair the tractor, he strips away this *faux* pilot-image, revealing a false shirt front and sleeves over his true peasant identity. The helmet and goggles are gone as he throws himself violently into the effort. The implication is that it is the peasant, with all his efforts and inexactitudes, who is the lasting hero, and not the *faux* airman.

Marfa calmly stops the peasant from tearing up an ideologically-loaded red flag on the tractor's bonnet; instead, a delicate exchange of looks between them leads to his reaching between her feet and legs to tear strips from her petticoat. This frisson of physical attraction is alluded to at the end of the film when Marfa, who is now the pilot-figure, remembers the peasant as the 'Hero of the Day', and as she first sees him. In the last frames it is not the dandy-air-man, but the authentic peasant who takes Marfa in his arms. Moreover, in the final frame she is no longer a pilot-figure in cap and goggles, but a Bolshevik woman in the arms of the peasant.

In the final frames of *General'naia liniia* Marfa is no longer wearing her goggles and helmet. She is still in a black leather jacket with her hair slickly pulled into a bun at the nape of her neck, and she is still wearing lipstick. That both had been 'pilots' underscores this union with the universal significance of flight as erotic connectivity. Yet the embrace of Marfa and the peasant is not the logical conclusion of a personal romantic narrative in keeping with Shklovskii's description of 'easy', 'boy meets girl resolution(s) by means of a wedding' found in feature film.<sup>111</sup> Nor is it a 'marriage'

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<sup>111</sup> Viktor Shklovskii, 'Sergei Eisenstein and 'Non-played' Film', in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Christie and Taylor, pp. 161-62 (p. 162).

conclusion which has the purpose of crossing ‘gender lines’.<sup>112</sup> In *General'naia liniia*, all the physiological processes including the erotic are transformed into art. In an article written just after seeing the Japanese Kabuki Theatre in Moscow in 1928, Eizenshtein says that the revelation of the Kabuki Theatre was the way in which every element of the stimuli of the performance contributed to the totality of the (emotional) ‘provocation to the brain’. He says that *General'naia liniia* was the first film to be created on this principle rather than using the former method of collision of two ideograms to create a third meaning, and thus rather than the dialectic principle applied to the juxtaposition of two frames.<sup>113</sup> And the final image of Marfa, wearing a black leather jacket, in the arms of the male peasant in his white peasant shirt recalls the symbol of yin yang – a principle which the director also felt important to cinema. By this means Eizenshtein unifies an ideological and natural sense of harmony symbolizing *smychka* (the bringing together of the country and the city) and principles of opposition which engender creation and creative thought.

In *General'naia liniia*, the fluidity of the imaginary flight through Marfa’s memory speaks to episodes which are structured according to Eizenshtein’s *vzlet* and *skachok* in stages of development. The significance of flight in this film suggests a sense of Schopenhauer’s will; a pre-existing sense of an object before it is realised. It also communicates a sense of ascending through stages of development towards actualization. Marfa-as-tractor-pilot communicates a subjective sense of her having gained wings. She has gained wings in terms of having gained the power of persuasion and self-empowerment. By means of presentiments of the future which involve a folkloric tractor which hovers outside its future shed, a bull which rises above a field, and a modern kolkhoz which is a cinematographic ‘dream’, Eizenshtein plays ambivalently with the notion of a communist dream as a flight into the future. Eizenshtein’s brief use of aviation semiotics speaks to multiple spheres. By these means, he suggests the opening of a new consciousness in the mind of his main protagonist, Marfa Lapkina. Eizenshtein valorizes the creative imagination and the transformation of object into a work of art, and subtly intrudes flights which speak to a

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<sup>112</sup> Al LaValley, ‘Maintaining, Blurring and Transcending Gender Lines in Eisenstein’, pp. 55-56.

<sup>113</sup> Eisenstein, ‘The Filmic Fourth Dimension’, pp. 64-71 (p. 64 and 66).

folkloric cosmology in keeping with various strands of Russia's Futurism, and by which he subtly questions the reality of utopian visions.

The tempo of Marfa's flight through memory contrasts with the dynamism of Vertov's 'man with a movie-camera', but each communicates notions of transformation which are led by people of vision. These people are 'pilots' of a new era who open new worlds in the consciousness of their community and in the viewer. For Eizenshtein the aeroplane is not realised on screen: it is an un-enunciated fact which draws attention to the fluid dynamic of communication itself. In both films flight, in its broadest sense, is used to communicate revolutions in thinking which expand socialist consciousness, and artistic levels of communication.

### *Zemlia*

The expressive 'matrix of machines' (including the notion of an aeroplane) as a signifier of the realization of a new collectivized Soviet world is important to Aleksandr Dovzhenko's *Zemlia*. As in *General'naia liniia/Staroe i novoe*, the reference to aviation takes place during a scene which lasts only a few minutes near the end of the film. But its weight as a signifier of Soviet, collective futurity is pivotal to the ideological and rhetorical function of the film, and is important to the film's poetic affirmation of eternal life processes. As in *General'naia liniia*, the use of aviation is a multivalent signifier which speaks to notions of 'creative volition' (*tvorcheskoe volnenie*). This quality is a characteristic of the main protagonist, who opens up a new Soviet world by introducing modernity to the village. As in *General'naia liniia*, the communication of a notion of flight in this film signifies a creative dynamic. Flight is as much a manifestation of the forces of life as the wind, the rain, the process of life and death, and love. The off-screen flight signifies a Bolshevik futurity which, in turn, speaks to Lunacharskii's famous 'Bolshevik dream', which he formulated as: not a 'flight from the present but a flight to the future.' The harvest is communicated in one heady day of harvesting, separating out the grain and mechanized bread-making. As Vasil' walks away from it he walks 'as if amongst the stars, alone' ('Vot on idet po doroge odin, sredi zvezd'). His walk becomes a dance, and Dovzhenko says it seems he

could ‘fly with such lightness, the lightness with which we fly in open-ended dreams.’ (I mozhno letat’ s takoi zhe lekost’iu, s takoi letaem my v nerazgadannykh sniakh.)<sup>114</sup>

The exquisite final sequences of *Zemlia* in relation to the filmic totality suggest that the forces of modernity are nevertheless enfolded into the cycles of nature. The tension between these levels of communication has divided the reception of the film. On the one hand, there are those who accuse it of formalist ‘biologism’ and ‘pantheism’,<sup>115</sup> which panders to bourgeois values. On the other, there are those ideologues who see it as an exceptional exposition of dialectical forces in nature and in history, in the individual and in society.<sup>116</sup> As Papazian says in her excellent analysis of the significance of ‘off-screen’ space in this film, the aeroplane’s flight symbolises ‘the utopian impulse’, the realization of which, the introduction of the tractor, make possible mechanization and electrification.<sup>117</sup> This analysis of *Zemlia* demonstrates how an opposition between the linear futurity of dialectical forces which are symbolised in the ‘Bolshevik aeroplane’, and cycles of nature are reconciled. The idea of flight ambivalently signifies Vasil’s spirit in death, but it also signifies modernity. This semiotic thus mediates between, and unifies, different qualities of time. Each sense of time is also informed by mutual sub-structuring notions of will. The dynamic of flight is linked to creative and transformative (*volia*) and of force (*sila*).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Aleksandr Dovzhenko, ‘*Zemlia*’, in Dovzhenko, *Sobranie sochinenii*, ed. by Iu. Sol’ntseva and S. Ginsberg, 4 vols (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1966-1969), I (1966), pp. 111-39 (p. 131).

<sup>115</sup> For excerpts and summaries of contemporary and diachronic responses to *Zemlia* see: Paul E. Burns, ‘Cultural Revolution, Collectivization and Soviet Cinema: Eisenstein’s *Old and the New* and Dovzhenko’s *Earth*’, *Film and History*, 11, 4 (1981), 84-96; Vance Kepley, ‘Earth’, in *In the Service of the State: The Cinema of Alexander Dovzhenko* (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), pp. 29-44; Elizabeth A. Papazian, ‘Off-screen Dreams and Collective Synthesis in Dovzhenko’s *Earth*’ (hereafter: ‘Off-screen Dreams’), *Russian Review*, 62, 3, (2003), 411-28; Gilberto Perez, ‘All in the Foreground. A Study of Dovzhenko’s *Earth*’ (hereafter: ‘All in the Foreground’), *Hudson Review*, 28, 1 (1975), 68-86; Herbert Marshall, ‘Earth’, in *Masters of the Soviet Cinema: Crippled Creative Biographies* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 121-35.

<sup>116</sup> Herbert Marshall, ‘Earth’, pp. 121 and 129, 132-33.

<sup>117</sup> Papazian, ‘Off-screen Dreams’, pp. 411-28.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* This is a central part of Papazian’s excellent consideration of the poetics of ‘off-screen’ space in this film.

### Old Traditions, New World

The subject of Dovzhenko's *Zemlia* (1930), like *General'naia liniia/Staroe i novoe* is the process of collectivization and agricultural modernization in the Ukraine. The bringing of the new technology of the tractor and, thus, collectivization to the village and the breaking down of the barriers between privately owned land is an 'act of creation' on the part of the film's hero, Vasil' (Semen Svashenko).<sup>119</sup> For this he is killed by the son of a kulak family, Khoma, (Petro Masokha), whose land Vasil' has incorporated into the collective. This narrative is visually framed at the beginning and the end of the film by an image of landscape which divides the screen between sky and field. The death of the grandfather at the beginning of the film is paralleled by the death of his grandson at the end. During Vasil''s funeral the sighting of an aeroplane suggests the symbolic opening of a Revolutionary space between the sky and the soil of the Ukraine, and in the minds of the villagers watching it from below. The aeroplane's existence is evidenced only by virtue of the movement of the villagers' faces as they follow its flight-path from below.

At the end of the film there is a powerful visual refrain of sublime close-ups of fruit on the trees and on the ground. At the beginning, fruit on the trees ripens and falls during autumn rain. At the end of the film it is spring. A child is born; the anguish of Vasil's death is transfigured in the anguish of childbirth. There is a wash of rain across the screen, and fruit amongst the leafy-trees. Vasil''s spirit is twinned with the aeroplane, and the editing almost suggests the aeroplane has unleashed the rain which brings this fertility and rebirth. The notion of an aeroplane is a multivalent ideological signifier which speaks to Bolshevik ideology and Christian and pagan traditions. This may include the notion of Cronus who, as the divine reaper, cuts the 'seed' from the 'stalk' so that Mother Earth yields up her harvest.<sup>120</sup>

The Cronus myth represents the separation of sky and earth. For the anthropologist Edmund Leach this symbolism speaks to the division of male and female, and 'postulates' a third 'mobile and vital' element which moves between

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<sup>119</sup> Evgenii Margolit, "'Zemlia", SSSR (1930)', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1990. 12, pp.107-09 (p. 109); Sergei Trimbach, 'Pochva i sud'ba', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1994. 12, pp. 106-08 (p. 107).

<sup>120</sup> Edmund Leach, 'Two Essays Concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time', in *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: Athlone Press, 1961), 124-36 (pp. 129-30).



them.<sup>121</sup> Vasil's sacrifice has effected a new life and the introduction of a modern 'Bolshevik' age to the village. At the end of the film, Vasil's fiancée, Natal'ka (Elena Maksimova), who, prior to this, is seen naked in prostration and in the hysteria of grief, wakes to the gentle smile of a new love. The medium close-up shows her enfolded in the young peasant's arms, a symbol of harmony and unity. By these means Dovzhenko's diegesis communicates a spectrum of ideological, cyclic and eternal values of time and qualities of life. These sensibilities are intruded into the imagined space opened up by the suggestion of an aeroplane.

### **Transcendent Flight**

The Russian film critics Evgenii Margolit and Sergei Trimbach see Vasil' as a Christ or god-like figure who brings forth a new world, and for this his life is ultimately 'sacrificed'.<sup>122</sup> His death transforms his father's thinking and he asks for a new kind of secular funeral because 'Vasil' died for a new life' (Kak pogib moi Vasil', za novuiu zhizn...to proshu i prokhoronit' ego po novemu.) The funeral takes place outdoors amongst the villagers and is led by a young secretary of the Bolshevik komsomol-cell rather than by the priest. The film explains that Vasil's sacrifice has not been in vain. The establishment of the kolkhoz (as a hypernym of socialism on earth) is cause for 'his glory to fly around the earth' (poletit slava pro nashego Vasil'ia po vsemu miru). The camera shows the young leader raising his arm skyward. It is simultaneous with Vasil's body being carried through the village. The camera follows the ostensive gesture and travels upwards along its line. There is a sense of hope and expectation. There is a long shot of the Bolshevik pointing skyward. Just as we expect to see an aeroplane, there is a cut to an intertitle announcing its appearance in the air: 'Just there, it's our Bolshevik aeroplane!' (Kak von tot nash bol'shevistkii aeroplan!) The following cut is a complete surprise: we do not actually see the aeroplane.<sup>123</sup> What we see is an overhead shot of the crowd of villagers looking up as if at an aeroplane. In this way the idea of glory, of Soviet technology, and modernity all become entwined with the symbolization of Vasil's transcendent spirit. The notion of the aeroplane flying above his funeral, as at state funerals, is linked to an older tradition of the notion of a

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Gilberto Perez, p. 80; and Elizabeth Papazian, pp. 424-26.

bird signifying the soul released in flight. The word 'our' (nash) underlines the link between the aeroplane and Vasil'. The aeroplane represents an idea of sacrifice and modernity.

The presentation of the aeroplane as a fact mirrors the tractor's arrival earlier in the film, which is first hardly visible on the horizon. As Papazian says, its emergence is linked to the off-screen significance of the aeroplane. The tractor appears almost as a mirage until, in broken starts and stops, it finally arrives large in the frame. It is heralded as a 'fakt' (fact), symbolizing the arrival of modernity, and the construction of the new socialist world. The director says that every artist wants to see and to feel facts which are in the process of becoming perceptible as those which are already perceivable (*kazhdomu khudozhniku khochet'sia zakonno videt' i chuvstvovat' nekotorye oshchushchestvliiaemye fakty kak oshchushchestvlennyie*).<sup>124</sup> The artist is able to communicate that which is being sensed (*oshchushchestvliiaemyi*) and transform it into the perceivable (*oshchushchestvlennyi*). The artist calls it into existence. Although completely different in their specificities, the absence of an aeroplane and the subsequent cinematographic flights in *General'naiia liniia* and in *Zemlia* organically communicate revolutionary thought as the process of coming into being. In Eizenshtein's *General'naiia liniia* the tractor cinematographically hovers as if in flight before its existence is demonstrated to the village. Marfa's flight of memory traces her development from a young dairy maid to a Bolshevik.

The non-image of an aeroplane suggests the zenith of modernity which is presented as *oshchushchestvliiaemyi* fact before it has materialised. It is not only a symbol of modernity but of possibility. This foregrounds the act of imagination itself. The effect is not dissimilar to Aleksandr Blok's sense that the fact of the word encases the music of poetry; and this signifies intangible cognitive sensibilities, a sense of the music of the universe. In *Zemlia* the intertitle suggests a verbal encasement to which a visual image of the 'aeroplan' would be covalent. The freeing of the screen of an image of an aeroplane, in effect, releases the notion of revolutionary thinking which it signifies from a comparable visual encasement. Dovzhenko communicates the aeroplane as a word-fact, and the absence of the aeroplane foregrounds the process of perception, the idea of flight, as 'vital' communication.

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<sup>124</sup> Aleksandr Dovzhenko, "'Zemlia' 1930', in *Sobranie sochinenii*, I, pp. 259-76 (p. 266).

As with religious icons in the tradition of the Eastern Church, a sense of holiness is bestowed on the image not by what is represented, but by that which is invisible.<sup>125</sup> In this case it is the aeroplane. The realioria is not the workings of God, but of technology. In this light, the nature of film operates as a contemporary icon of modernity. Religion, and the priest, may be ‘silent’ in the film but the question of the existence of a higher power is not impossible. Dovzhenko’s sense of the difference between that which is coming into being, and facts which are already perceived arises in relation to the question ‘but what if there is no God?/ And what if there is!’ (Bez popa dobre zhe a esli net boga/a esli est!), which Vasil’s father asks when he allows the funeral to be led by someone who is not a priest.<sup>126</sup> As Jean Luis Baudry points out, ‘Behind what film gives us to see, it is not the existence of atoms that we are led to seek but rather the existence of an “other world” of phenomena.’ It is in this ‘revelation (...) of a spiritual presence’ that he understands the communicative property of cinema.<sup>127</sup> Dovzhenko’s cinematographic communication of flight signifies both an idea of spiritualization and futurity. It does not signify the realization of a dream, but the fact of artistic creation by which it is suggested. The flight signifies idea and it is the highest form of fact.

### **Socialist Transfiguration**

During the civil burial ceremony the moment of flight shows the ‘collective’ filling the screen which had, at the start of the film, been divided between earth and sky. The static overhead shot of the collective reads like an aerial view and suggests that with the coming of progress man has now taken the space in the screen which religion traditionally makes the symbolic space of God and demi-gods. The ‘spiritual presence’ the camera projects is that of modernity.

This socialist consciousness is shot through with a sense of eternal life. This is achieved by means of the ‘songs of a new life’ which will carry Vasil’s glory in

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<sup>125</sup> Lars Blomqvist, ‘Introduction’, in *Symbols of Power: The Aesthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Claes Arvidsson and Lars Erik Blomqvist (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1987), pp. 7-23 (p. 8).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Jean Louis Baudry, ‘Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinemagraphic Apparatus’, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Baudry and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 345-56, (p. 348).

circumnavigation of the globe. It is a song at death which speaks of new life. The aeroplane stands in for the traditional symbolism of a bird which signifies the spirit departing the body after death. It communicates the idea of the movement forwards of socialism towards the future, and also a sense of the cyclical nature of life and death. Vasil' can be seen to have broken down the physical boundaries of the land in life, and his death signifies the breaking down of borders between the metaphysical and physical worlds.<sup>128</sup> The striving for a better world that had been expressed in dance on the earthly plane during Vasil's life has been transmogrified into a metaphoric flight of his soul in death. Vasil' has died and his 'song' has become the very air, the medium of flight. This subliminally links to the movement of the wind which sweeps through the fields in the opening shot.

**Ideology: A Flight in the Minds of Men.**

As the crowd looks towards the sky, the cinematographic space that had been divided and shared at the beginning of the film between the earth (the fields of grain blowing in the wind) and the sky is now filled with people seen in a long-shot. Symbolically, the coming of modernity has thus unified the villagers. As they stand with their faces turned towards the aeroplane they form a graphic patterning of space, and the 'authorial' aerial viewpoint defines them anew as a collective group. The static position of the camera gives a sense of the aeroplane/the future looking back. The crowd first looks right off-screen, and in a rapid cut, it looks left. Their heads move in a continuous, unified horizontal, choreographed way. Their unified perception of the aeroplane makes it a 'fact'. Thus their ability to see the aeroplane defines them as potential seers, and they become a symbol of 'the collective' and of the forward movement of socialism. The villagers look towards the sky which becomes a symbolic future space, and the combination of all that it signifies imbues them with a sacral aura. They also gaze out across time towards the audience of their future.

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<sup>128</sup> Margolit suggests the breaking down of the boundaries of Vasil's world in "*Zemlia*" SSSR (1930), p. 108; and R. Sobolev describes the linking of death and life which contributes to the film's epic qualities in his; 'Poema O Zemle', in *Aleksandr Dovzhenko seriia zhizni v iskusstve* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), p. 117.

### **Limitless Futurity**

Bachelard observes that, in terms of aerial psychology, the imagined is the space of aspiration, and is expansive because one ‘absents’ oneself from the present.<sup>129</sup> For Dovzhenko the idea of an aeroplane in this sequence is not a sign of aspiration alone; it is a communication of something in the act of becoming and this involves perceiving the ‘presence of the future in the present’. Whether it is actually perceived or purely imaginary, the off-screen flight implies that it is as unbounded by the frame as it is potentially limitless in the minds of the collective. The movement of the collective’s composite face which is unified by the aerial perspective suggests Iurii Lotman’s ‘footprint’ of the future.<sup>130</sup>

### **Cinematic ‘Revelation’**

In the civil ritual of Vasil’'s funeral, the notion of the aircraft comprises only thirty seconds in a film which lasts seventy-seven minutes. In effect it is comparable to Stites’ ‘eschatological moment in human experience that announces the New Order, the New World, the New Life’.<sup>131</sup> An epiphany in the minds of the collective is communicated by means of its seeing the aeroplane and an edit to an image of the sky and earth dividing the screen. This echoes the beginning of the film. By these means the notion of the aeroplane and its imagined flight symbolically opens up a ‘revolutionary space’ in the minds of the villagers and the viewers of the film alike. Its utopian significance is used as ‘a tool to excite imaginations, dismantle old orders, mould new worlds, and

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<sup>129</sup> Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>130</sup> In Iurii Lotman’s discussion of the nature of rhetoric, levels of semiotics and code, and iconic values in visual texts, he argues that a ‘footprint’, the transformation of an object into sign, affords a model which is both part of a thing, and outside of it. It exists as a duplication while participating in its semiotic creation. See his ‘Painting and the Language of Theatre: Notes on the Problem of Iconic Rhetoric’, in *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture*, ed. by Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993), pp. 45-55 (pp. 45-46). See also his discussion of the importance of re-coding to the creation of artistic text in ‘Art as Language’ and ‘The Problem of Meaning’, in Iurii Lotman, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. by Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), pp. 7-31 and pp. 32-49.

<sup>131</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams, Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 3.

construct a new Man'.<sup>132</sup> In cinematic terms the 'absence of the image' of the aeroplane foregrounds the kinetic communication of ideology.<sup>133</sup> Its absence underlines the essence of what it represents. That is to say, the absence of the aeroplane demonstrates that its existence is in the mind. Dovzhenko is renowned for his ability to convey the essence of his subject, and the power of his 'autotelic' imagery.<sup>134</sup> Dovzhenko 'abstracts' the image from the screen and what is left is signification and idea itself, and the utopian vision symbolized in the perception of the aeroplane is understood as a function of man - what Stites calls a 'propensity for utopian dreaming'.

Echoing Eizenshtein's ending of *General'naia liniia*, Dovzhenko ends *Zemlia* not with the image of the collective that is focusing on the future, but with an image of Natal'ka in the arms of a new love. The physical similarity of the new love to Vasil' generalises a sense of Vasil's revolutionary spirit. It also suggests that the future exists not in the abstract positing of ideology but in the idea of eternal renewal. While it suggests a future hope for the couple, which is inextricably linked to collectivization, this image illustrates that the true harmony of the opposition of sky and earth for Dovzhenko, lies not in a vision of glory and sacrifice for an ideological future, but in his 'zdorovie liudi'. This image mirrors that of Marfa in Eizenshtein's *General'naia liniia* in the final frames as she stands in the arms of the young peasant whom she helped start the tractor, and which suggests a sense of the harmony of yin yang as much as it suggests her transformation into a Bolshevik. In *Zemlia*, Natal'ka looks tenderly into the face of her new love; the movement of their chests, which are just visibly and rapidly pulsing, and the gradual smile that lights her face, suggest the opening of future hope and transcendence.

### **Flight: Domination of the Elements**

The notion of the aeroplane in *Zemlia* can be seen to represent the zenith of technological achievement both universally and in the context of the first Five-Year Plan (1928-32) during which the Soviet Union began to manufacture the first Soviet

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Candyce Veal, 'The "Eagle" Defines His Space: Images of Flight and Dance in Film of the Stalin period' (un-published master's thesis, UCL/SSEES, 2003), p. 22.

<sup>134</sup> Perez, pp. 68-86.

designed aircraft.<sup>135</sup> In the film, it is first denoted by the word ‘aeroplan’ followed by an ‘absence’ of its image. It is in the form of a pure abstraction; for the audience, an imagined flight across the sky. By this means Dovzhenko posits a space which denotes a utopian sense of the Revolution carried forwards into the future and around the world. Yet at the time of its release this film was criticized for its ideological shortcomings. It has also been criticized for obviating the real experiences of forced collectivization and de-kulakization and not being ‘agitational’ enough.<sup>136</sup> It was accused of demonstrating such abundance (of fruit trees, fruit, grain) that the need for a tractor was not clear, and of demonstrating an interest in its own language above the interests of ideology.<sup>137</sup> In Dovzhenko’s film flight is a metaphoric dynamic which stands in for political consciousness. Yet it is also covalent to the forces which push the apple into fruition, and to man’s will to realise his dreams. Marx dictated that the transformation of history into world history is more than world spirit, an ‘abstract act on the part of the ‘self-consciousness’, it is also an ‘empirically verifiable act’.<sup>138</sup> Dovzhenko’s presentation of the aeroplane is first a word-*fakt*, and freeing the screen from its visual encasement is an abstraction not only of the essence of ideological communication, but also of forces of life. Dovzhenko says that the most important aspect of his film is ‘politicheskoe soznanie’ (political consciousness).<sup>139</sup> In this respect the artists/film-makers can be included in those who shape history, who pilot social conscience and who seek essential truth.

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<sup>135</sup> Reina Pennington, ‘From Chaos to the Eve of the Great Patriotic War, 1922-41’, in *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 37-62 (p. 39).

<sup>136</sup> Kepley, *In the Service of the State*, p. 84.

<sup>137</sup> Sobolev, p. 86.

<sup>138</sup> Karl Marx and Fredrikh Engels, ‘Conclusions from the Materialist Conception of History’, in Marx, *The German Ideology*, Part One: Feuerbach and the Opposition between Materialist and Idealist Philosophy, <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>>.

<sup>139</sup> Dovzhenko (answering criticism of formalism) ambivalently asserts that political consciousness is more important than form, as is the ability to ‘investigate’ the most important political conditions. Dovzhenko, ‘“Zemlia” 1930’, p. 260. See also Sobolev, ‘Poema o Zemle’, p. 111.

### ***Odna, Alone***

In Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna*, as in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, *General'naia liniia* and *Zemlia*, the notion of flight is linked to the communication of freedom from varying forms of oppression. In *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* it is freedom from the stultifying dynamics of a ménage à trois and marriage. In *Odna*, as in *General'naia liniia* and *Zemlia*, the main protagonists must stand up against local kulaks in order to assert what are communicated as positive Soviet values. In each of these films notions of flight are also predicated on notions of personal and social transformation.

The sequence involving aviation in *Odna* can be compared to that of Marfa's flight through her memory in Eisenstein's *General'naia liniia*. Both films share a sub-structuring significance of flight as a communication of transformation into collective consciousness. But the form of its communication is completely different. The imaging of aviation in *Odna* is not based on suggestion. The aeroplane is very much present on screen, and the movement of its propeller and its landing and take-off are the means of communicating Kuz'mina's personal transformation. Flight and aviation communicate notions of freedom from the oppression of the kulaks and transformation both in the consciousness of the young woman who comes from Leningrad, and also in the consciousness of the villagers. The notion of an 'opening of new horizons' is topographical and metaphorical in this film. In its symbolic role, the aeroplane in Kozintsev and Trauberg's film communicates a similar spiritual dimension which the absence of the aeroplane communicates in *Zemlia*. Each is identified with the sacrifice and transcendent spirit of the main protagonist, and is a signifier of the idea of the Soviet state as a higher reality. In each of these films, the cinematographic communication of flight and aviation speak to shared sub-structuring notions of freedom from oppression, revolutionary thinking, and the dynamic realization of a socialized dream of a better world. In each film the use of flight is a means of highlighting the director's sense of his authentic approach to form.

The significance of flight not only serves a rhetorical function but, in its poetic function, communicates the creative ideological horizon and world view of the director. As in *General'naia liniia* and *Zemlia* the use of aviation semiotics comprises only a few minutes of this feature film. But because these moments have such a strong visual impact: because the aeroplane is explicitly identified with the female protagonist, Elena Kuz'mina; and because these moments reflect a tension between that which is



ideologically 'schematic' and that which expresses individualism (in form and meaning), they are very important in demonstrating the levels of autonomous voicing in the film. These minutes of aviation semiotics communicate uniquely in the way a speech act does. They also suggest a dynamic of cognition which moves from interiority towards external expression. The sense of transformation of consciousness and expansion of internal horizons is an ascension which moves towards transcendence in this film.

In *Odna*, the heroine's transformation and sense of personal self-expansion culminates in a self-sacrificing act which is rewarded with an aerial ambulance rescue by the state. On one level, this film communicates the transformation of an archetypal *little man*, who is oppressed by impersonal state hierarchies, into a Soviet citizen who is singularly important to the collective and the state. Unlike Nikishka's sixteenth century flight in *Kryl'ia kholopa* which signified a challenge to the perceived natural and social orders, and which resulted in his punishment by the Tsar, Kuz'mina's challenge to the natural order of the local kulaks and corrupt local Soviet results in her rescue by the state. Rather than the Tsar representing God's judgement on earth, and Nikishka's flight condemned as devil's work, in *Odna* the aeroplane's flight is a symbol signifying a higher order of Soviet justice. In *Kryl'ia kholopa*, Nikishka's flight is symbolic of transcendence over the corruption of the court and results in his death-sentence. In *Odna*, Kuz'mina's aerial rescue is instrumental in the communication of the heroine's spiritual transcendence over corruption, *byt*, and the greed which was the norm amongst the leadership of the local Soviet of the Altai, and the local kulaks of the village to which she is posted. Although it is not the only message, the use of aviation in each of these films suggests how far the state has been transformed since the Revolution. Tarich's film does this by means of allegory. *Odna* achieves it by means of quasi-documentary.

***Odna: An Idea of Soviet Justice, and a Rescue-plane***

The aeroplane's arrival in the Altai at the end of *Odna* takes place in order to rescue the main protagonist, Elena Kuz'mina, a young graduate teacher whose first teaching-post is in the Altai. At the end of the film she lies dying of frost-bite, having undertaken a ground-level, open-sleigh journey in the dead of winter in order to seek justice from a higher Soviet body which is beyond the influence of the village. The local Soviet chairman, played by Sergei Gerasimov (in his final acting role for FEKS) is in league

with kulaks who are stealing both the profits from the wool of the sheep that the villagers shear, and the sheep themselves, which are the source of the villagers' living. The only means of transport made available to her is the sleigh which is owned by Kulak Bai. In different versions of the film her journey happens either off-screen or is an extended journey with scored musical accompaniment, and we see her desperate plight as she gets lost in the snow.<sup>140</sup> The villagers rescue her and go for help. An air-ambulance is sent from Novosibirsk.

### **Governmental Power, the Individual and 'Odn za vsekh'**

The relation of the individual to the government was important to Kozintsev. He was inspired to make *Odna* by a news report of a rural teacher for whom the Soviet government sent an aeroplane because there was no doctor in the region to treat the frost-bite she had developed after getting lost in the snow.<sup>141</sup> As Kozintsev points out, this episode pre-dates the famous aerial rescue of the crew and passengers of the stranded ship, the Cheliuskin, from the ice-flows of the Chukotka Sea.<sup>142</sup> Thus, *Odna* also pre-dates the 1934 mass-media treatment of that event. It therefore precedes 1930s Stalinist aviation epic myth-creation, with its glorified and paradigmatic presentation of rescue-from-the-centre. Although, Sanaviatsia (the medical service established by Aeroflot) was founded in 1931,<sup>143</sup> and the newspaper report which inspired the making

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<sup>140</sup> The Absolute Medien Arte DVD is a 1931 version restored by Gosfil'mofond in 1966 which includes material which was not in the film as it was released. It shows that Kuz'mina is tricked and left stranded in the snowy wastes. She has to make her own way back, struggling against the elements. Finally the village send a party out to look for her, they find her half-frozen, not a great distance from the school.

<sup>141</sup> Grigorii Kozintsev, 'Odna', in Kozintsev, *Glubokii ekran* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971), pp. 147- 60 (p. 147).

<sup>142</sup> In 1933 the steamer Cheliuskin attempted a passage from Murmansk eastward through the Siberian Arctic waters. On 13 February 1934 the ship foundered and sank. The rescue of the passengers and crew of Captain Voronin's ship (by order of Stalin in February 1934) became the subject of a nationwide media campaign. This is returned to, and a filmic treatment of this rescue is looked at closely in Chapter Three.

<sup>143</sup> A civilian and military medical air service was established by 1931 but not centralized as Sanaviatsiia until 1933. *Russian Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 248-49. Novosibirsk provided a postal air service from 1928. Moskvina's filmography shows that work on *Odna* started 16

of this film might be seen as part of a pro-Sanaviatsia media campaign, it is clear that the story was received by Kozintsev as an authentic act of rescue of an individual by the government.<sup>144</sup> Cinema debates from 1928 include a document signed by Kozintsev and Trauberg which calls for more ideological guidance and a united ideological plan, so that ‘ideology will be not the mysterious blue – or rather red – bird that our current leadership tries in vain to catch by the tail.’<sup>145</sup>

Accompanying the edits between people looking upwards and out of frame towards the aeroplane, we hear a public announcement. The first is a male voice-over from Novisibirsk describing Kuz'mina's plight. This is followed by a response from Narkompros, announcing that an aeroplane is to be sent for Kuz'mina. It is the same official, female voice that is heard earlier in the film in a sequence following Kuz'mina's petition to Narkompros to stay in the city with her fiancé. At that point the camera shows the young graduate walking down a corridor, reading a letter of permission from Narkompros to stay in Leningrad. But the terms in which this female voice-over conveys her permission to stay also describes Kuz'mina as one of the enemies of socialist construction' ('vragi sotsialisticheskoi stroiki') for which the country has no need. As we watch Kuz'mina reading this letter, and hear the female official voicing, it is as if we are reading her mind. It is both public and private voicing in consonance, and the audience understands that this is the voice of public conscience within her. Thus when we hear the official announcement that the government is sending an aircraft to Kuz'mina's aid, the aeroplane's arrival signifies the transformation of Kuz'mina's social standing, and of her own self-perception. The dual planes of conscience are underscored when we see an edit to Kuz'mina as she lies with her hands bandaged, expecting to die. Her lips begin to move in synchronization with the official female voice-over which announces the need for her rescue over radio

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August 1929, and the first filming was in the Altai from the 1 September to the end of October 1929. Studio filming continued from November 1929 to February 1930. A second trip to Altai in order to film took place February–June 1930. Ia. L. Butovskii, 'Andrei, Nikoavich Moskvin: Biofil'mobibliografiia', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 27 (1995), 118-32 (pp. 122-23).

<sup>144</sup> Kozintsev, 'Odna', p. 147.

<sup>145</sup> V. Pudovkin, 'To the Party Conference on Cinema from a Group of Film Directors', in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Christie and Taylor, pp. 205-06 (p. 206).

loudspeakers. It is as if Kuz'mina herself is enunciating the official words, and this registers visually as a powerful sense of official care as it exists in her own mind.

Having been recently occupied with themes of the *malen'kii chelovek* in relation to the impervious, and uncaring, government of Tsarist Russia, and the values of the Old World, in his previous films *Shinel'*, *kino-p'esa v manere Gogolia* (The Overcoat: A Film-Play in the Manner of Gogol, Leningradkino, 1926) and *Novyi Vavilon*, (New Babylon, Sovkino, Lenindgradskaia kinofabrika, 1929), Kozintsev says that he was also interested in showing what makes the plight of one individual deserve such interest by the state.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, he wanted to make a film which showed the inner, personal development of a naïve, young graduate teacher, just embarking on life, in the context of the 'complexities of unification of a single life (with) the flow of history.'<sup>147</sup> For Kozintsev, the theme of *Odna* arose almost as an answer to Gogol's 'Overcoat'. The thematic centre of gravity of the film, in the director's words, was:

Ужас обездушенного государства, где железным рядом  
вставали все против одного, - и общество, основанное на  
положении: все за одного, один за всех.<sup>148</sup>

He told his cameraman, Andrei Moskvina, that 'Na etot raz tsel' byl' osobyi: zaglianut' vglub', v dukhovnyi mir nashei geroini, otkryt' otnosheniia odnoi i vsekh'<sup>149</sup> The idea of revealing 'relations of one and the all', rather than 'one for all', is open to subtle interpretation and is not irrelevant to the multivalent significance of the aviation sequence in *Odna*.

### **Feminine Creative Rebellion**

The first woman who greets Kuz'mina when the young teacher arrives in the steppes is subsequently inspired to rebel by Kuz'mina's example of courage and goodness. In

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<sup>146</sup> Kozintsev, 'Odna', p. 147.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., pp. 150-153.

<sup>148</sup> Kozintsev, 'Odna', p. 147. Mamatova underlines Kuz'mina's initial response in the film to being sent to the Altai, "Ja budu zhalovat'sia!", as an embodiment of Kozintsev's meaning when he says: 'The little man in the vast foreign, and alien world is the continual theme of FEKS.' (*Malen'kii chelovek v ogromnosti chuzhogo, chuzhdogo emu mira* – postoiannaia tema feksov). See Liliia Mamatova, 'Mashen'ka i zombie: Mifologiiia sovetskoii zhenshchiny', *Iskusstvo kino*, 1991. 6, pp. 110-18 (p. 110).

<sup>149</sup> Kozintsev, 'Odna', p. 150.

terms of ‘socio-symbolic’ contract, both women occupy conventionally feminine roles as either teacher, or mother.<sup>150</sup> The Altai woman is first pictured with her child close to her body, and the emotional bonds between Kuz’mina and her small students are underscored as they gather round their teacher’s bedside as Kuz’mina lies dying. In the sequence just prior to the aeroplane’s arrival, this woman’s creative act of revolt is sparked when she asks the corrupt Chairman what the local Soviet will do to help Kuz’mina? His inhumane response is to say; ‘The Soviet will bury her’. This galvanizes the Altai mother to write a letter to a higher Soviet. It is as a result of her action that the aeroplane is sent to rescue Kuz’mina. The aeroplane thus becomes a symbol of Soviet higher justice, and a symbol of human and collective values. Moreover, the aeroplane’s flight represents not a conventionally masculine-active, but a positive, feminine-active dynamic.

The arrival of the aeroplane to rescue Kuz’mina is signalled by a close-up of the Altai mother who lifts her hand to her eyes, and looks upwards and out-of-screen. This aerial gazing is a trope of the period which, when used in agit-material, signifies the projection of a utopian Socialist World of justice, and freedom from oppression.<sup>151</sup> The idea of distance which the aeroplane’s presence in the sky communicates is associated with Kuz’mina when she arrives in the steppes, and is asked by one of the mothers of the village for her objective support as an outsider. The mediation of the arrival of the aeroplane through the Altai woman’s perspective also weaves a sense of individual empathy with the symbolism of state concern. The edits show a close-up of her face, now looking upwards, and then angled downward as if looking over Kuz’mina’s sick bed. Her face is momentarily identified with the downward-looking perspective of the aeroplane. Thus, when the aeroplane arrives, it is not only a symbol of the state, it is also a symbol of the bond between the women, and of a spirit of care.

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<sup>150</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, in *The Feminist Reader*, ed. by Catherine Belsley and Jane Moore, 2nd edn (London: MacMillan Press, 1997), pp. 201-16 (pp. 203 and 206).

<sup>151</sup> I use this phrase to describe the same dynamic which Toby Clark has seen in Socialist-Realist painting and analysed in his: ‘Propaganda in the Communist State’, in *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1997), pp. 73-102 (p. 89).

### **Dynamics of Distance, Sacral Identity**

The aeroplane is first seen high in the sky, and the edits to the close-ups of Soviet people from the city and from the country, looking upwards and out of screen, suggests a projective spirit. But the in-coming flight also communicates a sense of a transgression. Elena Hellberg-Hirn argues that the approach to a monument from a distance involves the emotional dynamic of entering a sacred sphere.<sup>152</sup> It adds to the (traumatic) spiritual power of the experience. The overhead view, like the aerial view from in-coming aircraft, and the dynamic of penetrating distance in the audience's perception of the close-up, all communicate this kind of transgression. The sensibility adds to the (traumatic) spiritual power of the experience of the villagers and the viewers of the film alike. It is a perceptual dynamic which is also important to the imaging of Party leaders at air parades (which is discussed in the following chapter). The sense of spiritual trauma underscores the visual trope of the familiar, ideologically coded 'winged people' to which the images of upturned faces speak, and which is found in the poster art that promoted activities of Osoaviakhim.<sup>153</sup> In *Odna*, the trope of up-turned skyward-looking faces is transformed and communicates an intensification of the spiritual experience of the coming of a higher Soviet justice. In the communication of distance and of height, an aura of sacred identity is also bestowed on the villagers for whom Kuz'mina was prepared to sacrifice her life. The extreme distance and the sense of passage through the sky creates a heightened anticipation which the aeroplane's arrival and the accompanying music transform into an unmitigated sense of victory.

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<sup>152</sup> Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul: The Symbolic World of Russianness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 120-21.

<sup>153</sup> See Samuil Adlivankin's poster, 'The Young Model Aeroplane Constructors Competition (1931)' (Concours de jeunes constructeurus de modèles d'avion, 1931), *L'Idéalisme soviétique: Peinture et cinéma, 1925-1939*, ed. by Ekaterina Degot (Brussels: Fond Mercator, Europalia, 2005), p. 36. Gustav Klutsis' posters; *Molodezh na samolet!* (Youth to the Aeroplanes) (1934) in *Dream Factory Communism: The Visual Culture of the Stalin Era*, ed. by Boris Groys and Max Hollein (Frankfurt: Hatje Cantz, 2003), p. 61; and *Long Live Our Happy Socialist Motherland* (Da zdravstvuet nasha schastlivaia sotsialisticheskaia Rodina) (1935), in Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*, fig. 4.13.

### **Rhythms of Modernity and Ethnicity**

When the aeroplane bursts onto the screen, moving from left to right at great speed, it is preceded by villagers who are galloping alongside it on black horses. At the same time there is a tremendous climax in the music, which has been building from a soft pulse, representing the distance of the aeroplane, to a huge crescendo of rhythms as it lands. The music combines sounds, melodies, and instrumentation which were previously associated with either the city (the *sharmanka*), or the Altai (the shaman's drums, wind instruments, and whistles, and the Altai shepherd's singing and stringed instrument). In the sequence when Kuz'mina arrives in the Altai, we see a shepherd on a pony singing a doleful ballad about the importance of the sheep to the community, and mourning the idea of their loss. Here, at the end of the film, as the aeroplane arrives, he is seen playing with joyous fury. As the aeroplane rushes forwards the music comes to a loud crescendo, the rhythms of which stand in for the aeroplane's motor, and the sound of galloping horses at one and the same time. The arrival of the aeroplane is symbolic of the arrival of higher Soviet justice, and the shepherd knows his sheep will remain with the village. The aural transformation, from a doleful shepherd's ballad to the exciting pulsing rhythms and tempo accompanying the arrival of the aeroplane, accentuates the idea of transformation in the lives of the villagers which the aeroplane heralds.

Embedded in the juxtaposition of lesser regional technology with the new Soviet technology is the idea of Soviet domination from the centre, and superiority of Soviet-ness over ethnic culture.<sup>154</sup> But here, the sound scape expresses excitement and victory, and, at the same time aurally presents an idea of unity in terms of a new harmony of cultures. The striking parallelism of the older technology of the horse and the modern technology of the aeroplane as they each move into frame, in combination with the dynamic harmonics created by a mixture of urban and ethnic sounds and music, organically communicates that an energised spirit is shared by Russian and ethnic peoples. In this film the aeroplane's arrival and landing thus symbolically unifies a sense of highest humanitarian ethnic, and Soviet values.

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<sup>154</sup> Palmer, 'Peasants into Pilots', pp. 1-26. He also sets out the paradigmatic use of the idea of rescue from the centre in Soviet film from the time of Trotskii's campaigns to build an air fleet in 1923, and into the 1930s, in 'Red Wings on the Silver Screen', pp. 169-211.

### Stalin's Aviation and Flight of a Soul

When the aeroplane comes to a stop there is an intertitle which asks; 'What can the dead-bird do?' (Chto mozhnet sdelat' mertvaia ptitsa?) Etymologically the root word of *mertvaia* (*smert'*) signifies death. There is a subliminal association through the feminine gender of the Russian word for bird, *ptitsa* and Kuz'mina. But the emphasis here is not death, it is rescue. We see Kuz'mina loaded over the wing into the aeroplane with the help of two pilots. There is a visual and aural harmony between the energised music and the bright sunlight on the kulchug metal, and on Kuz'mina's face, which is the only visible part of her, the rest is wrapped in furs. We see three edits of the aeroplane's motor and propeller in medium angle. The first shows a blur of rotations from the perspective of the wing, as if we are part of the aircraft, ready to use the motor's energy and move forwards over the mountains. Visually, within the film-frame, the engine is equal in size to the mountains over which the aircraft must fly. There is a sense of the power of the motor, of imminent take-off and metaphorically of Kuz'mina and/or her spirit about to soar. The second edit is an external point of view which focuses towards the front of the aircraft. We see the movement of light reflecting off the propeller as the frame is cut at an angle by the black silhouette of the up-turned engine and the wing. The next frame is a closer angle which conveys the intensity of the movement of the propeller with a line of light which forms across the rapid rotations of shiny black metal. It is as if energy itself is made visible.

These frames are an exceptional visualisation of an engine propeller in Soviet film. They complete the diegetic element which requires a take-off. Furthermore, Andrei Moskvin's cinematography and Dmitrii Shostakovich's music create a sense of intense excitement and liberation, which links to the film's thematic dichotomy of activity and caring versus sleep and bourgeois values. The film begins with Kuz'mina waking. Later she awakens the corrupt Chairman to ask for help against the Kulak Bai. He is surrounded by the same domestic trappings which had been so attractive to Kuz'mina before she arrived in the Altai. In contrast to the images of the slothful chairman, and the corruption he represents, the visuals of the aeroplane's motor communicate the very essence of dynamism (associated with women's moral feeling); and of rescue by the state. This dynamism is the antithesis of the idea of sleeping in the film, and is symbolic of the waking of Kuz'mina's consciousness.



### **Aeroplane; Lifeless Bird**

There is an edit to the Altai musician on his horse in a tighter focus. His whole body is angled upwards. He is playing furiously. The next intertitle provides an answer to the question of what an aeroplane can do: 'The dead bird will give life to man' (Mertvaia ptitsa dast zhizn' cheloveku.) We then see the wing of the aeroplane with the door secured, and people milling around Kuz'mina's window. We see her inside the cabin, and then an extraordinary sequence of edits, which show an angled underview of the aeroplane's motor as a black silhouette with only the beginning of the wings extending out from the fuselage. The movement of the propeller is up and centre screen. It is so fast that it registers only like a horizontal bolt of lightning. There is then a sequence of eight edits between the dynamic image of the propeller and Kuz'mina as she smiles a farewell from inside the aeroplane, framed by its square window. The edits to the engine-and-propeller are very rapid, split-seconds only. The reflection of light on the propeller blades now registers as vertical flashing across the screen.<sup>155</sup> The edits are so rapid that the light almost seems to overlay the image of Kuz'mina. It is an extraordinary visualisation of transformation which likens the forging of a person to the 'tempering of steel'.

Natalia Kozlova, in her work on Soviet diarists of the 1930s, 'The Diary as Initiation and Rebirth', reveals that in a period when political indoctrination transformed all language, and its means of communication, internal voicing itself was also often expressed in the language of ideology.<sup>156</sup> In this respect, she found that diarists who recorded an intensely traumatic emotional personal event in their lives would describe it in the language of officialdom. Or they would use an official event, and its associative *entuziazm*, as a metaphoric equivalent in order to express, and at the same-time 'mask', the fact of deep, personal feelings. In *Odna*, the language and

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<sup>155</sup> Philip Cavendish beautifully describes the use of flashing effects as a means of communicating a de-stabilized mind, or 'disturbed consciousness', and dream states of the main protagonist in films of the avant garde which draw on Expressionist tradition in Cavendish, *Soviet Mainstream Cinematography*, pp. 12-14, 57-59, 91 and 96.

<sup>156</sup> Natalia Kozlova, 'The Diary as Initiation and Rebirth: Reading Everyday Documents of the Early Soviet Period', in *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, ed. by Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 282-99 (p. 285).

semiotics of officialdom can be seen to stand in for personal voicing. The circumstances leading to the need for an aerial ambulance, and the aural, and visual, intensity of the final aviation sequence correspond to a description of the process of transformation from peasant into Soviet citizen by one of Kozlova's diarists who described it as a 'painful purifying process' 'liudechistka'. But its visual power is so strong that it reads existentially as a moment of transformation.

If the feminine word signifying the aeroplane in the intertitle, *ptitsa*, is meant to be identified with Kuz'mina, the description 'dead bird' may be a metaphorical description of her fate. Kuz'mina's soul thus rises emblematically with the flight of the aeroplane even as her body is loaded inside. On one level, the representation of the aeroplane as a 'mertvaia ptitsa' fits the official mythology of rescue from the centre which symbolises the miraculous moral, and scientific, advances of Soviet socialism. On another, for the villagers, the notion of a 'dead bird' may simply be the closest they can come to a description of aviation technology which they are seeing for the first time. But *mertvaia ptitsa* can be read as a purposeful non-identification of the heroine with a common metaphoric phrase for the aeroplane; steel bird (*stal'naia ptitsa*). In the 1930s, symbolically the aeroplane represented the dynamism of building Socialism in One Country, and the phrase; *stal'naia ptitsa* morphologically identifies the aeroplane with Stalin himself through the common root word steel (*stal'*). With its attendant connotation of transformation of Soviet Man through a process likened to tempering steel, *stal'naia ptitsa* signifies the resulting perfection of the dialectical processes of history, and the 'tempering of Kuz'mina'. In its symbolism the idea of the miracle of flight and, metonymically, the miracle of the building of socialism are fused.

As the popular song 'Stal'naia eskadrii'ia' (1929) suggests (and Katerina Clark explains), *Stal'naia ptitsa* signifies a contemporary equivalent of the steed of a *bogatyir'* which supports the military hero in war, and which represents strength brought from the centre to assist in battles to protect the Motherland.<sup>157</sup> But the directors have not used this metaphor. Rather than the idea of a steel, aerial-steed, here it is the idea of a wounded, dying bird which is foregrounded. This communicates another trope of the Stalinist era, that of 'wounded-ness' as means of demonstrating heroism through the 'overcoming' of self, equal to an overcoming of the elements. It also links to the notion

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<sup>157</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 137-38.

of the mutilated body as a prerequisite sacrifice of the New Soviet Man.<sup>158</sup> Here the idea of the wounded bird, or dead bird; *mertvaia ptitsa*, speaks to multiple cultural spheres and serves ambivalent expressive functions. The notion of a dead bird and the aeroplane's take-off speaks to the mythology of the phoenix. The story of the bird that rises from its own ashes introduces an idea of rebirth and regeneration into the take-off of the aeroplane.

### **Miracle of Technology**

The rhetorical function that the aeroplane serves is used to comment on the nature of shifts in society towards inauthentic values. After her arrival in Siberia, Kuz'mina rehearses a lesson for her Altai students. As she looks about the bare, wooden school house, instead of becoming dominated by the limitations, and alien-ness, of her new environment, she takes heart at the sight of young children playing, and of a young colt suckling, and she addresses her imaginary students: 'Segodnia detei my govorim o chudesakh tekhniki'. There is then a dramatic aural, and visual, edit to a shaman chanting, and beating a drum, as part of a ritual healing dance around a sick baby, and its mother. On one level, the aeroplane, is a symbol of 'the miracle of technology' (*chudesa tekhniki*), about which Kuz'mina wanted to teach the local children. It stands in symbolic opposition to the superstitious miracle of faith demonstrated in ethnic medicine. This faith is seen in action during the film's use of documentary footage of a shaman's healing ritual over the sick child. This ritual is amongst the first impressions Kuz'mina has when she arrives and settles into the village. The authentic nature of the villagers' life is communicated and implied by the decision to use documentary footage in its depiction. Paradigmatically, the superstitious traditions of the village, and the bare classroom in which she finds herself, are in contrast to the notion of the 'wonderful furniture' (*chudesaia mebel'*) which, at the beginning of the film, is a synecdoche of the 'good life' (*khoroishaia zhizn'*) which Kuz'mina looked forward to in Leningrad with her fiancée prior to being posted to the Altai. By foregrounding 'miracles' and its root word miracle (*chudo*), the film paradigmatically links together a pervading attitude to science, 'miracle of technology' (*chudo tekhniki*) with its

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<sup>158</sup> Lilya Kaganovsky, 'How the Soviet Man was (Un)Made', *Slavic Review*, 63, 3 (2004), 577-96.

quotidian opposite, a sense of the good life (which is carried in the synecdoche; *chudesnaia mebel'*).

The idea of the 'technological miracle' is also a metaphor for unified plans in agriculture, industry and culture. Thus Kuz'mina's pedagogic dreams are linked to the expectations of miraculous achievements which were the promise of the Five-Year Plans, and of the Cultural Revolution. But what is also communicated is a banalizing effect of contemporary jargon. Kozintsev says:

Мы не принадлежали с тем, кто видел реальность как сияние улыбок, песни и пляски, легкую и прямую дорогу к счастью. Как раз такой способ видеть жизнь мы и попробовали пародировать в начале фильма.<sup>159</sup>

The film favourably contrasts the authentic documentary footage of a superstitious rite (which effects a miracle and cures a child) with clichéd notions of Soviet 'miracles'. In this way, it subtly alerts the audience to what Kozintsev perceives as the vacuity of those contemporary values which were centred on the miraculous.

### ***Odna za vsekh***

When Kuz'mina seeks the chairman's help on behalf of the children whom Kulak Bai has taken from class in order to tend the flocks in the dead of winter, Kuz'mina finds the Chairman asleep. So she speaks to his wife. But echoing Kuz'mina's: 'kakoe mne delo do vashikh baranov', the Chairman's wife says 'kakoe mne delo do vashikh detei?' The chairman's wife passively suffers in fear of her husband, and mirrors Kuz'mina's earlier isolating, and indifferent attitude. The wife's conventionally passive feminine dynamic is negatively coded. Visually, echoing the effect of the lines of washing in Liudmilla's basement flat in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, the Chairman's wife in *Odna* is symbolically tied by ropes (from which a cradle is suspended) which vertically cross the screen. The idea of a tantalizing bourgeois private life, which Kuz'mina had dreamt of at the beginning of *Odna*, is paralleled in the images of *meshchanstvo* in Liudmilla's home in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, and also in the corrupt Chairman's home-life in *Odna*.

By rejecting the values of the domestic oppression in the corrupt Chairman's world, Kuz'mina unconsciously transforms her own sensibilities. And the person who, at her arrival in the Altai, thought 'what are your sheep to me?' is transformed at the

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<sup>159</sup> Kozintsev, 'Odna', p. 158.

end into someone who has bonded with the villagers and risked her life to safe-guard their livelihood. The aeroplane's arrival at the end of the film is predicated on the transformation of Kuz'mina's naïve indifference into care personified. She becomes the embodiment, not of alone-ness (*Odna*), but of 'odin za vsekh', which is, according to Kozintsev, the central theme of this film. Morally, the film suggests that it is in recognition of this that an aeroplane is sent by the government.

### **Gaining Wings**

The sequence in which Kuz'mina imagines herself inculcating the values of Soviet scientific miracles into her new students also shows a sincere passion for teaching, and a sense of her metaphorical gaining wings (*chuvstvo poleta*). She is filled with inspiration and her youth lifts her above the difficulties of her material surroundings. She feels as if anything is possible. She looks at the portrait of her fiancé and her love for him is entwined with this feeling. This mixture of feelings finds physical expression in her Soviet callisthenics in which her arms move up, down and forwards in a touchingly comic, and unintentional, echo of wings. This choreography conflates a sense of what Kozintsev calls 'siianie ulybok' of Soviet utopian consciousness with a genuine youthful hopefulness. The communication of a 'radiant smile' as *zeitgeist* based on *faux* values and ideologically coded and technological miracles within the country, like Kuz'mina's personal, innocent hopes, are part of a matrix of naïveté. Her personal understanding grows while she is amongst the people of the Altai, and at the end, the aeroplane with its human cargo is no longer a symbol of the miracle of technological progress alone. Kuz'mina's transformation of consciousness is effected both ideologically and on a personal level. This is underscored when we see Kuz'mina through the window of the aircraft, and an intertitle gives the reluctant traveller's parting words: 'Skoro ia vernus''.

Ideologically she has come to collective-consciousness by taking up her teaching post in the Altai. On a personal level, her feelings about the people she has come to teach have changed. The sense of interiority and enclosed-ness within the cabin of the aircraft, and the idea of her exit on return, communicate an idea of both social and personal rebirth. The metaphor of the 'dead bird' which 'will give life' is important diegetically in that the miraculous speed of the aeroplane is the only means to transport Kuz'mina to hospital in time to save her life. Ideologically, it represents the idea of a caring Soviet state which also gives birth to a new people, and to a new way

of life. But Kuz'mina has failed in her naïve desire to pass on her Soviet pedagogic curriculum.<sup>160</sup> In the end, it is not in order to build a utopia that Kuz'mina will return, but to come back to the people of the village whose lives have become as important to her as her own.

### **Transcendent White Wings**

In the final frames we see the aeroplane take-off. The aeroplane's wings stretch across the screen in shades of white as it flies towards the camera, and out of the screen, over the now raised head of the white totemic horse skin. At the beginning of the film, white underscored the idea of Kuz'mina's innocence. The 'flight' (polet) (as Kozintsev refers to it) of the tram bedecked in white flowers through the streets of Leningrad near the start of the film, is associated with a false sense of the 'good life (khoroshaia zhizn')'. The tram fills the screen at an angle and its movement in relation to the buildings behind creates the effect of floating without reference to horizon. The tram's flight adds a sense of intoxication to the spectrum of inauthentic values which are signalled by the colour white. White china is a metonym of bourgeois values. A white totem horse-skin represents ethnic superstition. And white winter landscapes are harshly beautiful in natural terms, but are linked to forces of oppression and death. At the end of the film, the negative coding of white is reversed. The aeroplane's white wings cross the white snow-scape, and fill the white sky at the top of the screen. The aeroplane flies over the upturned head of the white horse-skin which is also directed towards the sky. The moment communicates a parallelism between the aeroplane and the totemic horse. And although the flight may communicate a sense of victory of Soviet values over ethnic values (and medicine), the director's dominant communication is of a transformation of an ideological 'schema' into a moment of personal transcendence for the heroine. Furthermore, it could be argued that, by means of the continuity in the upward trajectory of the horses head and the aeroplane, the director is suggesting a dialectical dynamic between local religious beliefs, and Soviet ideology, or he may subtly be suggesting that the old beliefs are nevertheless seeing off the new.

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<sup>160</sup> Julian Graffy, 'In the Hinterland: Evolving Cinematic Images of Life in the Russian Provinces' (hereafter: Graffy, 'In the Hinterland'), paper presented at 'Russia on Screen: Identity and Appropriation', Conference, Queen Mary College, London University, 10 May 2008.

### **White air; Dematerialization**

Kuz'mina's physical transformation from wearing a demurely-attractive, white dress at the beginning of the film, then a plain work-dress and jumper, and felt boots, as an Altai teacher, to finally becoming just an outward-looking face from the cabin of the aircraft, suggests a stripping away of all materiality, and of her human physicality. Instead of a sense of gaining wings through pedagogic aspirations which lift her spirits above the inhospitable world in which she finds herself when she first arrives, by means of the intensity of music and of flashing, reflected light, her flight is a communication of her complete de-materialization, spiritualization, and transcendence of all physiology, sickness and death. As in *Zemlia*, on one level, the aeroplane/ 'mertvaia ptitsa' echoes a traditional role of bird symbolism as representing a departing soul as it leaves the body after death. The film-makers subtly leave open the question of whether Kuz'mina actually dies. They also leave open the question of whether she will return. But whether she dies, or is rescued, her torturous journey, and final flight, marks her transition from Soviet teacher to a secular Soviet saint.

The model of the hagiographic transformation of Kuz'mina looks forward to the self-sacrificing Soviet partisan women of films of the Great Patriotic War, such as Fridrikh Ermler's *Ona zashchishchaet Rodinu*, (She Defends the Motherland, Tsentral'naia Ob"edinennaia kinostudiia, Alma Ata, 1943) Mark Donskoi's *Raduga*, (Rainbow, Kievskaiia studiia khudozhestvennaia fil'mov, 1943), *Zoia*, (Zoia, Soiuzdetfil'm, 1944). In these partisan films, as in *Odna*, the heroine's ability to sacrifice, (and, where necessary, kill), stems from, or is communicated through, the prism of love of children, and children in turn function as symbols of vulnerability and eternal hope. Kuz'mina's image 'in felt boots' ('v valenkakh'), 'in a grand-mother's dress' ('bab'em platke'), and her simply pulled back hair, also pre-echoes the imaging of partisan heroines of these films. But in these war-year films, the Soviet aeroplanes, and the skies in which they are pictured, function as un-ambivalent ideological signifiers. They communicate connectivity to, and rescue from, the centre; victory and Soviet spiritualization.

The last sequence of *Odna*, in which aviation imagery is used, was considered too abstract ('otvlechennoi') and 'paradigmatic' ('skhematiceskoi') by Kozintsev,<sup>161</sup> at the same time, the film was officially reproached for its predilection for gloomy

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<sup>161</sup> Kozintsev, 'Odna', p. 156.

dramatics ('uprekli v mrachnosti, pristrastii k dramatismu'),<sup>162</sup> and for its formalism (za proizvlennyi v s"emkakh formalizm).<sup>163</sup> But Kozintsev achieves his desired 'spirituality' ('odukhotvorennost') by means of the power of the cinematography, which serves to communicate the 'authenticity' ('podlinnost') of 'man' (cheloveka).<sup>164</sup> Kozintsev and Trauberg's, and their cinematographer, Moskvina's cinematographic use of the aeroplane creates an image of a hagiographic, transformation of feminine consciousness, not for its ideological message, but to communicate 'existentially'.<sup>165</sup> It is Kuz'mina's example of courage, empathy, kindness and care which inspires the rebellion of the Altai women. Moreover, Kuz'mina's naïve dream of teaching the miracles of technology to her students is replaced by the painful reality of nearly sacrificing her life for them. This 'hybrid' documentary and artistic film contrasts the *faux*-flight of the tram through the streets of Leningrad early in the film, and the actual aircraft which arrives in documentary fashion in the Altai. Similarly, authentic miracles of technology are evidenced by the sophisticated use of A. F. Shorin's early sound recording system, the technology of the aircraft, and the existence of an air-ambulance service, all of which were crucial to the making of the film. Flight technology is a fact, and the authentic miracle is a lone individual's rescue by the state.

It is remarkable is that the directors portray the creative, active dynamism of women in a way which obliquely realises the film-makers' creative freedom. Trauberg may have felt that, out of necessity, their film was essentially untruthful ('ne pravdiva po suchchestvu'),<sup>166</sup> and that their intentions were dwarfed by its ideological semiotics. And there is certainly an undeniable communication of ideological exhilaration and

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>165</sup> Graffy, 'In the Hinterland'.

<sup>166</sup> Neia Zorkova cites Trauberg, who says 'But what's to be done? We wanted to write, wanted to produce, wanted to work. And we made this kind of film. A film which was not truthful in essence' (No chto delat'? My khoteli pisat', khoteli stavit', khoteli rabotat'. I my postavili takuiu kartinu. Kartinu, kotorai ne pravdiva po sushchestvu). See her "'Odna" na perekrestakh', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 74 (2005) <<http://www.kinozapiski.ru/ru/print/sendvalues/450/>> [accessed 14 June 2014].



victory in the last aviation sequence. The aeroplane is a sign of Kuz'mina's transformation from alone-ness to being considered one of the villagers and part of the wider Soviet collective. It follows that *Odna* can be read as a proto-typical coming to consciousness film, its heroine a paradigm of female transformation. It can also be read as an early 1930s rescue from the centre drama, which asserts the moral superiority of the Party's Soviet socialism over ethnic cultures of the regions. And it can be read as a typical power-from-the-centre, and domination of the peripheries film. But *Odna* is not called *We* (My). Looked at from a diachronic perspective, the sequence of aviation in this film expresses not only the ideological victory of Soviet construction and rescue (the ideological 'schema'), but also, several planes of discourse.

These planes of discourse include the communication of the symbolic 'weight' of the aeroplane's metaphoric motor which 'grinds' people up, and pulls them inexorably in the direction of the state. The final flight is also said to be that of a 'dead bird', not a 'steel bird', or an 'aeroplane', or a 'miracle of technology'. Like the symbolism of the Phoenix, the aeroplane signals the eternal and re-generational in man. And, already, in the early 1930s, there is a sense of humour underscoring the notion of *chudesa tekhniki*, of which the aeroplane is a symbolic zenith. Thus aviation and flight are multivalent signifiers, and aviation, flight and ornithic semiotics function both as ideological meta-language, and as a means by which the directors achieve a personal voicing. The unique combination of aural and visual imaging of flight and aviation (from the trolleybus, to aircraft, to the upwards trajectory of the totem horse-head) reveals what is essential to the directors concerning the spirit of their heroine, the Altai community and Soviet values of the early 1930s. The director's specific use of flight and aviation points up what is truly miraculous and what only has the appearance of being miraculous. In this they reveal their own pursuit of truth in a way which corresponds to a platonic sense of a human soul that has wings.

In the first chapter it was shown how flight and aviation communicated on the level of allegory and psychology. And that they are a means by which the public and the private spheres can be shown to be separate and in opposition. In this chapter we have seen how flight and aviation semiotics entwine the relationship between the state and the individual more closely in terms of the subjects on screen. And, as a significant form, these elements communicate messages on art and authenticity and on the nature of communication itself. The following chapter begins by looking at aviation and flight in air-parade films. It shows how aviation and flight serve a rhetorical function and

become an ideological sign, and as well as a signal. The chapter then shows how rhetorical voicing travels into fiction film. It examines the differences in the levels of messaging and voicing in fiction and feature films and reveals the importance of aviation and flight to Soviet identity and to myth-creation.

### Chapter Three: Air Parades: Symbolic and Rhetorical Transformations

Документальные фильм активен и революцион по самой природе. Он не может не быть проповедническим искусством. Скажу больше – идеология, тенденция лежат в самой основе документального кино.<sup>1</sup>

В тридцатые годы страна бурно развивалась, меняла свое лицо, осваивались новые районы, каждый день отмечался новыми рекордами. Событий было очень много, и мы, хроникеры, не сидели без дела.<sup>2</sup>

The creative documentary, *Bogatyri Rodiny* (Knights of the Motherland) (Soyuzkinozhroniki, 1937), directed by Leonid Varlamov (1907-1962) and Fedor Kiselev (1905-1972), was made in the year of the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, and it is a cinematographic treatment of the annual air parade at Tushino airfield (located north of Moscow). Aviation Day was variously called: *Den' vozdushnogo flota*, *Den' aviatsii*, *Den' vozdushnykh sil* (and in post-Soviet times it is also called *aeroshou v chest' vozdushnykh sil*). It was a holiday which was dedicated to the nation's aviation and air force, and was celebrated in parade displays of Soviet aeronautic technology. And, although air displays were part of Russian culture since before the Revolution, the first official Aviation Day was in 1933. Sheila Fitzpatrick describes air spectacles, along with football and auto races, as part of the

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<sup>1</sup> Sergei Drobashenko, 'Roman Karmen: Put' v iskusstve', in *Roman Karmen v vospominaniakh sovremenikov*, ed. by A. L. Vinogradova (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1983), pp. 67-80 (p. 67).

<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Oshurkov, 'Roman Karmen, kakim ia ego znal', in *ibid.*, pp. 120-25 (p. 122).

‘entertainments’ available to people in the Soviet Union in the thirties.<sup>3</sup> The importance of the air parade for the youth at this time is reflected in the words of the pilot, engineer and son of Anastas Mikoian, Stepan Mikoian, who recalled that, ‘All those events, both peaceful and wartime, contributed to the young people’s interest in aviation. One of the most popular spectacles of the time, and one of my most exciting childhood memories, was the annual air show that took place every 18 of August at Tushino airfield to the north of Moscow.’<sup>4</sup> The air parades are amongst those national festivals which were intended, in part, to replace those of the Christian calendar, and they were dedicated to the valorisation of the notion of ‘military preparedness’. (This is reflected in the pantheon of holidays created in the Stalin period, which included Aviation Day, Border Guard Day, Navy Day, Red Army Day and the All-Union Physical Culturist Day).<sup>5</sup> The air-parade films (like the holiday ritual itself) canonize (or create a text of) Aviation Day which can be ‘re-contextualized’ (or re-centred) and repeated across the country. In this way, the images of the pilots and aircraft and their moral and ideological symbolism function as propaganda but in a more neutral sense than the Western usage of the word. The word propaganda derives from *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), which was created in 1622 as a means for the Vatican to challenge the ideas of the Protestant reformation through proselytising the Catholic faith. Propaganda broadly grew to mean ‘the dissemination of political beliefs’.<sup>6</sup>

The tenets of Socialist Realism were ideas which had gestated in discussion in the early thirties. They required that art show life in its revolutionary movement

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<sup>3</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930* (hereafter: *Everyday Stalinism*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 93-95 (p. 94).

<sup>4</sup> Stepan Mikoian, *Stepan Anastasovich Mikoian, Memoir of Military Test Flying and Life with the Kremlin’s Elite*, trans. by Aschen Mikoian (Shrewsbury: Airlife, 1999), p. 48.

<sup>5</sup> Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades: Celebrations in the Time of Stalin* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, ‘Propaganda in the Communist State’, pp. 47-103. Haynes succinctly highlights the differences in reception of Soviet film as socially manipulative hierarchical propaganda within the context of more positive reception within Soviet society. John Haynes, *New Soviet Man, Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (hereafter: *New Soviet Man*) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 2, 4-5, and 8-10.

towards socialism, and required that it give ideology a human quality. Socialist-Realist ideology and style was evidenced in literature prior to its formulation at the First Writers' Conference in August 1934.<sup>7</sup> Anatolii Lunacharskii, People's Commissar of Enlightenment from 1917 to 1929, said in 1933 that it was the duty of the Socialist-Realist warrior to 'stylise reality in its artistic representation with the aim of re-creating it in practice.' By this it was clear that the creative working of reality on the screen was indeed to be a form of dream-reality that would come to be. He famously said in the same article that a Socialist Realist 'does not accept reality as it really is. He accepts it as it will be.'<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in a comparison of the expressive power of Soviet film and Hollywood's (specifically Griffith's) approach to cinema, Eizenshtein (writing in 1942) says that 'We and our epoch are acutely ideological and intellectual and could not fail to see that a shot had, first and foremost, the properties of an *ideological cipher* (his italics), could not fail to detect in the juxtaposition of the shots the emergence of a new, qualitative element, a new image, a new concept.'<sup>9</sup> *Bogatyri Rodiny* and several short air-parade newsreels which were filmed between 1935 and 1940 are helpful in demonstrating the transformation of aviation phenomena into ideological cipher, and they provide a basis in this chapter for showing how the same semiotics are used ambivalently, as Stalinist myth creation and as autonomous expressive units, and how they are departed from (if at all) in fiction and other creative documentary film.

The Aviation Day parade films drawn upon are: *Den' aviatsii* (Soiuz kinokhroniki, 1935) (No director is given), Rafail Gikov's *Moskva v Tushino: Prazdnik Stalinskikh sokolov* (Moskovskaia studiia kinokhroniki, 1938) (In future this film will be referred to as *Prazdnik stalinskikh sokolov*)<sup>10</sup>, Irina Setkina's (also known as Setkina-Nesterova, and referred to in the titles as one of the two 'montage directors') *Moskva v Tushino, 18 avgusta 1939: Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (Moskovskaia studiia kinokhroniki, 1939) (henceforth this film will be referred to as *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* 1939), the Latvian director, Samuil Bubrik's, *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii*:

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<sup>7</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> Anatoli Lunacharskii, 'Synopsis of a Report on the Tasks of Dramaturgy', in *The Film Factory*, ed. by Christie and Taylor, p. 327.

<sup>9</sup> 'Dickens, Griffith and Ourselves', in S. M. Eisenstein, *Selected Works*, 4 vols, ed. by Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1996), III (*Writings 1934-1947*), pp. 225-33 (p. 231).

<sup>10</sup> Gikov also directed the film *Vozdushnyi parad* (1934).

*Moskva v Tushino 18 avgusta 1940*, (Sentral'naia studiiia kinokhroniki, 1940) (henceforth this film will be referred to as *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1940)).<sup>11</sup>

As the names of the studios that made these films suggest, the genre of these films is *khronika*. The function of film chronicle, as one Soviet encyclopaedia says, is to cinematographically convey information about actual events and also up-to-the-minute facts about what is happening in the world.<sup>12</sup> According to the same entry, unlike documentary film, which looks at these facts in their 'totality', film chronicle is limited in the scope of 'its information and ascertainment of facts' and employs the use of 'short commentary'.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this entry points to cinematographic means as the primary source for communicating point of view (and by the same token ideology) in its definition of film chronicle. By manipulating film (for instance by means of editing) or composition of the frames, and by means of the details recorded by the cameraman, film chronicle conveys the attitude of the artist/journalist to the material. Moreover, in conversation with Lunacharskii, Lenin is reported to have said that for 'the production of new films, imbued with communist ideas which reflect Soviet reality, you have to start with the newsreel' (*proizvodstvo novykh fil'mov, proniknutykh kommunisticheskimi ideiami, otrazhaiushchikh sovetskuiu deistvitel'nost', nado nachat' s khroniki*).<sup>14</sup>

The Soviet film historian, Nikolai Lebedev differentiates 'bourgeois' (and pre-revolutionary) newsreel, such as Pathé, from its Soviet counterpart by its '*vtorostepennye fakty*'. He says that, by contrast to Pathé, Soviet film-chronicle is said

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<sup>11</sup> These films are released on video by Studiiia Kryl'ia Rossii as: *Aviaparad 30e, Prazdniki stalinskikh sokolov* (2001), *Aviaparad 1937, Bogatyri Rodiny* (2002). I also touch on corresponding films taken from: *Aviaparad 1951, Den' vozdushnogo flota* (2001), *Aviaparad 1952, Den' vozdushnogo flota* (2002). I am extremely grateful to Julian Graffy for bringing these films to my attention.

<sup>12</sup> The use of a Soviet encyclopaedia is of interest as a source because it unequivocally represents a government-approved interpretation of the facts of the world, which is also directed towards the education of the Soviet public. In this way, its formulations contribute to an understanding of official Soviet self-perception.

<sup>13</sup> 'Khronika v kino', *Kino slovar'*, ed. by S. I. Iutkevich, 2 vols, (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo. Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1970), II, pp. 837-8.

<sup>14</sup> N.A. Lebedev, 'Kinokhroniki' in *Ocherk istorii kino SSSR: Nemoie kino (1918-1934)* (hereafter: *Ocherk istorii kino*), (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1965), p. 108-16.

to capture important political events, the ‘facts’ about cultural and agricultural events, military action at the front and some portraits of ‘every-day’ life, and it is seen to be differentiated from its Western counterparts by the importance of its ‘social’ content.<sup>15</sup> The perception is that it is precisely the ideology which it signifies that lifts the second rate military parade into something worthy of note.

Although the directors or camera operators of the short chronicle films of Aviation Day parades are not well known in the West, several of them have earned honours. Kiselev and Setkina became Honoured Artists of the Soviet Union. Varlamov (together with Kopolin) won an Oscar for the ‘perhaps most effective’ documentary film of the Second World War, *Razгром nemetskikh voisk pod Moskvoy* (The Defeat of the German Armies Outside Moscow) (1942).<sup>16</sup> Camera operator Nikolai Vikherev is listed for *Den' aviatsii* and was also one of the aerial photographers of Mikhail Kalatozov's *Muzhestvo* (Courage) (Lenfil'm, 1939).<sup>17</sup> Members of the chronicle film studios included great directors and/or camera operators of ‘played’ and documentary film such as Roman Karmen, Grigorii Aleksandrov, Iulii Raizman, Esfir' Shub, and Dziga Vertov.<sup>18</sup>

Film historian Peter Kenez points out that the borders between documentary and played film were often elided.<sup>19</sup> And Lebedev notes the influence of chronicle tradition in the works of Sergei and Grigorii Vasil'ev and Aleksandr Dovzhenko.<sup>20</sup> Excerpts of parachuting lend a moment of authenticity to Boris Barnet's drama of the ‘adventure film’, *Podvig razvedchika* (A Scout's Feat) (Kievskaiia kinostudiia, 1947);<sup>21</sup> and the importance of capturing life, and of a ‘semi-documentary’ approach in Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna*, has been shown in Chapter Two. It could be argued that much of Soviet played film owes its traditions to the chronicle studios, and to pre-revolutionary approaches, which combined documentary elements with narrative film (such as

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Kenez, ‘Films of the Second World War’, in *The Red Screen*, pp. 148-71 (p. 152). *Kino Entsiklopedicheskie slovar'*, p. 66; and *Kino slovar'*, I, p. 66.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Dopolneniia’, *Kino slovar'*, II, p. 1067.

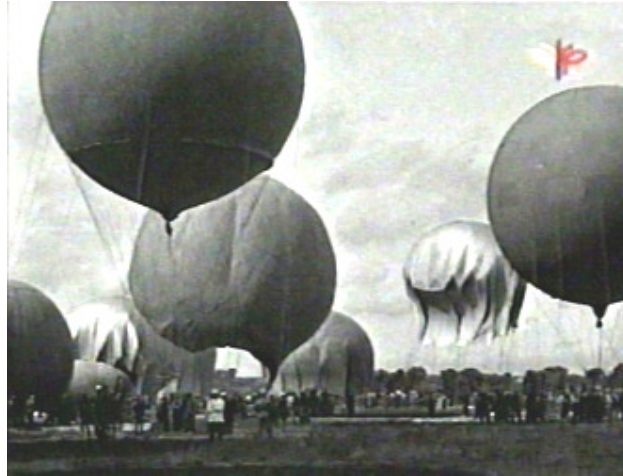
<sup>18</sup> *Kino entsiklopedicheskie slovar'*, pp. 859-61.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Films of the Second World War’, p. 150.

<sup>20</sup> Lebedev, *Ocherk istorii kino*, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Philip Cavendish for this insight.

Protazanov's *Sorok pervyi* and Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna*). All of the expressive functions of Aviation-Day chronicle films and of *Bogatyri Rodiny* serve an ideological message. Even within this construct, there are many moments of authenticity which simply exist outside the ideological message. This is seen at the beginning of *Den' aviatsii* when the affect of seeing air-balloons as they are being prepared to lift posters of leaders into the air is arguably as great as the political iconicity.



**Figure 12: Beyond iconicity *Den' aviatsii*, 1935**





In *Bogatyri Rodiny* we see the same five pilots ‘otvazhnaia piatorka istrebitelei’, swimming in the river at the beginning as they prepare for the Air Parade and near the end flying in their five ‘red’ fighter aeroplanes, performing aerial stunts and formations. Inserted between these two points are several cinematographic syntagmas, the action of which occurs in a ‘hiatus’ in time and space between the setting off and making ready for the parade at Tushino and its actual performance (at the end of the film). Like Bakhtin’s sense of adventure time, the air parade (on the airfield and on the screen) creates a ‘ritual’ time, that is, there is a stepping outside of the ordinary flow of time. In this ‘break’ in time the ‘hero is tested’, and then normal time and the plot resumes.

Christian Metz describes bracket syntagmas (‘autonomous segments composed of several shots’) as a sequence of brief scenes representing occurrences ‘as typical samples of a same order of reality without in any way locating them in relation to each other in order to emphasize their presumed kinship within a category of facts’.<sup>22</sup> *Bogatyri Rodiny* divides into two broad sub-structuring forms of ‘kinship’: the first sequences of syntagmas demonstrate actions which symbolise developing Soviet collective identity (activities promoted by Osoaviakhim), and the second illustrate the services performed by Soviet aviation (civil aviation and *Voенno-vozdushnye sily SSSR*). The syntagmas are loosely structured along the following themes: ‘Typical’

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<sup>22</sup> Christian Metz, ‘From *Film Language*: Some Points in the Semiotics of the Cinema’, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, pp. 68-89 (p. 84).

(obychnyi) flights which show civil aviation bringing culture (kul'turnost') and closer ties to the all the peoples of the Soviet Union. 'Rescuing' flights show aviation within the USSR providing assistance 'na pomoshch'" and ambulance services 'sanitarnaia aviatsiia', and defence of Abyssinia and Spain. 'Heroic flights' brings the idea of rescue to a climax in the *epic* of the Cheliuskin. *Bogatyri Rodiny* then shows further heroic victories achieved by the USSR 'for humanity' by showing the Ivan Papanin (1894-1986) scientific expedition to the North Pole and Valerii Chkalov's world-record-breaking flight over the arctic from Moscow to Vancouver, Washington, USA. In the narrative of Aviation Day, the five pilots who are shown at the beginning of the film as they prepare for the day, are shown performing their aerobatics (vysshii pilotazh and fokusy) including death loops (mertvaia petlia) on the airfield.

For the linguist Valentin Voloshinov, any material phenomenon, that is, 'any item of nature, technology, or consumption', can become a sign. In his article 'The Study of Ideologies and the Philosophy of Language', he examines the problems of the transformation in the consciousness of a 'material' product' into an ideological sign.<sup>23</sup> For Voloshinov, sociology, semiology and ideology are inseparable because 'signs' are socially determined. They cannot arise in isolation. He demonstrates that the 'physical body' is transformed into an ideological sign through a layering of shared meaning. He explains that it is only this social/interactive meaning that develops consciousness and 'understanding'. And he says that 'the understanding of a sign, is after all, an act of reference between the sign apprehended and other already known signs; understanding is a response to sign with signs.' Moreover, he adds that 'everything ideological possesses meaning: it represents, depicts or stands for something outside itself. In other words it is a sign. Without signs there is no ideology.'<sup>24</sup> In the analysis that follows the films illustrate how the elements drawn from the sphere of aviation are transformed into signs, and how feature film uses these semiotics, and creates further levels of meaning according to their specific usage.

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<sup>23</sup> Valentin Voloshinov, 'The Study of Ideologies and Philosophy of Language', in *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture*, pp. 1-9 (p. 3).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

## Life ‘socialized’ into Ideological Ciphers

### Dedication and Soviet genus of pilot heroes

Before the credits of *Bogatyri Rodiny* there is a dedication: ‘Pilotam moguchei aviatsionnoi derzhavy/ gordym stalinskim sokolam/Geroiam Sovetskogo Soiuza/letchikam malym i bol’shim v dvadtsatuiu godovshchinu Velikogo Oktiabria POSVIASHCHAETSIA FIL’M’. From this we understand that hypernymically the Union’s highest military honour, Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuza, is linked not only to ‘sokoly’ (Stalin’s heroic record breakers, military pilot-heroes and air-rescuers who received this honour), but to ‘letchiki malye’ and ‘bol’shie’. Lexically and grammatically a metaphoric ‘genus’ is hierarchically modelled and the dedication represents the ‘New Soviet Man’ as a ‘class’ of hero expressed in aviation terms. ‘Malyi’ can signify young in age. By this means the youth of the country are privileged in the dedication. Moreover, the idea of the ‘letchiki malye’ and ‘bol’shie’ may also include the twenty-six nomadic peoples of Siberia, who were called ‘malye liudi’ during this period.<sup>25</sup> In part this connoted that they were the youngest of the ethnic societies to join the Union. McCannon suggests that these people embodied an idea of ‘nekul’turnost’ which was perceived as an economic and practical threat to the industrialization projects of the Soviet government.<sup>26</sup> The implication is that the *malye liudi* are socially included and that being a member of the Union’s wider ‘Great Soviet Family’ is symbolised by becoming equivalently heroic as one of the country’s ‘fliers’ (letchiki). While a dedication was a common Stalinist film-trope which designated specific groups in society for valorisation,<sup>27</sup> the titling and the film’s dedication

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<sup>25</sup> John McCannon, *Red Arctic, Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939* (hereafter: *Red Arctic*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5 and 22.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.. This should not be confused with *malyi narod*, as defined by Igor Shafarevich in the 1980s. This designated a ‘small elite’ in society who undermine established ways of life and traditions with new beliefs. The introduction to, and effect of, socialism in Russia, Calvinism in England, Hegeliansim in Germany of 1840s was seen to be brought about by such a *malyi narod*. Geoffrey Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 370-71.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, ‘youth’, in Sergei Gerasimov’s, *Semero smelykh*, (Lenfil’m, 1936), young women/cow tenders in Aleksandre Medvedkin’s, *Chudesnitsa*, (Mosfil’m, 1936), and women

demonstrates that ‘the socialist-realist worldview diffused heroic status among the Soviet people, who were thus united, high and low, in what the media called the ‘Stalinist tribe’ (Stalinskoe plemia) the most advanced and progressive genus of humanity on earth.’<sup>28</sup>

### ***Sokoly and bogatyri; folklore embedded in Soviet aviation***

#### ***Sokol***

One of the key words of the dedication and of Stalinist aviation mythology is *sokol*. Drawing ideas of heroism in part from ancient epic tales whose heroes were often referred to as bright falcons (*sokoly*),<sup>29</sup> and, reflecting characteristics such as ‘bezumstvo khrabrykh’ of Gor’kii’s allegorical tale ‘Pesnia o sokole’, Stalin’s *sokoly* signified those pilots who took extraordinary risks in the air in order to serve their country.<sup>30</sup> For instance, they were courageous aviation record-holders, or pilots who excelled in battle over Spain, Abyssinia, and Kalkhin Gol and they included persistent and daring arctic explorers.<sup>31</sup> Their mythologized relation to Stalin may imply a devotion that was commensurate with that of the self-sacrificing ‘liubimyi sokol’ of Lev Tolstoi’s fable, ‘Tsar’ i sokol’.<sup>32</sup> This creature gave up his life in order to save the Tsar. This suggests that layers of extra-textual references culturally predicate a quality of ‘relation’ (embedded in the word *sokol*) which connotes both a sense of bravery and devotion. In the first reported usage of *sokol* during a toast by Stalin in a reception for the participants of May-Day parade at the Kremlin on 2 May 1935, he said; ‘Za nashikh khrabetsov – letchikov! Eto – gordye sokoly nashei armii’.<sup>33</sup> These sensibilities are

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partisans of the Great Patriotic War in Fridrikh Ermler’s, *Ona zashchishchaet Rodinu*, (Alma Ata, 1943).

<sup>28</sup> McCannon, *Red Arctic*, p. 108.

<sup>29</sup> ‘Byliny’ p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Pesnia o sokole’, in Maksim Gor’kii, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*; 20 vols (Moscow: Nauka, 1969), II, p. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Boyd, *The Soviet Airforce since 1918*, pp. 74-87.

<sup>32</sup> ‘Tsar i sokol’, in Lev Tolstoi, *Basni, skazki, rasskazy. Kavkazkii plennik*, (Moscow: Russkii iazyk, 1988), pp. 34-35 (p. 34).

<sup>33</sup> See the citation from *Pravda*, 6 May 1935, in K. V Dushenko, *Slovar’; sovremennykh tsitat*, (Moscow: EKSMO, 2002), p. 558.

reflected in the *test pilots* (*ispytатели*) and fighter-pilots (*istrebiteli*) that figure in Soviet film of the nineteen thirties and nineteen forties. Ten films of the twenty-four which have aviation as their main theme in the nineteen thirties, have either an *istrebitel'* or *ispytatel'* as their main protagonist.<sup>34</sup> In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, as the word order of the dedication and its juxtaposition to the title underlines, the 'piloty' 'Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuz'a', 'sokoly', and 'letchiki malye' and 'bol'shie' are all considered part of the 'family' or 'genus' of *Bogatyri Rodiny*. The dedication thus foregrounds categories of relation, inclusion and folkloric tradition as structures of Soviet identity. The *bogatyri* are figures of epic Russian tales and songs (*byliny*).<sup>35</sup>

***Byliny: epic tales of bogatyri***

The idea of the warrior prince is linked to the notion of the *sokol* in epic tales such as, *Zadonshchina*. This epic tells of the defeat of Mamai and the Mongol Hordes at Kulikovo in 1320. In it warrior princes transform themselves into 'gyrfalcons' and 'eagles', and they 'fly' to battle at the side of the 'brother' Princes, Dmitrii and Vladimir, to save Russia. Thus the idea of the *sokol*, as well as battle, carries ideas of folkloric transformation and self-sacrificing rescue. The Aviation Day film draws on folkloric cultural symbols which carry with them ideas of transformation and posits this as a subtext of the film. Further extra-filmic references are the romanticized images by Viktor Vasnetsov of legendary *bogatyri* in his painting by the same name which further signified their romanticized tradition in the Stalin period.<sup>36</sup> In 1937 Marfa Kriukova wrote her first *novina* (*faux byliny*) about Stalin, 'Glory to Stalin shall be Eternal', in which Stalin wakes and decides to go to battle for 'the working people'. She says that on the road he meets with Lenin and the 'two bright falcons flew together'. Characters of the *byliny* of earlier centuries were also giants, for example, one of the *starshie bogatyri*, Sviatogor, and the great fighters and rescuers with superhuman strength

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<sup>34</sup> This is information drawn from the lists of film in *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my, Annotirovannyi katalog*, ed. by A. V. Macheret and N. Glagoleva (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1961), III, pp. 12-20.

<sup>35</sup> They were composed primarily in the sixteenth century but their origins extend as far back as the eleventh and twelfth centuries. 'Byliny' p. 66.

<sup>36</sup> Vladislav Bakhrebskii, 'Bogatyri', *Viktor Vaznetsov, zhizn' zamechatel'nykh liudei* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1989), un-numbered plate.

known as the *mladshie bogatyri*, such as Il'ia Muromets.<sup>37</sup> These categories of *bogatyri* echo the notion of the 'malye' and 'bol'shie' pilots to whom the film is dedicated. Embedded in the concatenation of the dedication is an inference that anyone in the Soviet Union from the 'malyi' to the greatest *sokoly* and *bogatyri* (with the examples of Lenin and Stalin) can transform themselves into such heroes.<sup>38</sup> It can be seen that the filmic dedication of *Bogatyri Rodiny* employs Voloshinov's 'ideological signifier *par excellence*', 'the word' which draws its communicative power through a process of cultural association and grammatical and semantic relation. It reflects the importance of the process of 'socialization' in creating meaning and the use of cinematographic tropes as ideological communication. The words of the dedication, communicate a the idea of a symbolic Soviet pilot-*bogatyry*, which is linked to the symbolism of the *sokol*, and thus represents an idea of valour based on notions of the 'immense' (*moguchii*), and loyalty, bravery and self-sacrifice. The pilot-*bogatyry*' represents an idea of a Soviet person who is capable of transforming himself and the world, and is a figure of equivalent potency to the *bogatyry*' of legend.

### ***Bogatyry*' aircraft**

The *bogatyry*' of the title of the 1937 parade film can be seen to refer to the aircraft as much as to the men. The parallelism is reflected in the image of a Soviet sentry standing next to an ANT-6 near the beginning of *Bogatyry Rodiny* and both the man and the aeroplane are 'imaged' within the frame to express the idea of being 'at the ready' not only for the air parade, but symbolically for the defence of the country. In all the parade films there is the visual trope of introducing a set of pilots in front of, or beside their aircraft. And this is accompanied with voice-over constructions such as 'Ni odna strana v mire ne imeet takogo otnoshenogo vozdushogo flota!/Ni odna strana v mire ne imeet i ne mozhet imeet takikh letchikov kak nashi stalinskie sokoly'.

One of the pre-revolutionary aircraft made by Igor Sikorskii was called *Il'ia Muromets*. This, record-breaking plane was developed from its predecessor, the

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<sup>37</sup> 'Byliny', p. 61.

<sup>38</sup> The idea of symbolic social inclusion of the *malenkii chelovek* in the period of the 1930s is echoed in Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, when she implies 'inclusion' is a function of the new-found 'mobility' of the population by which Russia's vast spaces became 'accessible to all'. (p. 52).

‘biggest aeroplane in the world’, the internationally famed and first four-engine aircraft, the *Russkii vitaz*.<sup>39</sup> It was ‘the world’s first long range bomber’.<sup>40</sup> The *Sviatogor* was designed by Vasili Slesarev and, according to the Aviation entry in the Soviet Encyclopaedia of 1953, was ‘the world’s largest two-engine biplane’.<sup>41</sup> Not only did these aircraft establish Russia and the Soviet Union’s predilection for building aircraft of immense size<sup>42</sup> but their function and the folkloric associations of greatness and size underscore the word ‘moguchii’ in the idea of a ‘moguchaia aviatsionnaia derzhava’. Near the end of *Prazdnik Stalinskoi aviatsii*, 1940 a still camera takes in the ‘giant’ length of the L760 (aka the ANT-20bis).<sup>43</sup> In what becomes a cinematographic trope, the slow roll past the camera displays the length of the fuselage, and the aggrandizement of its six engines express the camera’s (and the official) appreciative point of view. The aeroplane is imaged as a concretization of the notion of ‘moguchii’, a *gigant*; and a technological *bogatyri*. The use of the aeroplane as a symbol to aggrandize Soviet identity is reflected in their names: ‘Strana sovetov’, ‘Rodina’ and ‘Moskva’.<sup>44</sup> The Soviet people’s self-identity as a mythic, heroic people is created in terms of aviation. And this, together with rapid aeronautic technological developments and events informs directors’ choices of topics and mis-en-scène.

### Aleksandrov’s Aeroplane

The idea of having the largest aeroplane of its day built to celebrate forty years of the achievement of the giant of Soviet literature, Maksim Gor’kii was put forward by

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<sup>39</sup> *Osprey Encyclopedia*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Hardesty, ‘Early Flight’, p. 25.

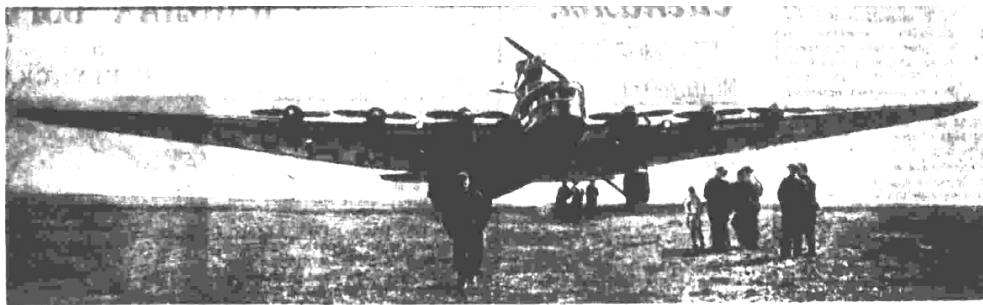
<sup>41</sup> Von Geldern and Stites (eds), ‘Aviation’, *Mass Culture*, p. 485.

<sup>42</sup> Their original use was for reconnaissance, but they became active bombers and attack machines. *Osprey Encyclopedia*, pp. 9-11.

<sup>43</sup> This is an ANT-20bis, the successor aircraft to the ANT-20 which was named the ‘Maksim Gor’kii’ ‘propaganda’ aeroplane’ which crashed during an air parade over Red Square. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Strana sovetov’ (an ANT-6, *Prazdnik Stalinskoi aviatsii*, 1940), ‘Moskva’ (a TsKB-30) and ‘Rodina’ (the ANT-37bis, DB-20 in which Raskova, Osipenko and Grizodubova flew their record-breaking flight to the Amur valley in 1938). *Strana sovetov* embarked on a 13,000 mile flight to New York on 23 August 1929. Palmer, ‘Modernizing Russia in the Aeronautical Age’, pp. 154 -61, and Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, pp. 185-89.

Mikhail Kol'tsov, the founder of the journals *Krokodil* and *Ogonek*, and one of the editorial team of the daily newspaper *Pravda* (the official organ of the Central Committee). This aeroplane and its class has a configuration of multiple engines which includes one above the fuselage. In Grigorii Aleksandrov's staging of the finale of the staged circus sequence 'Polet k stratosferu', he uses an aeroplane which echoes this distinctive feature. The aeroplane is decorated with lights which recall Lenin's *lampochki Il'icha*<sup>45</sup> and is positioned as if in flight at the back of the stage. For an audience who had participated in raising funds for the 'Maksim Gor'kii',<sup>46</sup> and who were steeped in aviation record-breaking events, and not unfamiliar with the site of new aeroplanes displayed in Red Square, Aleksandrov's staging may well have evoked the 'Maksim Gor'kii' and Soviet advances in long-distance/bomber-class (bombardirovshchik) technology.



## Рождение гиганта.

**Figure 13: The 'Maksim Gor'kii', Pravda feature, 21 June 1934**

This childlike depiction of such an aircraft communicates a joyful celebration of the development of both aviation and electrical Soviet technology which became a Leninist symbol of Soviet Communism. The eight-engine aircraft, 'Maksim Gor'kii', entered the *agit-eskadril* of the same name in 1933. However, on 18 May 1935, three weeks after the aircraft had appeared over a crowd of thousands celebrating the first of May in Red Square, it crashed when Nikolai Blagin clipped the giant-aircraft's wing when he went

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<sup>45</sup> The popularization of Lenin's program of electrification included the phrase 'little lamps of Il'icha' which were evidence of bringing electricity to the far reaches of the country. See Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, pp. 180 and 221. This element of the stage-set in *Tsirk* brings together two of Lenin's symbols of modernity: electricity and the aeroplane.

<sup>46</sup> Gunston, *Osprey Encyclopedia*, p. 394.



against military discipline (*razrushil distsiplin*) and spontaneously performed aerial acrobatics in one of the escorting small fighter-planes (I-5).<sup>47</sup> The agit-plane was the largest aeroplane in the world of its day. It had a cinema, the ability to project its own flight images to the ground, a lounge, tables, chairs, internal radio communications and megaphone. When it crashed all its passengers and crew were killed. The event was profoundly shocking to the nation, and the notion of ‘*razrushenie distsipliny*’ which points to a pilot’s lack of collective responsibility, is seen in numerous flier films including *Letchiki*, *Intrigan*, *Muzhestvo*, *Piatyi Okean*, and *Valerii Chkalov*. *Letchiki*, *Piatyi okean* and *Valerii Chkalov* also include an *avariia* as important signifiers (I will be discussing this more fully in Chapter Four).

At the time which they were built, the ANT-16, and the ANT-20 were ‘the largest landplane[s] of the day’ superseding the British Bristol Brabazon and Howard Hugh’s plans for the ‘Hercules’ aka ‘Spruce Goose’.<sup>48</sup> In Dubson, and Gekkel’s *Bol’shie kryll’ia* aka *Tebia liubit Rodina* (Great Wings aka The Motherland Loves You) (Lenfil’m, 1937), the head of an aviation factory Kuznetsov (Boris Babochkin) suffers emotionally when his ‘baby’ (*detishche*) crashes killing people on board and below. In the film the answer is for the team to resume their efforts and build an even better model, which is then displayed at an air-show. At this air-show, the Soviet aircraft is superior to those of the West. This film was well received by the famed arctic and long-distance pilots of the day, Liapedevskii and Vodopianov, but it was withdrawn after *Pravda* reviewed it under the heading ‘false film’ (*fal’shivaia kartina*).<sup>49</sup> Gunston says

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<sup>47</sup> For a celebration of air-craft’s creation see ‘Rozhdenie giganta’ and ‘Maksim Gor’kii reet nad krasnoi stolitsei’ and ‘Izumitel’nye mashini’ in *Pravda*, no. 169, 21 June 1934, p. 3, <<http://dlib.eastview.com/browse/doc/21737771>>. For a full account of the crash of the Maxim Gor’kii see: Paul Duffy and Andrei I. Kondalov, ‘Maksim Gor’kii’, *Tupolev: The Man and His Aircraft* (Shrewesbury: Airlife Publishing, 1996), pp. 61-63; Dmitri Sobolev, ‘Tragediia ‘Maksima Gor’kogo’, *Rodina*, 8 (Aviastsiia 100 let’, spetsial’nyi vypusk) (2004) 51-54; and Boris Efimov, ‘Rasskaz o brate (Mikhail Kol’tsov)’, *Spokoinoe mesto rossiiskogo interneta*, V. V. *Shakhidzhanian*, 2009, <<http://1001.vdv.ru/books/efimov/issue25>> [accessed 1 October 2011].

<sup>48</sup> Duffy and Kondalov, p. 61.

<sup>49</sup> E. Margolit, V. Shmyrov, *Iz’iatoe kino, 1924-1953* (Moscow: Dubl’, 1995) <<http://www.kinoteatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/2897/annot/>> [accessed March 2012].

that it was the ANT-16 which was used in 1935 for the filming of *Bol'shie kryl'ia*.<sup>50</sup> And its plot echoes reality, in as much as after the 'Maksim Gork'ii' crash, the public raised the funds to create a new *gigant* (the L-760). In *Tsirk*, an echo of the ANT-16 and the ANT-20 technology symbolically embeds an idea of the transformation of the bad of a historical event, the crash of the 'Maksim Gor'kii', into a mythological good of a celebration of Soviet aero-technology.

**Figure 14 a. b. c. 'Moguchie kryl'ia': the L760, 1939**



a.



b.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Osprey Encyclopedia*, p. 394.

<sup>51</sup> The author wishes to thank Studiia Kryl'ia Rossii for permission to use images from Aviation Day newsreel and *Bogatyri Rodiny*.



c.

The ethos of turning bad to good, and the tradition of folklore which is part of the culture of flight technology, suggest a further folk legend which supports ideas of winged-transformation, and which may inform the plot and treatment of aviation themes in these films. The Pagan, Christian and Slavic myths of Sirin and Alkonost, who were half-bird, half-woman, are seen in lubok paintings, and Vasnetsov also painted these creatures in shades of black and in shades of white as the respective birds of sorrow and joy. The Old Believers refer to this mythology. Upon hearing Alkonost's voice, a person can forget everything; and this, together with her beauty, can tempt people to their death. But the signification of death is also attributed to Sirin.<sup>52</sup> The myth of Alkonost includes variations, such as the story of her placing her eggs in the depths of the ocean, and after seven days they burst to the surface, whereupon she places them on the shore. On the day of *Iablochnyi spas*, Alkonost replaces Sirin's doleful singing in the garden with her song of joy, beating her wings which give strength to the apple trees. These myths suggest that joy and sorrow are never separated, and possibly, that joy follows sorrow. Meri's well-analysed transformation from a Western artiste with black hair to a Soviet aerialist with blond hair, and finally into the white athletes' parade uniform, speaks to the dynamic myth of Sirin and Alkonost. Furthermore, this myth of winged-transformation, and the joyful power of song, supports the personal transformation of Meri. Aleksandrov thought that 'song is

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<sup>52</sup> *The Lubok Russian Folk Pictures: Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Alla Sytova, (Leningrad: Aurora, 1984), pp. 58 and 70.

as necessary to film as wings are to birds'.<sup>53</sup> Liubov' Orlova's renowned singing of Lebedev Kumach and Isaak Dunaevskii's song 'Shirokaia strana moia, Rodnaia' wooed not only Martynov (Sergei Stoliarov) but was also taken to the hearts of Russian audiences as a second national anthem from its day to the present. It represented the full transformation of what was depicted as her sorrowful life in the West to a life of joy in the Soviet Union. In Soviet flier films, such as *Bol'shie kryl'ia*, the parable of this myth, that is, the transformation of sorrow to joy, can be seen to inform Soviet identity in terms of plot construction. In Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Prostye liudi*, (Simple People) (Lenfil'm, 1945) a Soviet air-fleet is destroyed during an attack which echoes the reality of Operation Barbarossa, on 22 June 1941, when Germany invaded Russia by land and air, destroying between one and two thousand aircraft on the first day, and as much as ninety-percent of its total fleet within the first week. In this film all able-bodied people who have not gone to the front, join together on the production line (stanki) of the factory. The end of the film sees the victorious issue of the desperately needed aircraft. But, in tension with the message of the overcoming of sorrow, this film, which was made at the end of the war, dares to show the tragic tale of Erimina (Ol'ga Lebzak), the wife of the head-engineer, Erimin (Iurii Tolubeev), who loses her sanity because of the impact of the war. It is telling that this film was not released until after Stalin's death, and five months after Nikita Khrushchev's speech denouncing the cult of personality at the XX Party Congress in February 1956 (which led to a period of liberalization of the 'Thaw'.)

### **Of leaders and their aeroplanes**

In the 1930s the identification of aeroplanes with leaders, and with the country, is reflected in the names emblazoned across the wings of aircraft in posters such as G. G. Klutskis' 'Da, zdravstvet nasha schastlivaia sotsialisticheskaia Rodina. Da zdravstvet nash velikii liubimyi Stalin',<sup>54</sup> in which a line of huge air-craft in flight display the names of Stalin, Voroshilov, Gor'kii and Kalinin, and it seemingly extends into perpetuity as it disappears into the horizon. In part two of Mikhail Chiaureli's *Padenie Berlina* (Mosfil'm, 1949, r. 1950) Stalin arrives in an aeroplane whose size is

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<sup>53</sup> Grigorii Aleksandrov, *Epokha i kino* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1976), p. 199.

<sup>54</sup> Palmer, *Dictatorship of the Air*, p. 18, fig. 46.

accentuated by a long pan across its wing, and this aggrandizes the leader's *fictional* presence at the eponymous 'Fall of Berlin'.<sup>55</sup> As has been noted elsewhere, the topos of Stalin's arrival may have been a response to Leni Reifenstahl's documentary masterpiece *Triumpf des Willens* (Triumph of the Will) (Reichsparteitag-Film, 1934-1935), which glorifies Hitler and communicates his flight and arrival in Berlin in a Junkers (Ju-52) as if a demi-god descending through the heavens.<sup>56</sup> The sight of similar Junkers aircraft, which war has transformed into contorted metal on the terrain outside Stalingrad is seen in Varlamov's documentary homage; *Stalingrad* (Soiuzkinokhroniki, 1943). In the penultimate syntagma of this film, a voice-over informs the audience that 'twenty Four Hitler-ite Generals were captured'; and we see smoking debris, the contorted metal of German aircraft, and highly textural images of guns, canon, and lorries, like so much rubbish in a field. The *voice-over* brings home the fact that 'two thousand five hundred officers laid down their arms, ninety-one thousand captured soldiers (...) History does not know of such a great army, equipped so well, encircled and annihilated.' This syntagma ends with an aerial view over the devastation. It is not unreasonable to suggest that the sight of the mangled Junkers aircraft in 1943 after the glorified image and associations of the Junker with Hitler's personal aeroplane, as shown in *Triumph of the Will*, may have subliminally accentuated a contemporary Soviet viewer's sense of the possibility of the German leader's vanquishing.

In the air parade chronicle films, near the beginning of *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939), the narrator says: 'kry'lia moguchikh i bystrykh samoletov rasprostranilis' nad vsemi gorodami i selami nashoi prekrasnoi rodiny'. It defines the Motherland and the two types of aeronautic technology that will protect it. In *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1940) aviation is a model for the country's dialectical development when the narrator says 'with every year the wings of the Soviet empire become ever greater' (s kazhdym godom vse moguchoi stanoviat'sia kry'lia Sovetskoi derzhavy).

### **Tropes of waking and official joy**

*Bogatyri Rodiny* begins as a 'day in the life' of Moscow and the country and echoing intertitles and the beginnings of films such as Boris Barnet's *Dom na Trubnoi*

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<sup>55</sup> Claire Knight, 'Soviet Reviews and Questions of Spectatorship: Pre-viewing The Fall of Berlin (1949)', seminar paper, RCRG/SSEES, 26 October 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

(Mezhrabpom-Rus, 1928), which reads; ‘Gorod spit’, and Abram Room’s *Tret’ia meshchanskaia*, which reads ‘Moskva eshche spala’ and Vertov’s *Chelovek s kinoapparatum* which include sequences of the city waking as the beginning of the narrative, *Bogatyri Rodiny* shows preparations for the day have already begun. The introduction to the air parade by means of showing the preparations and how people get there is shown in *Prazdnik Stalinskikh sokolov, Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939) and *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1940) and the post-war aviation day films, *Den’ vozdushnogo flota*, 1951 and *Den’ vozdushnogo flota*, 1952. The ubiquitous billowing white flags of the parades are used to communicate an officially approved excitement. And flags blowing in the wind are a trope of aerial displays in feature films such as, *Letchiki, Valerii Chkalov* and in Protozanov’s *Semiklassniki* and Timoshenko’s *Nebesnyi tikhokhod*. In Protazonov’s film, a young aspiring flight engineer, Dima, (aviostroitel’) (Iura Mitaev) approaches the entrance to the ‘VI competition of aeroplane engineers and the avenue which recedes from camera is lined with flags. Protozanov achieves a delicate level of parody in such details as the candy-cane stripes on the poles which support flags displaying the sunburst and wings of the emblem of the Air Force of the Red Army. And also, by means of a light palette which is so pervasive in the film that it is detectably hyperbolic. It speaks to the colour of Soviet athletes’ costumes and parade-culture, and to an attending officialized *entuziazm*, in a way which also echoes the negative coding of white in Kozintsev and Trauberg’s *Odna*. In *Odna*, it signals a pejorative sense of a false ‘siane ulybok’ which is associated with inauthentic (and in that film ‘bourgeois’) values. In *Semiklassniki*, the pervasive white palette has the effect of a rose-colouring of life (lakirovka) but the candy-cane flag-poles signal a satiric nuance. It suggests that society’s enthrallment with aviation as a dialectical model, and also, parade-culture is ambivalently inflected into this film.

*Bogatyri Rodiny*, and all the chronicle Aviation-Day films (1935-1940), include preparations for the day and show the journey along Moscow streets to Tushino. As in Barnet, Room and Vertov’s films the idea of Moscow as *home* is symbolised in the city’s exterior awakening and this is mirrored on a human level when the camera takes the viewer inside the buildings. In aviation parade films the ‘street’ is both real and symbolic. The movement of the camera to the interior may ostensibly serve the same purpose: that is, to invite the viewer into the personal realm of the main protagonists, to mutually identify people and place. But in *Bogatyri Rodiny* the camera pans up from a

model of the aeroplane, the ‘Stalinskii marshrut’ (ANT-20), in which the great test pilot Valerii Chkalov flew across the Arctic to Vancouver, Washington, USA, and then to a portrait of him, which hangs above the bed of a boy who appears to be the pilot’s own sleeping son, Igor’. The camera creates a link between the sleeping boy and the model aeroplane which symbolises the first trans-arctic, non-stop flight between Moscow and America. The aeroplane is named after Stalin; ‘Stalinskii marshrut’. By this means, the son of the great flier becomes symbolic of all young boys who dream of becoming a pilot-*Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuz*a. There is a reflexive significance in that all boys, it suggests, think of their father’s as such heroes, and also that all boys fantasize about having Heroes of the Soviet Union as their fathers. By these means, *real* ‘kinship’ relations invite the audiences’ empathy, and Chkalov’s personal ‘family’ is transformed into a national symbol. This imaging of ‘celebrity’ also models both the ‘hero’ as a societal father figure and the ‘son’ as the dreamer. And Stalin’s presence is subconsciously embedded in the opening sequence of the film.

We then see Valerii Chkalov at Tushino aerodrome sitting amongst young pilots (*druz’ia*) who clearly look up to him. There is an edit to a former pre-revolutionary pilot who is also the centre of a group of young Soviet fliers. The narrator enthusiastically introduces him. ‘Many today remember the grandfather of Soviet aviation, Boris Ilidorovich Rossinskii’ (Mnogie vspomnili segodnia dedushku Sovetskoi aviatsii, Borisa Ilidorovicha Rossinskogo). Both the pre-revolutionary and the contemporary record-breakers are ‘imaged’ as symbolic father figures of the same heroic dynasty, and also as professional mentors who orally pass on the traditions of aviation. Rossinskii is the flier who is reported to have performed eighteen aerial loops during the May-Day celebrations in 1918.<sup>57</sup> In this extended Aviation Day film which is made in honour of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, the pre-revolutionary pilot becomes a symbol of the fight for a Soviet world and emblematic of the Revolutionary pilot-*bogatyr*’. He establishes a tradition for ‘miraculous flight’ which the sign behind the propeller blade spells out: ‘*Moskva-Tver’-chudo polet*’. And,

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<sup>57</sup> Oleg Demchenko, ‘Pervyi polet’, *Eastern Siberian Pravda*, no. 172, 31 August 2000 <<http://www.vsp.ru/23800/172-3-1.HTM> [accessed 2006]; Not to be confused with the convention of calling Zhukovskii the ‘Father’ of Soviet aviation. See: von Geldern and Stites (eds), ‘Aviation’, in *Mass Culture*, pp. 479-86 (p. 484).

his pre-revolutionary aeroplane and its propeller blades underscore how far the country has come in comparison with Chkalov's non-stop flight to America.

Analysing the characteristics of early forms of the novel such as Roman autobiographies and memoirs, Bakhtin says that 'the national ideal was represented by ancestors', that 'the tradition of the family had to be passed down from father to son' and that 'such autobiographies are documents testifying to a family-clan consciousness of self'.<sup>58</sup> Here, the newsreel footage captures a sense of the immediacy and reality of conversation and, at the same time, it creates a sense of Soviet aviation 'tradition', an 'autobiographical self-consciousness'. Unlike Igor Sikorskii (1889-1972), his fellow aeronautic student (who built the first multi-engine bomber 'giant' but who emigrated to the West following the Revolution), Rossinskii was not elided from the Soviet history books. He became a part of Soviet aviation history. He is transformed into an ideological sign, the 'ded' of Soviet aviation.

The use of the historical 'miracle' as a marker of dialectical progress which validates Soviet technology of the 1930s is also seen, but in a comic turn, in Aleksandrov's *Tsirk*. Aleksandrov's self-described 'parodic number', his 'chudo tekhniki: 1903', is based on bicycle technology and it is juxtaposed to the main circus 'number' (attraktsion) the 'Flight to the Stratosphere'.<sup>59</sup> The ideological message of this is to point up how far Soviet technology has come and promises to go. But the nod to 1903 speaks to the first heavier-than-air flight by man; Orville and Wilbur Wright's successful twelve second flight on 7 December 1903 at Kill Devil Hills, South Carolina. By this means, Aleksandrov links the very concept of scientific achievement and aspiration in a logic of parodic continuity with the circus act; Flight to the Stratosphere. He thus creates an ambivalence which echoes Kozintsev and Trauberg's *Odna* in which *chudesa tekhniki* signify an inauthentic approach to life based on scientific systems. Koestler says that emotions have the effect of slowing down an audience's responses. And in keeping with Aleksandrov's search for a 'life-loving' art, and 'healthy', 'jolly' Soviet humour, which offers something to replace the 'cruel' humour of Gogolian satire, Aleksandrov's parodic number both plays with the notion of 'miracles of technology', and celebrates it.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel', p. 137.

<sup>59</sup> Aleksandrov, *Epokha i kino*, p. 193.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-67 and p. 204.



**Aerial baptisms, parachuting and transformation: ‘Imaging’ dialectical development in Soviet Man**

In *Bogatyri Rodiny* there is an intertitle ‘V nashi dni’, and with it a sense of a ‘miraculous’ and ‘qualitative’ shift in time to the Soviet ‘present’ and a new generation. The edit suggests the movement forward of history. It implies that what is to be shown will be ‘essential’ and ‘typical’ of the times. What is startling is that it is not contemporary specialists of aviation who are shown, nor the world class Soviet aircraft that were being produced during the 1930s, nor even the nation’s favourite pilots, but rather very small children bravely sliding down a parachute training slide. The essence of aviation that links the bravery of a Rossinskii with the idea of the small children learning to overcome their natural fear of height is not just the idea of bravery itself but rather of transformation.

Sheila Fitzpatrick highlights that the idea of the re-making of man was central to the socialist world-view and, in the 1930s, collectivization and ‘work’ were perceived in the same life changing symbolic ‘complex’ as the Revolution. She describes parachute jumping (*pryzhok*) as an activity through which the Soviet people’s perception of themselves and their lives changed. Citing both a lampoon in the journal *Krokodil*, and a quote of someone who experienced his ‘second birth’ while jumping from the bell tower of a church (an example of which is shown in this film) she shows that parachuting was considered an ‘aerial baptism’.<sup>61</sup> It can be seen that the link between Rossinskii and the children is not the idea of inculcating bravery in the young in order to create heroes (such as a Rossinskii or a Chkalov) alone. Parachute jumping and living through the Revolution was a transition that was considered by many in the Soviet era as nothing less than a rebirth.<sup>62</sup> In a period when Socialist Realism demanded of film that it ‘appeal to the masses’ the ‘imaging’ of reality uses the power of medium close-up and of lived experience to fascinate. We see the consternation in a

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<sup>61</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 75-9 (p. 75) This 1930s understanding of aerial baptism should not be confused with ‘aerial baptisms’ (*‘vozdushnye kreshchenie’*) of the 1920s which were flights into the country by ODVF agit-squadrons. They were designed to promote aviation and support Bolshevik anti-religious campaigns at one and the same time. Taking local villagers into the air was meant to demonstrate that there was no God in the sky, only air. Palmer, ‘Modernizing Russia in the Aeronautical Age’, p. 127.

<sup>62</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p. 75.

little boy's face as he looks up at another child jumping, we see a mother waving encouragingly to her daughter. The purpose of the filmic 'slice of life' edited into the Aviation Day parade film is not a case of 'abstract and impersonal concepts' which are 'covered with flesh and blood', rather it is living phenomena which are structured in order to seem to reveal an inherent *idea*.<sup>63</sup>

### **Ever Higher; transforming the country**

The refrain of the song 'Davai tovarishch! Poletim' with lyrics by Vasilii Lebedev Kumach (1898-1949)<sup>64</sup> which accompanies the images of young children learning how to parachute rings out clearly:

МЫ ЛЮБИМ ВОЗДУХ  
 МЫ ЛЮБИМ НАШЕ НЕБО  
 МЫ БЫТЬ КРЫЛАТЫМИ ХОТИМ!  
 Орёл – не птица,  
 Пока в полете не был,  
 Давай, товарищ, полетим!<sup>65</sup>

And the refrain; 'Vse vyshe, vyshe i vyshe' of German and Khait's 'Ever Higher' (Vse vysshe), aka 'Aviator's March' (Aviamarsh), which is also heard, communicates ideas of flight as a metaphor for the ability to 'rise' socially from the most modest cowherder to a General Secretary.

### **Bogatyri Rodiny and Osoaviakhim**

We see young girls and boys taking the first steps in studying aeronautics. We see them making model aeroplanes, poring over books, and designing gliders and flying them (a pattern which in itself reflects a dialectical model). In the gliding sequence there are images of young men in their helmets edited alongside images of various model planes

<sup>63</sup> Abram Tertz, *On Socialist Realism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), p. 35.

<sup>64</sup> Lebedev Kumach has written poems and songs in support of the Soviet Government since the Civil War. One of his most famous songs 'Shiroka strana moia rodnaia' (Broad is My Native Land) (aka Song of the Motherland) from Grigorii Alexandrov's musical *Tsirk* became a second 'hymn' in the hearts of this generation and continues in the hearts of many Russians to this day.

<sup>65</sup> 'Davai, tovarishch poletim!', in Vasilii Lebedev Kumach, *Pesni i stikhotvoreniia* (Moscow: gosud. izd. khudozh., 1960), p. 108.

circling high above (on the airfield in later air parades such displays are described as ‘kak slovno chaiki’). The lightness of the small model aircraft which fly in graceful sweeps creates an optimistic atmosphere. These sequences reflect ideas of both *obuchenie* (education, training) and *vospitanie* (moral educational development, training).<sup>66</sup> But the documentary gives a rich chiaroscuro, and the shape of the aircraft seat gives a sense of Soviet man and machine which echoes Italian Futurist silhouettes of pilots and communicates a sense of a mastery of modernity. Instead of the Italian Futurist man-machine as a symbolic force of destruction, here the film’s imaging benignly suggests Soviet technological development and the development of the next generation of specialists. The narrator gives an ‘official’ seal of approval as we are told that Voroshilov says: ‘put’ ot modeli k planeru, i s planera k samoletu’ is the best way to create new cadres of aviation and atomic (iadernyi) personnel. And this links to Stalin’s statement to academics of the Red Army in May 1935 when he said that highly trained cadres are needed because ‘kadry reshaiut vse’, and only with sufficient cadres would the country be victorious.<sup>67</sup> The importance of the aeroclub/aviation school as the place in which young people gain their moral and technical *vospitanie*, and are seen to grow into mature and responsible Soviet people is reflected in the settings of *Letchiki*, *Intrigan*, and *Piatyi okean*. And the importance of a school in conjunction with aviation activities features in films such as *Semiklassniki*, *Priiateli* and *Istrebiteli*.

### **Osoaviakhim: a ‘Literary Camp’**

The filmic episodes of *Bogatyri Rodiny* illustrate the activities of the socio-military project of the Osoaviakhim. The Ninth Komsomol Congress in 1931 ‘pledged support of the Osoaviakhim and the Red Air Force’. It urged ‘young communists to take part in air and parachute training and to study for defence qualifications. Gliding was no longer to be the prerogative of the few but a mass, popular pastime’.<sup>68</sup> A further decree,

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<sup>66</sup> Lynne and Catriona Kelly, ‘Programmes for identity: ‘New man’ and the ‘New Woman’ (hereafter: ‘Programmes for identity’) in *Constructing Russian Culture in the Age of Revolution: 1881-1940*, ed. by Catriona Kelly and David Shepherd, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 260-85 (p. 261).

<sup>67</sup> ‘Dal’neishii pod’em promyshlennosti i sel’skogo khoziaistva v SSSR’, in *Istoriia vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partiii (Bol’shevikov)*, *Kratkii kurs* [1938] (hereafter: *Kratkii kurs*), 1938, (Moscow: 1950), pp. 320-26 (p. 322).

<sup>68</sup> Boyd, p. 16.

‘‘On Osoaviakhim’’, adopted jointly by the Party Central Committee and the Soviet government on 8 August 1935, [...] demanded that the society strengthen its efforts in military training.’ The resulting Komsomol pass (putevka) enabled all people who were under the age of twenty-four to be admitted to the growing ‘network of aviation schools, air clubs and circles being established by Osoaviakhim’, and it enabled thirty-thousand communists and *komsomoltsy* to enter the Air Force’s schools between 1931-1936.<sup>69</sup> Between the years 1927 and 1933 Osoaviakhim membership increased from just under three million to eleven million, and by 1934 it had risen to fifteen million members. The numbers of aeroclubs also increased, and by 1934 there were one hundred and fifteen, and, although there are variations, by 1936 the number of flying clubs rose again to one hundred and forty.<sup>70</sup>

The filmic tribute in *Bogatyri Rodiny* to Osoaviakhim activities also foregrounds the annual glider competitions which were held at Koktebel’ (named Planerskoe 1941-1991) on the south-western coast of the Crimea. (They were established by the Friends of the Air Fleet (Obshchestvo druzei vozdushnogo flota/ODVF). Here gliders were built and flown by future designers, such as Il’iushin, Iakovlev and Oleg Antonov and by future test pilots, such as Iumashev, who were young Air Academy students when they competed.<sup>71</sup> The ODVF also saw the founding of glider schools in Moscow. By 1935, the Central Aeroklub at Tushino (which is featured in all Aviation-Day chronicles from 1935 to 1940) was opened. It became renowned as a training centre, and in 1938, the year of Chkalov’s death, it was renamed Tsentral’nyi Aeroklub SSSR imeni V. P. Chkalova (TsAk SSSR im. V. P. Chkalova).<sup>72</sup> Practically, the sequences in *Bogatyri Rodiny* which delineate stages in learning to become a pilot promote the activities of Osoaviakhim and an awareness of its benefit to the whole industry and illustrate a sphere from which new design and defence cadres would emerge. Symbolically, movement between levels of training is itself a flight

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<sup>69</sup> David R. Jones, *Soviet Aviation and Air Power*, pp. 246-48 (p. 251).

<sup>70</sup> Boyd, p. 16. David R. Jones states that ‘In all, from 1930, to 1941 the society claimed to have trained 121,000 aircraft and 27,000 glider pilots for the civilian military air services.’ See Jones, *Soviet Aviation and Air Power*, p. 251.

<sup>71</sup> Boyd, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Jones, ‘The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot’, pp. 251-52.

which signifies the historical dialectical development of Soviet people into perfected *kyrlatie liudi*.

The symbolism of model aeroplane construction by youngsters, which signals a metaphoric beginning of a path of development towards unlimited horizons is echoed in Stalinist posters, for instance, Samuil Adlivankin's poster, *Sostiazanie iunykh modelistov* (The Young Model Aeroplane Constructors Competition) (1931),<sup>73</sup> and Iurii Chudov's poster *I my budem letchikami! (And We Will Be Pilots!)* (1951).<sup>74</sup> The theme of model-aeroplane construction, gliding and dreaming of flying to the moon structures Nikolai Lebedev's film *Na lunu s peresadkoi*. In it a young aspiring model aeroplane builder, Lenia (Leonid Glebov) builds a rocket and attaches a letter from his fellow Pioneers to the 'people of the moon'. When its remains are discovered in a field, Lenia is told that 'the country needs educated pilots, intelligent engineers, and not empty-headed dreamers' (*strane nuzhny obrazovannye letchiki, umnye konstruktory, a ne pustye mechtateli*). And he is helped by the head of the political department to build a glider. But when he secretly attaches his glider to the aeroplane of his mentor's sister, the pilot, Natasha (E. Pyrialova), he causes a crash. Natasha sends him a letter as he is recovering in hospital which announces the competition in the Crimea of the All-Russian competition for gliders. Recognizing the error of his ways, he goes on to win a medal.

The glider history of Koktebel' is traceable in Boris Khlebnikov and Aleksei Popogrebskii (dirs.) *Koktebel'* (Roman Borisevich, with Sluzhba kinematografii, MkrRF, 2003). In this film, the yearning of a young boy to fly his aeroplane at the site of the great competitions gives the film its name. And the disappointment at the reality of the broken monument, and the inability of his own paper-plane to fly when he finally gets there, is pivotal to the broken emotional journey of the father and son who travel by train to the south. At the end the camera takes an aerial view of the father (himself a

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<sup>73</sup> Samuil Adlivankin, 'Concours de jeunes constructeurs de modèles d'avion, 1931', in *L'Idealisme soviétique: Peinture et cinéma 1925-1939*, catalogue ed. by Ekaterina Degot (Liège: Musee de l'art, 2005), p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> Iu. Chudov, 'I my budem letchikami! 1951', in *Velikaia pobeda i vrozozhdenie Moskvy*, ed. by N. N. Glushko, texts by A. F. Shkliaruk (Moscow: Izdatel'skii tsentr Kniazhnoi palaty, Kontakt-kul'tura, 2005), p. 113.

former flight-engineer) as he finds his son. We see them sitting at the end of a pier. We see them as a universe in microcosm, and they are united at its centre.<sup>75</sup>

In the 1938 film *Semiklassniki*, Dima Roshchin (Iura Mitaev) is desperate for his design to win an aeroplane-model competition, and he only learns the lesson that study is necessary when his plane is sent through a wind-chamber and does not withstand the turbulence. In Mikhail Gavronskii's *Priateli* (Friends) (Lenfil'm, 1940) the young protagonist, Il'ia Korzun (Mikhail Kuznetsov), is an aspiring *konstruktor* who designs an automatic parachute but has to learn the value of serious study over talent before the end of the film. Even animated frogs had to learn the moral value of study. In F. Firsov (dir.) and I Shmidt's (artist) *Liagushata-letchiki* (Mosfil'm, 1935), two frogs want to parachute without bothering with lessons. They use mushrooms which dissolve in mid-air. It is only when the third, 'who is never separated from its books', invents a good parachute, that they all become 'otvazhnye parashiutisty'.

Air parades include parachute, gliding and aerial formations of 'trainers' (such as the Po-2). The short chronicle films show that most of the air parades begin with aerial displays by either students of the Zhukovskii Academy (*Bogatyri Rodiny*) or young people from aero clubs of the Osoaviakhim (*Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939) and *Prazdnik Stalinskoi aviatsii*, 1940). In each parade film there are mixtures of aircraft formations of either star patterns, the date of the air parade, 'SSSR', and the names of Stalin and Lenin. They not only display the prowess (*umenie*) of the young pilots who mark the space with Soviet identity. Their youth is also symbolically imprinted on the sky in a sign of endless futurity.

### **Parachuting: disseminating**

Echoing an enthusiasm for parachuting across the country which is also shown in Vertov's *Tri pesni o Lenine* (1934) and *Kolybel'naia* (1937), Aleksandrov's *Tsirk* (1936) and Vasilii Artemenko's *Gornyi tsvetok aka Edelweis (Mountain Flower aka Edelweiss)* (Ukrainfil'm, 1937, released 1938)<sup>76</sup>, in *Bogatyri Rodiny* we hear, 'Zhitel'

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<sup>75</sup> I am drawing on Susanne Langer's analysis of statues and space; pp. 90-91.

<sup>76</sup> Vasilii Artemenko is listed in the screen-credits of this film. He is also listed as its director in "Raisank'e kino" (1935-1938), *Sistematichnii pokazchik zmislu zhurnalu*, ed. by M. A. Kukianenko, V.O. Kononenko, (Ministerstvo kultury Ukraini Derzhavnii zaklad, "Natsional'na Parlementska Biblioteka Ukraini", 2012), p. 112. <<http://nplu.org/storage/files/su-cinema.pdf>>

dalekoi (...) sovetskoi tundry (...) stanovitsia parashiotistom (...) Tol'ko za poslednye tri goda v strane sovershenno dva milliona takikh pryzhkov'. The narration stresses: 'Molodye sovetskie patrioty, rabochie i kolkhozniki, traktoristki i doiarki v aeroklubakh preobretaiut vtoruiu professiiu, pochetnuiu i liubimuiu v nashei strane'.

The symbolic importance of the parachute jump in the Soviet Union can be understood in terms of Clark's 'liminal ritual', that is to say, 'a symbolic retrogression into Chaos'. In her analysis of the function of mythology in the Soviet novel, she explains that they were 'preparatory "ordeals", and "encounters" [...] with the elements or with elemental forces.' She says that 'the symbolism of death and rebirth lies at the heart of any rite of passage – the killing of one self to give birth to the other [...] When the hero sheds his individualistic self at the moment of passage, he dies as an individual and is reborn as a function of the collective.'<sup>77</sup> In *Tsirk*, Meri's descent from the heights of the acrobatic number 'Polet k stratosferu' is visualised as parachute descent from an aerial balloon, and the image of its silk filling the screen and climactic swells of music create an abstract moment outside of time which envelopes the audience in a communication of this rite as a sensual experience. At the end of it, Meri has joined the genus of Soviet *winged* people, and by means of an edit, she metaphorically flies into Red Square and a May-Day parade signalling her full acceptance of her Soviet identity. Aleksandrov's setting for his circus *atraktsion* 'Polet k stratosferu', as Rimgaila Salys has comprehensively analysed, includes an array of aviation themes.<sup>78</sup> It is to be seen not only in the choice of circus acts and in the fairy-lit aeroplane at the back of the stage, but also in the aerial formations of both heavy bombers and sports planes, which are painted on the circus-ceiling, in the numerous statues of parachutists as architectural mis-en-scène, and in the falling of miniature parachutists which fill the arena-sky. As she rightly points out, this speaks to events such as May-Day parade in 1935 which

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[accessed 9 September 2014], but *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my* gives 'A. Artemenko' as its director. See *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, II, no.1404, p. 126.

<sup>77</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 177-89 (p. 178).

<sup>78</sup> Rimgaila Salys writes authoritatively on aviation themes in *Tsirk* in her excellent: *The Musical Comedy Films of Grigorii Aleksandrov: Laughing Matters* (Chicago: Intellect Books, 2009). For an introduction to the importance of parachuting to this scene see especially; *ibid.*, pp. 150-53.

included a show of hundreds of aeroplanes over Red Square. All of these elements as a collocation also speak to Aviation Day celebrations, and Aviation Day chronicle films.

In *Tsirk*, we see the circus audience grasp at the small parachutes as they fall in a shower which echoes images of parachutists (falling like seed) in Aviation Day chronicle-film from year to year. There are *commedia dell'arte*-like clowns who hold the ropes of a circus air-balloon. Such moments, and the staging of an air parade in a circus can be seen as delicately subversive. The staging may be influenced by Aleksandrov's approach to the agit-prop skits of the Proletkul't theatre in 1923. The Proletkul't productions, with Eizenshtein as the manager (and Aleksandrov working under him), took a 'vaudeville', 'satirical and eccentric', and 'comic horse-play' approach to topical themes of the day.<sup>79</sup> Eizenshtein developed his Acrobatic Theatre after his experience staging Aleksandr Ostrovskii's *Na vsiakogo mudretsa dovol'no prostoty* (Enough Simplicity in Every Wise Man).<sup>80</sup> The description of its arena echoes Aleksandrov's circus on screen.<sup>81</sup> One of the targets of its humour was the insertion of a short film which 'whirled off into a volatile parody of the currently developing Soviet newsreel.'<sup>82</sup> Aleksandrov includes newsreel footage at the end of *Tsirk*, and it is not inconceivable that the scene might bring chronicle-films of Aviation Day to mind to a contemporary audience. Aleksandrov may transform the notion of Aviation Day, and seemingly the whole history of aeronautics (by virtue of an oblique reference to the year of Wilbur and Orville Wright's first heavier-than-air flight) into, not an ideological sign, but into what Arthur Koestler calls a 'comic symbol'.<sup>83</sup> And with the inclusion of May-Day parade chronicle footage, followed by whimsical air balloons announcing the end of the film, Aleksandrov brings three themes; the circus, Aviation Day, and chronicle film, into a potential 'flash point' by means of which an audience should be able to experience that liberating release which would be expected by the recognition of such symbolic clashes. In this case the planes of logic which suggests themselves as

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<sup>79</sup> Seton, p. 42.

<sup>80</sup> This was 'Glumov's Diary'. See: Philip Cavendish, "'Lost" to "Found": The "Rediscovery" of Sergei Eisenstein's *Glumov's Diary* and its avant-garde context', *Kinokultura*, 14 (2013) <<http://www.kinokultura.com/2013/41-cavendish.shtml>> [accessed 20 October 2014].

<sup>81</sup> Seton., pp. 58-59.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>83</sup> Koestler, p. 108.



targets for social comment could thus be the idea of inauthentic ‘radiant smiles’; the idea of the ‘miraculous’ (chudesna tekhnika), Aviation Day, or, parade-culture in general; and perhaps the official importance placed on chronicle film. However, instead of allowing a target of humour to become clear, Aleksandrov, who proselytized the Five-Year Plans while in America, and who wanted to create a ‘bodryi’ humour, which would offer something to replace what was criticized by satire, masks any potential criticism in a romantic ‘resolution’ to the film.<sup>84</sup> Drawing on Koestler’s analysis of the effect of emotional symbols, this slows down the audience’s apperception, and thus desensitizes it to potential collisions in planes of logic which might otherwise produce humour with a social edge. For Aleksandrov, song were crucial emotive ‘wings’ for his films. And *Tsirk* gave Russia a song, ‘Shirokaia strana moia Rodnaia’, which affirms Soviet self-perception in terms of a free, egalitarian, and spacious country, which is still sung in Russia today.

Parachuting and flight training (Osoaviakhim activities) serve the country’s aviation industry and defence. The training that is seen on screen in *Bogatyri Rodiny* is predominantly conducted by teachers in military uniform, and this subliminally enforces an idea of the military as ‘facilitator’ in the social project, and also, military instructors as *mentors*. The film functions rhetorically by communicating values of *klassovost*, and as public ‘autobiography’ (in a Bakhtinian sense). It portrays the country in terms of an extended ‘clan’, one which is defined by Soviet aviation traditions, which they share, and which are communicated by the military and paramilitary symbolic Fathers.

### **Varying Modes of Parachuting**

Each of the aviation day chronicle films in the years 1935-1940 (with the exception of 1936) includes images of a long-distance view of a shower of parachutists over a field:

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<sup>84</sup> I am drawing on Shklovskii’s argument against the ‘easy’ ‘boy meets girl resolution’ of fiction film, and also Aleksandrov’s defence of the film, in the face of criticism that his approach to *Tsirk* undermined the film’s comedic qualities. He says that the film is structured on multiple planes of communication, and he stresses the importance of the fusion of romantic feeling with patriotism in the film. See Viktor Shklovskii, ‘Sergei Eisenstein and ‘Non-played’ in Taylor and Christie, *Film Factory*, pp. 161-62 (p. 162), and Aleksandrov, *Epokha i kino*, pp. 164-67 and p. 204.

these look like the symbolic seed of Russian youth over the soil of Mother Russia. Chronicle footage also includes images of parachutists falling from the fuselage and wings of aeroplanes. This imaging is present in feature and other creative documentary in which it serves as a direct *signal* of an air parade, a signifier of ideological ideals, and as an autonomous symbol which is specific to that film.

Iulii Raizman momentarily signals the authenticity of an aviation parade by including a group of parachutists landing in the background in *Letchiki*. But this also contributes to a plane of logic by which the films delicate humour is constructed. Timoshenko uses parachuting as a means for his returning football team to arrive at their match in *Vratar* (The Goalkeeper) (1936). In Vertov's creative documentary: *Tri pesni o Lenine* uses chronicle footage of parachuting from out of aircraft which is similar to that seen in air-parade films. They are part of his complex of material which communicates the realization of Lenin's dreams for the country. In his *Kolybel'naia*, parachuting and piloting aircraft are also important to Vertov's communication of women's newly acquired freedom to enter into spheres of work traditionally thought of as exclusively male (following the acceptance of Stalin's constitutional project in 1936). This film shows a new kind of Soviet woman, whom their children watch as they fall ('mama padaet!'). And an interview with a young woman after her first parachute jump (in this film) contrasts the oratorical speeches of a young female pilot, a young girl, and female figures who honour Stalin's paragraph which gives women the right to enter all fields of work which had previously been considered the prerogative of men. This was presented at the Eighth Emergency Congress of Soviets of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics on 25 November 1936, and promulgated at the Seventeenth All-Russian Emergency Congress of Soviets on 21 January 1937.<sup>85</sup>

Vertov's young parachutist describes looking up and seeing 'the umbrella' (zontik) of the parachute opening, her lack of fear, a sense of her legs swinging and the view opening below her. Thus, this sequence communicates her direct impressions and experience in a register which is also conversational and gentle. In the context of the

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<sup>85</sup> Iosef Stalin, 'O proekte Konstitutsii Soiuza SSR. Doklad na Chrezvychnom VIII Vsesoiuznom s"ezd Sovetov, 25 noiabria 1936 goda', *Sochineniia*, XIV, (Moscow: Pisatel', 1997), pp. 119-47. See also: *Pod znamenem stalinskoi konstitutsii*, Prilozhenie k No. 12, *Zvezdy*, 1936 (no author given), and 'Novaia konstitutsiia utverzhdena', *Pravda*, no. 22, 22 January 1937, p. 1.

film's praise for Stalin, this interview suggests a symbolic sense of new horizons opening which represent what the contemporary world seemed to promise. As Widdis points out, her eye is able to take in everything in an aerial gaze which suggests control and self-empowerment.<sup>86</sup> But this sequence also gives a moment of stylistic respite, and a communication of authenticity which speaks outside of the film's hyperbolic tributes to the *vozhd'*.<sup>87</sup>

The use of parachuting as a fact of military operations is also inserted into films such as Barnet's *Podvig razvedchika*, where the single *razvedchik* jumps from the opening in the fuselage, and the sight of his single parachute opening and falling into the opaque void accentuates the sense of how alone he is as he enters enemy territory.<sup>88</sup> But at the beginning of Timoshenko's *Nebesnyi tikhokhod* a lone 'ace' lands in a puddle to newspaper acclaim in a conspicuous play with the notion of heroism and of formalism in this most 'difficult of genres' (*samyi slozhnyi zhanr*); comedy.<sup>89</sup>

In *Bogatyri Rodiny* the final images of parachuting are followed by edits of manoeuvres by cavalry and tanks which move in parallel directions off-screen. The tanks are then cinematographically *transformed* through further edits into a representation of the navy. In the 1938 Aviation Day chronicle parachutists are cinematographically transformed through edits into an idea of the wider field of defence when they land as paratroops, and run, prepared for battle, off-screen. This chronicle ends with frames of a *navy* battle cruiser steaming into the open sea (towards an off-screen enemy). Thus Gikov's 1938 film, which is dedicated to the Air Force underscores its importance as part of the wider field of national defence. This illustrates that the parachutists (like all branches of the forces) are a synecdoche of the Great Military Soviet Family. Images of aircraft filling the skies and transformed into an animated versions of this, demonstrate their transformation into abstract symbols of defence. A similar visual transformation of aircraft into an animated formation

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<sup>86</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 129.

<sup>87</sup> This film combined use of a cinematographic lullaby, and the idea of flight and autonomous moments of directorial discourse in film is something I am looking at in detail in relation to the film's earlier script-plans elsewhere.

<sup>88</sup> I wish to thank Philip Cavendish for bringing this film and this point to my attention.

<sup>89</sup> Nikolai Kriuchkov, 'Vystuplenie N. A. Kriuchkova po Leningradskomu radio o kinokomedii *Nebesnyi Tikhokhod*, 8 noiabr' 1945', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 72 (2005) 182-83 (p. 183).

following a syntagma which shows representations of the navy and the cavalry appears at the end of Dovzhenko's *Aerograd* (Aero-City) (Mosfil'm and Ukrainfil'm, 1935). This also communicates the importance of military power to Soviet identity in a period of fears of foreign intervention and invasion. And it suggests that the same 'officialdom' that influenced the ending of the chronicle film had already exerted the same influence on *Aerograd* (1935).

***Krylatye liudi, and the ideal gender transformation***

In *Bogatyri Rodiny* the intertitle which follows sequences of parachuting across the country reads, 'Sovetskaia molodezh' stanovitsia pokoleniem krylatykh liudei'. The edit immediately following this is to an image of rows of *women* doing callisthenics outdoors. These syntagmas of women link to the *-malye* Soviet 'knights' of the film's dedication. The foregrounding of women and youth suggests the ideological concept that these groups within society represent *potential* to develop and create the socialist world.

Besides the implication that these women are a subset of the *bogatyri* of the film's title, the images of the women doing physical exercises demonstrate another nuance in the meaning of *bogatyri*. The word *bogatyri* derives 'from the Persian *bagadur* or 'athlete' borrowed through the Tatar medium'.<sup>90</sup> In this sense we understand the idea of the *bogatyri* to mean the equivalent of an Olympian. In god-like fashion the *bagadur* is able to control his physical nature and the natural world. In the bright sunshine we see women's arms moving vigorously upwards as their legs coordinate a movement in the opposite direction. All of them move in complete unison.

In relation to this, it is worth rehearsing a brief consensus of thought on the societal significance of unitary movement (whether of the human body or, by extension, aerial formations). Petrone, drawing on Christel Lane, argues that unified movement on parades reflects the ideology of the unified political body and 'the subjection of the individual to the collective pursuit'.<sup>91</sup> Kelly and Attwood demonstrate that *fizkul'tura* was important to Soviet society because a healthy physical body represented the healthy body politic of the state.<sup>92</sup> And 'consciousness', as Clark

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<sup>90</sup> Jakobson, *Russian Fairy Tales*, p. 646.

<sup>91</sup> Petrone, *Life Has become More Joyous, Comrades*, p. 24.

<sup>92</sup> Attwood and Kelly, 'Programmes of identity', p. 267; Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 15.

explains, 'is taken to mean actions or political activities that are controlled, disciplined, and guided by politically aware bodies. *Spontaneity*, on the other hand, means actions that are not guided by complete political awareness. Rather than *unconscious* action these movements are *purposeful* and can in themselves thus be seen to be emblematic of the greater purpose of building of socialism.'

The foregrounding of women as parachutists and trainee-pilots who accomplish the same feats as their male counterparts not only reflects their response to the government's 1932 call for youth to take up flight training but also the appeal flight held for women.<sup>93</sup> Many of the aviators who were destined to be amongst the 800,000 women to fight in the Great Fatherland war as one of Marina Raskova's three fighter and bomber regiments came from the ranks of the Osoaviakhim. The official enthusiasm which is communicated speaks to the genuine passion for flying. For instance, Senior Lieutenant Evgeniia Zhigulenko, pilot, commander of the formation, Hero of the Soviet Union, future film director, describes how she 'was spellbound by the mystery of flight.' It was her 'orientation with the universe'.<sup>94</sup> In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, we see a young woman pilot her aircraft as it is tracked climbing into the sky and performing an aerial spin (*vyshee pilotazh*). The camera fully captures the moment of the aeroplane's surrender to gravity before being brought under control. On landing the young pilot (*letchitsa*) is beaming as she steps from her aircraft and holds numerous ubiquitous bouquets. This imaging communicates the ideology of inclusion of women *aviatritsy* into the male dominated sphere of aviation, and also, the joy of having flown.<sup>95</sup> 'Reality' is configured on screen and underscored with music and lyrics

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<sup>93</sup> Anne Noggle, 'Senior Lieutenant Nina Raspopova, pilot, flight commander, Hero of the Soviet Union' (hereafter: 'Nina Raspopova') in A. Noggle, *A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II* (hereafter: *A Dance with Death*), introduction Christine White (College Station, TE: Texas and A&M University Press, 1994), pp. 21-26 (p. 21).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-58.

<sup>95</sup> The idea for these regiments was made public in October 1941 when Raskova put out a call for women pilots to join the army. What these images leave out are the experiences of those of a future Hero of the Soviet Union Nina Raspopova. She trained as a pilot and was assigned to a glider school as instructor in 1933 but in 1937 (the same year that *Bogatyri Rodiny* was filmed), she, along with fifteen other of her Komsomol colleagues, was accused of spying and expelled from her post. One of her co-workers was executed. The sequences in *Bogatyri Rodiny* which

intended to stir the emotions. The image speaks to the officialised idea of rising ‘ever higher’ as is seen in headlines such as *Pravda*’s announcement of Polina Osipenko’s world height and weight record-flight in May of 1937; ‘Letat’ vyshe vseh devushek mira’.<sup>96</sup> The sequence communicates an authentic excitement of flying and its symbolization. In the chronicle film *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939), the audience of the air parade and of the film must have thought they were walking amongst the Gods when they saw Raskova and Grizdubova walk past the camera in the grounds of Tushino, and, at the same time, the mythology of democratic inclusion would have been affirmed.

### **Heroism**

Tradition and mythology can fulfil society’s need both to explain its universe and to create moral paradigms. It is especially characteristic of mythology that it is peopled by gods and demigods. From ancient Greek and Roman tales to the tales and songs of Russia written between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, the archetypically mythic is understood in terms of the physically immense and super-human. The narratives of mythology create cultural identity in terms both of ‘creation stories’ and heroic acts. And, just as the nature of relationships between the gods was instrumental in creating models, and cultural allegories, which expressed society’s values, so too, in the Stalinist period, it was the symbolic *relational* structures of society that generated ideas of the heroic and of national identity.

As Svetlana Boym points out, the idea of becoming *winged* became ‘a popular common place’ in this era and ‘they (phrases from the Aviator’s March) become part of the new folklore, entering proverbs and anecdotes’. She says that such ‘magical commonplaces’ were ‘re-enacted in popular spectacular rituals’.<sup>97</sup> She further suggests that it was the fact that there was nothing to substantiate these commonplaces (what she calls the ‘emperor’s new clothes’ effect) and that they were ‘circumscribed by fear’ that gave them their ‘omnipotence’. But this agit-film attempts to demonstrate a reality.

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demonstrate women’s equality in the sphere of aviation reflect an idealised Stalinist social message.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Letat’ vyshe vseh devushek mira’, *Pravda*, no. 143, 26 May 1937, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Svetlana Boym, ‘From Russia with a Song: From Back in the USSR to Bye-Bye America’, *New Formations*, 22 (1994), 33-47 (p. 39-41).

And in its contemporary official symbolism the idea of *samolet* can be seen morphologically to stand in opposition to the politically negative idea of *samotek* (a lackadaisical attitude which was an anathema to Lenin and Stalin), or to the notion of ‘tiap da liap’ which Maiakovskii felt would prevent the building of an air fleet and which compelled him to say ‘Tovarishch!/ bros!/ v razdume koptit’sia!’ The following filmic syntagma’s in *Bogatyri Rodiny* show that Soviet self-perception which correspond to the idea that ‘ne na slovakh, na dele – proletarii stal krylat.’<sup>98</sup>

These sequences of *Bogatyri Rodiny* correspond with agit-films of the 1920s. Such as Vladimir Shneiderov’s and Giorgii Blium’s film of the ‘prestige flight’ *Velikii perelet*. This was a journey from Moscow to China and then Japan and is an early Soviet ‘travel film’ which promoted Soviet aviation advances, and friendship amongst nations.<sup>99</sup> *Bogatyri Rodiny* communicates this governing spirit by means of services that Civil Aviation provides within the Union. These are broadly referred to as ‘Sovetskaia aviatsia’. The syntagmas show the transportation of both goods and people and illustrate ways in which Aeroflot is used ‘na pomoshch’ (against locusts and malaria) and as a flying medical service ‘sanaviatsiia’. And, in a process which Widdis identifies as ‘osvoenie’, from Siberia and the Pamir Mountains to the Polar Circle, from Kazakhstan and Tadzhikstan to Lake Sevan, from Bashkiria to the Caspian Sea *Bogatyri Rodiny* brings images of the life of different groups of people to those of other regions and from the regions to the cities.<sup>100</sup> With the editing of the aeroplane’s flights and services as a symbolic single journey the aeroplane is understood to make its geography and its productivity ‘available to all’.<sup>101</sup> These sequences are followed by five syntagmas which illustrate *Stalinskaia aviatsiia* in terms of ‘missions of rescue’ in Arctic Siberia, Spain and Abyssinia. They include three of the most famous heroic

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<sup>98</sup> Vladimir Maiakovskii, ‘Aviadni’ (1923), in Maiakovskii *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 13 vols, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudezhestvennoi literaturoi, 1955-1961), V (*mart-dekabr’ 1923*), ed. by I. I. Ageeva and F. N. Pitskel’ (1957), pp. 85-86. See also his ‘Daesh’ motor!’ (1925), and ‘O.D.V.F.’ (1925), in *ibid.*, VI (*1924-pervaia polovina 1925*), ed. by I. S. Eventov (1957), pp. 131-36 and 137-41.

<sup>99</sup> Palmer, *Dictarship of the Air*, p. 165.

<sup>100</sup> See Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

journeys of the 1930s, the Cheliuskin *'epopeia'*, the Papanin expedition and Chkalov's trans-polar flight to America.

#### **'Sviazyvanie' and Furs from Siberia**

The first imperative of 'Soviet aviation' as projected in this film is the unification of the country's geographical regions. Eleven minutes into the film the intertitle reads; 'Sovetskaia aviatsiia sviazala samye dalekie okrainy nashei rodiny.'

The following sequences show Siberian people who bring furs through a forest and emerge by the side of a lake where a hydro-plane is waiting. We are brought close to the texture of the fur. We see the detail of the hunters' clothes, their pack animals and the land they inhabit. They emerge from a forest by the side of a lake, where a hydro-plane is waiting. The cliffs at the water's edge are beautiful, sculpted shapes in a muted tone. The whole sequence is set to a gentle orchestral accompaniment of classical themes. The film thus praises the life of the trappers, the landscape and the technology. This filmic insert employs a 'lakirovka' of (what is ostensibly) factual life, and this cinematographic register symbolically harmonizes the idea of Soviet life across the country's regions. The aeroplane lies across the frame suggesting its link to world off-screen.

#### **Above the Pamirs : aerial *puti soobshcheniia* and technology of dominance**

The idea of *sviazyvanie* is also visualized by means of images of air travel and the aerial view. At this point the narration explains that 'nad gorami [...] pamira rabotaiut avia-motory', and the audience is shown dramatic aerial views of white clouds and the snow capped mountain chain of the Pamirs as it slides below the aeroplane's wing, and is framed by, first, the aeroplane's motor, then its wing supports and skis. There is a constant reminder that the powerful landscapes of the Soviet Union are made available by the aeroplane. And with narrative intrusions such as 'Vsego dva chasa dlitsia perelet' 'vmesto piatnadsati sutok dlia karavannogo puti', it is the ideology of technology that is underscored. The technology of the aeroplane supersedes the animal caravan. The film does not intend the aeroplane to be viewed as a 'technology of dominance'<sup>102</sup> which proves Moscow's (urban) superiority over the environs (rural areas). Although it may be understood as part of that dynamic, by means of the quality

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<sup>102</sup> Palmer, 'Peasants into Pilots', pp. 1-26.



of light, the tone of voice of the narrator and the images of the aeroplane's positive reception, the sequence is intended to make the audience identify with technological progress and to feel pride in it and in the beauty and variety of the Motherland. Bearing out Widdis' analysis of the function of *puti soobshcheniia* and Medvedkin's *Kinopoezd*, here the official 'imaging' of the aeroplanes' flight paths connect the regions and 'equalize' life by bringing goods and the benefits of technology not just to the centre but to all corners of the country.<sup>103</sup>

These sequences make the great expanse of the Soviet Union known to the contemporary viewer much in the same way that pre-revolutionary Russian series Zhivopisnaia Rossiia's *Zavod rybnykh konservov v Astrakhane* (Pathé, 1908) did before the Revolution. In Kazakhstan, aeroplanes which have been filled by gas-masked workers are shown with a white tail of spray flowing behind them as they come to the regions aid against. 'Groznoe bedstvo!' – locust and 'na pomoshch' against Malaria. There is sweeping footage from an aeroplane of Georgian mountains, and of a village clinging to its rocks, the intrepid aeroplane and the collection by air-ambulance of a sick person seems to enter discourse with Mikhail Kalatozov's dramatic, visceral portrayal of the isolation, oppression and starvation in his *Dzhim Shvante* (Sol' Svanetii) (Salt for Svanetiia) (Tresta, Goskinprom, Georgia, 1929). Kalatozov's film communicates the historic isolation and oppression that occurred in such villages before the Revolution. At the end, the film asserts that this oppression by nature and history will all change under Bolshevik power. As if an affirmation of this, in *Bogatyri Rodiny* we see the patient loaded onto the aeroplane and the pilot (in his leather cap and goggles pulled back on his head) shakes hands with the people who have entrusted the villager to his care. He is waved off and, as the airplane rises over the beautiful snow crested peaks, we are told that 'tak v liubuiu pogodu s vrachom na bartu bezhat na pomoshch' letchiki nashei sanitarnoi aviatsii.' But while Kalatozov ends with this message, his mixed documentary and acted film shows the reality of starvation and the painful lack of supply of salt at a time when, *as a result of Bolshevik government measures*, starvation was occurring in his contemporary Georgia.

It may be a shift in apperception between 1930 and 2014 which allows this ambivalent reading. But the strong oratorical commentary (which asserted that change would come under Bolshevik rule) enabled the communication of an ambivalence

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<sup>103</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 46.

which may have been intended. In his later film, *Muzhestvo*, there is an ideologically sound transformation of individual *will* into action in service of the state. By means of this act the essence of the pilot's character is proven, and this exploit also lends the film its name. This, in turn, signals the director's officially correct position. But the aerial views of the snow-capped mountains are more dramatic than the subjugation of an interventionist enemy which happens during a climactic flight. And the length of time the director gives to the awe-inspiring beauty of the sunlit crags foregrounds their communication which is on a level beyond the film's ideological and dramatic planes.

### **The Soviet Union: garden of plenty**

In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, arid frames of Tadzhikistan are contrasted to images which resemble a tourist version of Dovzhenko's close-ups of fruit from *Zemlia*. That great director's vision of fertility and of the cyclical in nature is rendered a glossy advertisement for what could be read as the Soviet 'land of plenty'. The next edit shows 'fruit' being put into crates. The label 'Michurinsk Pitomnik/Ostrov Rudol'fa' pays homage to the work of the genetic horticultural scientist, Michurin (as interpreted by Lysenko). The new Soviet biology, 'with its emphasis on the inheritance of acquired characteristics and the consequent alterability of organisms through directed environmental change, was well suited to the extreme voluntarism that accompanied the accelerated development of the drive to industrialise and collectivise.'<sup>104</sup> Cinematographically, the printed word (Michurinsk) posits the underlying *ideinost'* and *partiinnost'* of this sequence (its topicality and faithfulness to socialist ideology and the furthering of Party ideals).

### **Heroic Rescue**

In *Bogatyri Rodiny* there is documentary footage of the defenceless peoples of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and Spain as they are bombed by German planes. These are dramatic sequences which illustrate what it means to be fascist 'zveri'. We are told that *Stalinskai aviatsiia* serves 'another purpose', and it is this kind of footage which adds legitimacy to the fictional fears of invasion. The notion of the Soviet Air Force serving a higher moral purpose sub-structures 'war' films (oboronnye; literally meaning

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<sup>104</sup> Helena Sheehan, 'Who was Lysenko? What was Lysenkoism?', in Sheehan, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Science: A Critical History* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1993) <<http://www.comms.dcu.ie/~sheehanh/lysenko.htm>>.

‘defence’), such as *Gorod pod udarom* (City Under Siege) (Soiuzfil’m, 1933), Aleksandr Macheret’s *Rodina zovet* (The Motherland Calls) (Mosfil’m, 1936); Petr Malakhov *Glubokii Reid* (Deep Strike), aka *Gordye sokoly* (Proud Falcons) (Mostekhfilm, 1937, r. 1938). In these fiction films it is the Motherland which is invaded and in need of defending. Images of aerial battles (close-ups of pilots in their cockpits and of aircraft in flight); and of bombardments (either of the Motherland, or of the enemies’ headquarters) dominate these films.

In *Rodina zovet*, the intangible and powerful bond of love between the father and son is mediated in terms of flight. The film begins with a close-up of the foot of the young boy, Iurii Novikov (Aliesha Goriunov). The young ‘restless inventor’ (neugomonnyi izobrazitel’) is setting up the antennae of his home-made radio, and he then looks out a window towards the sky. Edits between the boy looking out of the window and his father, the test pilot, Sergei Novikov (Mikhail Kedrov) communicate the strength of their love. As Novikov radios-in the news of his long-distance flight from the cockpit, a wound that he sustained in the Civil War opens up, almost as a presentiment of his imminent need to return to the defence of his country. When the country is invaded and a lone aeroplane gets through, Novikov responds to the call. Transformed from a *test pilot* (ispytatel’) into a fighter-pilot (istrebitel’) he goes after the ‘W-22’. In the air he learns that his son is amongst the victims. A close-up transforms his face into pure symbol of a fighter-pilot: the black rigid form of his goggles fills the screen. This image resembles that of Marfa Lapkina as a tractor-pilot in *Genera’naiia liniia* where the image of man-machine emblemized an idea of self-empowerment in a battle with the Old World. In *Rodina zovet* the domination of the black squares communicates the transformation of self into a pure killing-machine. The redemption of which is emblematically concluded by means of a visual parallelism. This is created when the German’s aeroplane has been shot down and we see the black squares of its swastika as it melts, and slides down the tailfin. *Pravda* reported that the writers Macheret and Kataev and the whole ‘collective’ of Mosfil’m, had depicted a family which represented all Soviet patriotic families, ready to respond to the call of the Motherland to destroy its enemies.<sup>105</sup> Self-perceived patriotism is thus understood in aviation terms to be the defence of ‘druzhiba’ at home and abroad. In *Bogatyri*

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<sup>105</sup> N. Erukhimovich, “‘Rodina zovet’”, kinokartina proizvodstva studii “Mosfil’m”, 1936 g., *Pravda*, no. 129, 12 May 1936, p. 4.

*Rodiny*, after showing the fires of the bombed villages in the grasslands of Africa and terrified people running for shelter in Madrid, Spain, the next intertitle is as if we are reading a fairy tale (complete with ellipses): ‘I kogda...’. The following footage is of a transformative event in the history of Stalin’s Russia: the rescue of the crew and passengers of the steam-ship, Cheliuskin.

### **The Cheliuskin *epopeia* as precursor text**

The first edit shows the Cheliuskin as it is sinking between Arctic ice floes. In 1933 the steamer attempted a passage from Murmansk eastward through the Siberian Arctic waters.<sup>106</sup> On 13 February 1934, however, it foundered and sank, leaving its captain, crew, and passengers (including women and children, even a toddler) stranded on the Arctic ice. The plight, and rescue of the passengers and crew of Captain Voronin’s ship from the ice of the Chukchi Sea, became the subject of a nationwide media campaign. Both the event and the campaign to rescue the expedition leader, Otto Iul’evich Shmidt (1891-1956) and the passengers and crew are central to this film’s themes commemorating the Revolution. That is, the theme of the heroic. The episode is also literally central to the film, being twenty-two minutes into its fifty-five minute running time. The powerful image of the sinking ship is immediately followed by a frame filled with a newspaper report of the tragedy. This communicates how quickly the government responded to the disaster. These edits demonstrate not only the importance of the event itself, but also the importance of its public perception. The use of footage of the event in this Aviation-Day film can be seen as a continuation of that media campaign.

In *Bogatyri Rodiny* we hear the sound effect of a blizzard underscoring the film footage taken by camera operator Mark Troianovskii and Arkadii Shafran (who accompanied the Cheliuskin group).<sup>107</sup> The film’s narrator encapsulates the sweeping coverage ‘I kogda sto odin grazhdanin nashei rodiny okazalis’ u l’da v plenu, vsia strana i tovarishch Stalin zabotalis’ o spasenii liudei’. This is spoken with a decided emphasis and foregrounding of Stalin in the narrator’s intonation. The sighting of a rescue

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<sup>106</sup> See the documentary film: *Tainy veka: Cheliuskin. Obrechennye na podvig* (hereafter *Obrechennye na podvig*) written and presented by Natal’ia Metlina (Telekompaniia Ostankino, 2004);

<sup>107</sup> Kino slovar’, II, p. 673.

aeroplane is heralded with suitably stirring orchestral music as the camera tracks a small aircraft across black-and-snow-covered craggy peaks. This is followed by an emotionally expressive cut between eager upturned faces and a graceful arc of a vapour trail as the plane disappears into the far reaches of the sky. As the aeroplane is tracked in its flight the narrator says; “Stalinskaia aviatsiia”. The integrated information of narration and image creates a psychological relationship between pilot and Stalin and suggests that it is his will and spirit which is the essence of their heroism. While illustrating the truly heroic feats of both the rescuers and rescued, it is Stalin’s mythopatriarchal image as the leader who cares for the people of his country (like a father cares for his children) which is foregrounded.<sup>108</sup> The Cheliuskin rescue was taken to be living proof of Stalin and the Party’s concern for its people. We then see a small biplane make its bumpy landing on a snow field which has been cleared of blocks of loose ice by the stranded people themselves.<sup>109</sup> The implication is that this level of risk and heroism with a moral purpose draws its source from Stalin and it is for this reason that aviation is given his name in the film.

It was for the successful conclusion of this potentially self-sacrificing feat that the pilots were awarded the first ever Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuzza medals. The ratification of this, the highest military honour of the country, altered the perception of ‘the heroic’ in the Soviet Union thereafter. Journalists at this time understood the institutional model of heroism to be ‘new phenomenon’. Reporting on an interview with Molokov the quotation reads ‘Slovo geroi stalo u nas gosudarstvennym poniatiiem, oformlennym zakonom. Geroi – eto prisvoennoe zakonom. Nositel’ zvaniia geroiia- eto chelovek neobychainoi slavy’.<sup>110</sup> Heroism has been defined in Soviet encyclopaedias as ‘zvanie, iavliaiushcheesia vysshei stepen’iu otlichiiia, prisvaivaetsia za lichnye ili kollektivnye zaslugi pered gosudarstvom, sviazannye s soversheniem geroicheskogo podviga.’<sup>111</sup> The heroic rescue invested the self-perception of the Soviet people with a notion of

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<sup>108</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 124-29. Hans Günther, ‘Stalinskie sokoly’, pp. 122-41.

<sup>109</sup> Gunstun, ‘Polikarpov’, *Osprey Encyclopedia*, pp. 286-312 (p. 295). See also ‘Cheliuskin’, in *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, XLVII, ed. by B. A. Vvedenskii (1957), p. 108. See also *Obrechennye na podvig*.

<sup>110</sup> Günther, ‘Stalinskie sokoly’, p. 124.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuzza’, in *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, XI, ed. by B. A. Vvedenskii (1952), p. 142.

‘glory’ which reached new levels, and this notion of the ‘heroic’ became a defining phenomenon of the times.

The humanity and emotion of the event is captured in details such as the eagerness with which the plane is greeted and the visual impact of the white aerial stream against the pale sky which suggests the very idea of a breath of hope. We see the pilots protectively, but matter-of-factly, prepare the passengers in extra layers of clothing and help them into the aircraft (ANT-4). At the centre of the film there is a return to its title and its dedication. These are the first Heroes of the Soviet Union and the dimension of heroism of the rescue was equal to that of the mythic rescuer-*bogatyr*’. With climactic music each pilot is introduced to the audience by name, the narrator’s voice is full of pride, and the close-ups fill the frame successively with each of their smiling, acutely individual faces. They all have the various accoutrements of the Arctic pilot: layers of scarves, fur and, of course, fliers’ goggles over a leather cap. First before the camera are the strong features of Vasilii Molokov, then the more chiselled face and bright eyes of Mikhail Vodop’ianov, followed by Sigizmund Levanevskii, Mavrikkii Slepnev, Nikolai Kamanin, the bear-like Ivan Doronin and lastly, Anatolii Liapidevskii, the first person to land and the pilot who received the first medal.<sup>112</sup> The camera also shows us the fuller faced figure of Doronin with two others casually ‘having a smoke’ on the ice in front of their plane. They appear at ease with themselves, straight-forward men who are at home in the most hostile of environments. Their easy going attitude contributes to the paradigm of the ‘heroic’ that they create. And we hear that; ‘Oni prodemonstirovali vsemu chelovechestvu gumannost’ aviatsii sotsializma, proslaviali na ves’ mir znamena Respubliki Sovetov.’ The idea of *gumannost’* is underscored with imagery that conveys a sense of the ‘ordinary’ living being. In the layering of image and narration can be seen the mixture of romantic and folkloric heroes. The Bakhtinian chivalric romantic hero was defined by the fact that he was both an individual and a symbolic figure. Above all else he represented glory not only for himself but for others (King and state) and, in this the episode reflects its epic quality.<sup>113</sup> Thus Soviet identity is modelled on romantic, folkloric and democratic ideas of heroism, which all serve the heroes sense of collective self.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>113</sup> Bakhtin, ‘Forms of Time and the Chronotope’, p. 153.

<sup>114</sup> See Katerina Clark, *Soviet Novel as History*.

The audience identifies with the Cheliuskinites' elation at seeing the rescue-aeroplane, and their celebratory welcome of the rescuers whom they throw into the air. There is a natural appeal of the 'face' of Soviet heroism framed on screen. Ultimately the audience empathises with the drama of the ordeal of being flown off the ice. Human values are 'made strange' when foregrounded against the alien Arctic environment. The pilots' heroic and self-sacrificing acts are distilled into the abstract idea of 'aviatsiia sotsializma', and they are symbolised in 'znamena Respubliki Sovetov'. The authenticity of the footage can thus be seen to be a source of its emotional power. And it is this emotional power which gives life to the ideological message. Eizenshtein (drawing on linguistic analysis) says that it is 'the logic of emotion when thoughts are placed not according to constant rules of reasoning but according to the significance which the speaker ascribes to them, and which he wishes to make his interlocutors feel.'<sup>115</sup>



**Figure 15: Vasilii Molokov**



**Figure 16: Mikhail Vodop'ianov**

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<sup>115</sup> Eizenshtein, 'Dickens, Griffiths and Ourselves', p. 234.



**Figure 17: Ivan Doronin**



**Figure 18: Sigizmund Levanevskii**



**Figure 19: Sergei Stoliarov (Aerograd, 1935)**





Figure 20: *Den' aviatsii*, 1935 <sup>116</sup>

Yet the seemingly unrepeatable imagery became the source of a canonization of Soviet heroism. The Cheliuskin heroes became the epitome of Stalin's definition of a pilot when, in 1936 he said that 'Piloty – eto kontsentratsiia kharakera, voli, umenie idti na risk. No smelost' i otvaga, eto tol'ko odna storona geroizma. Drugaia storona – eto umenie.'<sup>117</sup> Together they created an image of the pilot-rescuer capable of taking extreme personal risks for the sake of his fellow countrymen. And the 'unrepeatable' images of the documentary film of the Cheliuskin rescue can be seen as 'stem' imagery of the Soviet pilot-hero. The image of the Cheliuskin pilot-*bogatyry*' becomes a filmic text which is echoed in played film, for instance in the face of actor Sergei Stoliarov as Vladimir in *Aerograd* and as Martynov, in Aleksandrov's *Tsirk*; Mikhail Kedrov as Sergei Novikov (especially when he is an *ispytatel'* at the beginning) in *Rodina zovet*; Oleg Zhakov as Aleksei Tomilin in *Muzhestvo*, Andrei Abrikosov as Leontii Shirokov in *Piatyi okean*; Vladimir Belokurov as Valerii Chkalov in Mikhail Kalatozov's film of the same name, and Nikolai Kriuchkov as the pilot brother to an orphan in Iurii Vasil'chikov's *Brat geroia* (Brother of a Hero) (Soiuzdet'film, 1940), and also the flight commander in *Nebesnyi tikhokhod*. Two decades later the legacy can be seen in Sania Grigor'ev, in Vladimir Vengerov's *Dva kapitana* (Lenfil'm, 1955). The Cheliuskin epic was the subject of Poselky's creative documentary (with English voice-over by R. E. Jeffreys), which was screened as part of the BBC's 'Voices of the Past'

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<sup>116</sup> Permissions for these reproductions of images from Aviation Day films kindly given by Studiia Kryl'ia Rossii.

<sup>117</sup> Pravda, 14 August, 1936, p. 1.

series. The Cheliuskin was also the subject of Mikhail Ershov's dramatic film which takes the name given to the people stranded on the ice for its title: *Cheliuskintsy* (Lenfil'm, 1984).

The symbolism of 'democratization' of the romantic chivalric hero applies in the filmic treatment of pilots on the airfield in air-parade film. They, like the Cheliuskin rescuers, are introduced with pride by name, title and ranks (including 'Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuza') and they get into their *istrebiteli* and *bombardirovshchiki* with relaxed (and smiling) *muzhestvo*. For instance, Kokkinaki in *Bogatyri Rodiny* and his TsB-26, Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuza, Osipenko (*Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939)), and Colonel Nikolaev's *piaterka* stand in front of a Polikarpov I-16 before being introduced one by one to camera (*Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1940)). Thus the parallelism of the framing of the pilot who smiles to camera denotes the pilot-*bogatyry*' and *sokol* who faces the risk of life for the sake of his countrymen and visually links the heroic experiences in the Arctic with the images taken on the airfield and in played film. The footage of the actual event and its newsreel footage can also be understood in terms of Clark and Borges' 'precursor' text. Clark says that 'each writer creates his precursor text. His conception of the past will modify the past and the future.'<sup>118</sup>

While not specifically drawing on this episode, the portrayal of the Cheliuskin-*sokol* underscores the definition of the heroic which was available to Soviet citizens of the 1950s in their encyclopaedias. It says: 'Geroizm – samootverzhennost', *muzhestvo*, *stoikost'*, *bestrashie narodov*'.<sup>119</sup> The 1934 Cheliuskin footage can be seen as a precursor text which may have been created with a self-consciousness of 'history in the making' but the interpretation of the original material was in turn affected by later definitions of the heroic which it inspired. The treatment of historic events of the 1930s created an ideological horizon (the *socialized and inter-individual* meaning of phenomena rather than their practical sense alone) which was, in the first instance, defined by the state.

### **Papanin**

In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, following the sequences depicting rescue of 'defenceless' in Abyssinia and Spain, a filmic insert begins by projecting a visual sense of the idea of

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<sup>118</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, pp. 27- 44 (p. 29)

<sup>119</sup> 'Geroizm', in *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, XI, pp. 141-42 (p. 141).

Russia as the master of unattainable regions of the world. The camera dramatically frames two engines and a propeller against the sky. In the distance a horizontal line of movement is marked by the length of an ANT-6 in the distance. The orchestral music gains in power and light plays on the propeller blades which are spinning so fast they cannot be seen. The bright open expanse of sky beyond the wing takes our imagination into the distance. There is a palpable sense of power and open space which create a symbiotic sense of a limitless world and of the 'moral' drive of the Soviet people, and of Stalin. The edits between, now Vodop'ianov at the controls and now of Shmidt with the navigator, and now to images of another aeroplane off the wing, show this to be footage of Shmidt, Vodop'ianov and Ivan Papanin's expedition to establish the first exploratory station at the North Pole. In August 1937, this expedition, which set out from the Central Aerodrome on 21 April 1937 and arrived at its destination one month later, would be familiar, indeed famous and fresh in the minds of audiences of the Air Parade and the cinema-going public. The sequence of edits between close-ups Vodop'ianov and Molokov in the cockpit and the long shots of the snow covered, untouched wasteland and glittering sea creates an awe-inspiring view of the Arctic. When the intertitle then announces 'polius pokoren bol'shevikami', this feat is communicated as heroic not only because an undoubted natural contestant has been subjugated but also because the extent of the men's heroism is matched by the grandeur and beauty of the landscape.

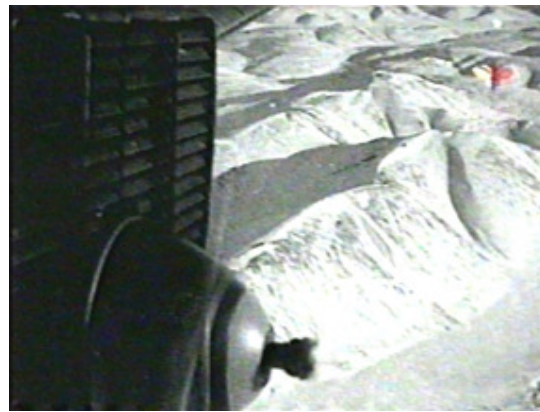
Andrei Zhdanov said of Socialist-Realist literature in his speech to the All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 that it should be 'a combination of the most austere, matter-of fact work with the greatest heroic spirit and grandiose perspectives'.<sup>120</sup> The film communicates the idea of 'grandiose perspectives' in its symbolic and visual rendering of the Arctic terrain. And it underscores ideology by drawing on the emotive power of the beauty and austerity of the landscape.

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<sup>120</sup> 'Rech' sekretaria TsK VKP(b) A. A. Zhdanova', in *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 1934: stenograficheskii otchet*, ed. by I. K. Luppol, M. M. Rozental' and S. M. Tret'iakov (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1934), pp. 2-5 (p. 4). Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 150.



**Figure 2: Over the Pamirs (*Bogatyri Rodiny*, 1937)**



**Figure 3 Over the Pamirs (*Bogatyri Rodiny*, 1937)**

*Bogatyri Rodiny* shows Otto Schmidt and Papanin exiting the aeroplanes onto the snow; their ‘victory’ is given an ideological interpretation, which is communicated by means of the intertitle which reads: ‘that the human dream of mankind is realised’ (chtob sbylas’ mechta gumannost’ chelovechestva). In this phrase the Soviet Union reveals its self-image as the vanguard of historical dialectical progress. But aviation as mediator also speaks to the folkloric origins of the Russian word for the aeroplane; *samolet* (self-flier). This magic carpet was the means for the young peasant protagonist of the tale to realise his dreams by flying back to Russia with the princess, whose hand in marriage he had won by his heroic feats. In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, as the flag is hoisted over the Arctic Schmidt leads them in singing the ‘Internationale’. The lyrics underscore the idea of competition with the West and with nature as ‘a decisive battle’ (reshitel’nye boi). The film shows the small group of explorers gathered under the Soviet flag at the North Pole like a microcosm of the wider Soviet Family. The camera glorifies their feat in a long pan away from the men that takes in the sweep of their natural ‘adversary’.

Günther draws a link between the idea of the battle against the ‘black’ fascists and ‘white’ Arctic. And the battle against fascism is one of the definitions of *gumannost'* given at the First Conference of Soviet Writers.<sup>121</sup> In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, a powerful structuring theme is *Stalinskaia aviatsiia*. It links the Cheliuskin episode, the air raids in Abyssinia and Spain, and the Papanin expedition. It is shown to represent a Socialist-Realist idea of *gumannost'* as both a readiness to fight for a better world and the moral will to carry it out. And the aeroplane's motor is a metonym of *Stalinskaia aviatsiia*. The use of the long shot and aerial views of the Arctic underscore a sense of the scale of the metaphoric battle. At the same time, the beauty of these images communicates a sense which is not dissimilar to the power of moral truth. Soviet geography is given a layer of significance which derives from the heroic actions which take place within (and above) it. By virtue of the ideological basis of its structure, the film is an example of creative documentary in its role as propaganda. Its treatment of contemporary history is not propaganda as a ‘construction of lies’ but the film does create a Soviet mythology which is based on reality.<sup>122</sup>

Stalin's aviation is understood to unify time and space not just between two great continental powers, but between two nations as homelands (*dva materika*). In a long aerial sweep of Pearson Air Field<sup>123</sup> we see the ANT-25 as it stands like an elegant giant ‘bird’ with its registration clear on its wing, surrounded by an array of technologically ‘inferior’ motor vehicles.<sup>124</sup> In accordance with a notion of Bolshevik humility we see Chkalov give a speech which gives account of Mikhail Gromov, Sergei Danilin and Andrei Iumashev's flight which was at that moment breaking (his own team's) world-record by flying six thousand three hundred miles over the Pole to San Jacinto, California. We see a long sequence of edits of the Heroes of the Soviet Union being received by ‘hospitable America’, and there are more flowers, leis around necks and officials, flags, canon fire, confetti and speeches as ‘In delight the whole world

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<sup>121</sup> Günther, ‘Stalinskie sokoly’, pp. 122-41.

<sup>122</sup> ‘Za “kruglym stolom”’, *Istoriia na ekrane: Dokument i mif*, *Iskusstvo kino*, 1991.1, pp. 23-34, (p. 25).

<sup>123</sup> Bill Alley, *Pearson Field, Pioneering Aviation in Vancouver and Portland* (San Francisco, CA: Arcadia, 2006), p. 67.

<sup>124</sup> The ANT-25 was able to be left overnight with only a few a guards on the field, and it was dismantled and shipped back to Russia the following day. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

greet the sons of the great country of socialism'. We see the men receiving honours from officials and citizens in the streets of Los Angeles and on a public outdoor stage. It is both the men and Soviet technology (which represent the collective) that are appraised. 'Accounts in the Soviet press of various record-breaking Soviet flights reveal how important the aviation hero was, not merely as a prestige symbol but as a chosen 'son', a fine example of new-order man. With each achievement the newspaper writers made claims for the superiority of Soviet aviation, but the main thrust of their claims was in terms of human superiority.'<sup>125</sup> Clark continues: 'Each aviator's flight became, as it were, his ritual trial by the elements to prove his worth as a "son"'. She sees that 'in terms of Russian superiority in combating the onslaughts of the elements 'each "trial", while not directly political in significance, did have broad symbolic resonance of a political nature.'<sup>126</sup> As the music comes to a climax over these exultant frames the Lebedev-Kumach refrain rings out 'vezde molodezh/ i vse ot rozhdenii – krylatie.'

In this respect, the documentary footage of Chkalov's speech compares to the structuring of two corresponding speeches which Valerii Chkalov (Vladimir Belokurov) gives after landing in Vancouver, and again during his welcoming trips home in Mikhail Kalatozov's fictionalized biographic film, *Valerii Chkalov*. In it Chkalov, Baidukov and Beliakov slide down the wing of their aeroplane, and hug each other in delight while standing in front of the fuselage painted with the aeroplane's name: 'Stalin's Route'. By means of this choreography, they express their delight at the successful flight and the film draws attention to the name of the leader who is their source of inspiration (vdokhnovitel'). The camaraderie is interrupted by what is shown to be a comparatively brutish crowd of journalists. Making his first speech from the aeroplane's wing, Chkalov shows his consternation at what is to him an unintelligible whistling of the crowd. Overcoming this, he gives a greeting from 'a million of our people to the great American people' (ot millionov nashego naroda k velikomu amerikanskomu narodu). Even while showing Chkalov trying to be diplomatic, this fictionalized speech is framed by differences between perceived Soviet and American values. For instance, crying 'hurrah' in delight 'according to the Russian custom' (po nashemu), rather than whistling. And when a journalist barges up to Chkalov and asks

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<sup>125</sup> Clark, 'The Aviation Hero as the Paradigmatic New Man', *The Soviet Novel*, p. 136.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

if he is rich, Chkalov says: 'yes'. But then, famously, he explains that 'one hundred and seventy million' refers neither to dollars or rubles, but to the number of (Soviet) 'people' who made his flight possible. In Kalatozov's film there is a collage of documentary footage of trains taking the pilots across the country, and streets showered with confetti as their cavalcade passes through. (Some of this newsreel footage seems to serve both *Bogatyri Rodiny* and the biographical film.)

Kalatozov's film at first echoes the news clips used in *Bogatyri Rodiny* of Chkalov on the airfield in his leather chaps and flight-jacket, and then in a soft-rumpled suit as a rugged individual praising the achievements of his comrades. But the dramatized speech-giving exaggerates the oratory of the corresponding documentary speeches. Chkalov/Belokurov gives three speeches which each communicate a more patriotic message, and they increase in oratorical style. Upon landing we see Chkalov/Belokurov give his speech from the aeroplane's wing dressed in leather-chaps and pilot-jacket. The second speech is given wearing a soft-wool suit and it further underscores collective identity. For the final speech, unlike the documentary footage, Chkalov is in an airforce uniform, and his speech is a full affirmation to the Soviet people of their importance to history. He is aggrandized by the low angle of the camera. And in this last speech, without a contextualizing audience or horizon in view, with a wind blowing both his hair and unidentifiable flags behind, Chkalov's figure echoes the extreme patriotic imaging of heroic leaders seen in Vladimir Petrov's *Petr Pervyi* (Peter the Great) (part one) (Lenfil'm, 1937) and Sergei Eizenshtein's *Aleksandr Nevskii* (Mosfil'm, 1939) in each of which, near the end of the film, the eponymous rulers give speeches to (now) off-screen audiences, and thus, as if to posterity. Diegetically, the viewer understands that the protagonists are speaking to those present at the historical event depicted (whether it is victory over the Swedes or over the Germans or over nature itself). But the unseen audience becomes symbolic of a meta-objective point of view, and the medium close-ups knit the cinema viewer into a sense of the dynamic of history. In Kalatozov's film, the words of Chkalov's final address defines Soviet identity:

Так я узнавал наш народ, крепко веряющий в свое счастье, в свои способности завоевать это счастье... «эта вера вела нас через облака, туманы, циклоны и всегда приводила прямо к цели, ибо если весь наш советский народ, возглавляющий человечество на его пути ко всемирному коммунизму, желает

одного и того же, то это желание непременно будет осуществленно.

In Kalatozov's film, Chkalov ends his speech by affirming Soviet identity not only in terms of socio-political faith which led them through their ordeal. He specifies cultural and historical figures who are models of talent, social mindedness, and who have affected history, and who thus hyponymically define the Russian people:

Велик и могуч наш русский народ... народ Разина и Ломоносова, Пушкина и Ленина, Горького и Сталина!<sup>127</sup>

### **Praising the Commander**

Following the documentary speech given by Chkalov in *Bogatyri Rodiny* there is an extended intertitle which sets out the words to the lyrical march of Dunaevskii's music.

Нет страны  
Где ценили бы лучше  
Нет страны  
Где б любили бы сильней  
Командиров  
Эскадры летучей  
Капитанов  
Воздушных морей!

We understand from this climactic song that it is not great events alone that define Soviet heroism but the return to earth of the pilot-*bogatyri*' and his appraisal in the public arena. In Bakhtin's analysis of the characteristics of early forms of autobiography and biography, he says that it was in the public square, the *agora* of ancient Greece, that the rhetorical form of autobiography was born. It took shape through the action of public evaluation. In this space the individual was defined in

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<sup>127</sup> In the screenplay (montazhnaia zapis') of the film, *Valerii Chkalov*, the words of this last address do not include Stalin, and the film does not include Gertsen as a national figure with whom the Russian people is identified. This sentence in the printed version reads: 'Velik i moguch russkii narod, narod Razina i Lomonosova, Pushkina i Gertsena, Gor'kogo i Lenina!' See *Montazhnaia zapis' khudozhestvennogo kinofil'ma Valerii Chkalov*, ed. by L. Mitlina, Reklamfil'm: Moscow, year not given, pp. 3-50 (p. 50).



terms of the exemplar of his professional life. His individual sense of self was not differentiated from his public being and his identity was defined by his civic acts and in the public accounting of his life.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, 'the square' was where the image of man was made most public and 'exteriorized'. As he writes:

the square in earlier (ancient) times itself constituted a state ((...) the entire state apparatus), it was the highest court, the whole of science and art, the entire people participated in it. It was a remarkable chronotope in which all the most elevated categories, from that of the state to that of revealed truth, were realized concretely and fully incarnated, made visible and given a face.

It was the arena in which a man's life was 'biographized.' In it 'the examination of a citizen's whole life was accomplished, and received its public and civic stamp of approval.'<sup>129</sup> In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, there is a concatenation of symbolic spaces which are linked in the semantic field of an *agora*. The primary metaphor of this is the aerodrome. It is the site from which national aviation events begin and end, and at which Stalin and Politbureau leaders, and people from all over the Soviet Union, came in the act of symbolic appraisal. The Kremlin, to which the heroes went after they returned, and also the streets of cities and towns, which filled with welcoming crowds, became extensions of this sphere of symbolic appraisal, each became a site of affirmation of the biography of the 'commanders' of society, and thus also the values of society.

In *Bogatyri Rodiny* Voroshilov and Stalin are seen watching a Tupolev multi-engine ANT-6 as it lands majestically at the aerodrome. Shmidt is seen leaving the aeroplane and the camera tracks him past crowds waiting in grandstands bedecked with flowers. Stalin and Voroshilov look skyward and when the returning 'warriors' reach the stand, the camera just manages to capture the images of Stalin and Voroshilov kissing first Shmidt and then other heroes, including Vodop'ianov. The leaders display a father-like affection for the pilots which mirrors, on a personal level, the *zabota* which Stalin demonstrated when he ordered the rescue of the *Cheliuskintsy*. The men are Stalin's 'sons' and 'sokoly', and the sequence illustrates Katerina Clark's 'exteriorized' and warm 'kinship' relations of the symbolic Great Soviet Family.

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<sup>128</sup> Bakhtin, 'Apuleius and Petronius, Forms of Time and of the Chronotope', pp. 131.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Nowhere else in the world, according to the mythology created on screen, are heroes received so gloriously and, at the same time, with such ‘familial’ warmth. The pilots may be given a heroic reception abroad, but the Soviet Union is shown to be superior both in the ‘moral’ heroic actions of its ‘captains’ and in the ‘valuing’ of its citizens. Following these sequences we see Moscow’s streets filled with a flurry of paper which is continued graphically over the intertitles. The final words of the song punctuate the visuals with key identifying phrases of the period ‘bol’shaia strana’, ‘vezde molodezh’ and ‘ot moria do moria krylatye!’ The words define the country and connect paradigmatically through the filmic inserts. The music and intertitles serve the function of a public evaluating voice. By this means, the film subtly suggests that not only the ‘Kapitan’ and ‘Kommandir’ but all pilots ‘malyi’ and ‘bol’shoi’, that is, all ideologically enlightened citizens, all ‘krylatye liudi’ are sustained by the dynamic of public praise which is the final seal of approval and mark of acceptance in the Great Soviet Family. Subliminally, all *krylatye liudi* metaphorically experience the celebration of the heroic cavalcade. Bakhtin says early rhetorical forms of biography and autobiography were ‘completely determined by events’. They took the form of ‘either verbal praise of civic political acts or real human beings giving account of themselves.’<sup>130</sup> Thus, in *Bogatyri Rodiny* the reception of Stalin’s ‘sons’ abroad and at home can be seen as, not only a form of ‘Victory Parade’, but also of Bakhtinian rhetorical biography, and the function of public reception was to create an elision of the individual and the state.

In *Bogatyri Rodiny*, as we see the entourage drive past the camera and disappear into the ‘welcoming’ Kremlin. The intertitles inform us that they are going ‘K tomu, kto vdokhnovil ikh k pobedu’. Stalin is projected as the source of their inspiration, and thus as guiding spirit in the battle for a perceived better socialist world. And the record-breaking fliers and Arctic explorers are received by Father Stalin and the Motherland (as represented by the city, Moscow, the name of which is a feminine noun in Russian).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>131</sup> Hans Günther, ‘Wise Father Stalin and His Family in Soviet Cinema’ (hereafter: ‘Wise Father Stalin’), in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. by T. Lahuser and E. Dobrenko (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 178-90 (pp. 181-82).

In the juxtaposition of the motor cavalcade which enters the Kremlin, we understand that the Kremlin, like the airfield, is also a symbolic *agora*. In this film the site of societal evaluation of the ‘Sons’ becomes re-centred on the Kremlin, and then back on Tushino for Aviation Day. At these symbolic sites national ‘self-identity’ and values are affirmed. And the audience of the Air Parade and of the Air-parade film is able to participate in this affirmation. The country’s standing in the world is also measured by its technology, and by its fliers’ skills. Its pilots are the ‘commanders’ that create models of behaviour. And the performance of death-loops and other aerobatics in the *agora* of airfield is symbolic of the pilots’ ‘greater acts’ in the wider world. The next edit takes the viewer back to the ‘present’ of Aviation Day.

### **Close-up and Monumental**

There is an extreme wide angle view which shows a visual river of pilgrims coming into Tushino airfield from year to year. In ‘Mother Russia Soil and Soul’ Hellberg-Hirn says ‘traditionally, monuments are erected in areas that are as open and accessible to view as possible; they keep worshippers at a distance. This distance is inscribed into its function, and therefore approaching the monument always involves a sort of transgression of a sacred zone.’ She also says that:

Precisely the immensity of the monument so keenly felt in close proximity, lends the monument the quality of the colossal, the incommensurable, and ascribes it the fiction of infinite height and unconquerable strength.<sup>132</sup>

The close-ups of Stalin and Voroshilov and the other party members at Tushino could be said to have the same ‘traumatizing’ effect. The subject of the close-up is rendered ‘colossal’. The importance of this subliminal effect in underscoring the idea of power of the Party leadership is linked to the sacral effect of distancing. The sacral effect of distancing is inscribed into the long shot and the aerial view. And this combined with the sense of transgression of a sacral space in the close-up, and the suggestion of an imaginative utopian space projected by the audiences’ focused gaze off-screen, subtly communicate a sense of the Soviet people as a chosen people, and of their production and ideology as ‘colossal’, monumental and deified.

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<sup>132</sup> Elena Hellberg-Hirn, *Soil and Soul*, pp. 120-21.

A common feature of Aviation-Day films is the raising of icon-like posters of Stalin and party leaders. As historians have noted, this feature serves as a vertical and political *krestnyi khod* (the carrying of icons in religious ceremonies). The ritual underscores political legitimacy and hierarchy and incorporates already familiar religious forms of worship. Stalinist celebration drew on a mixture of traditions; pre-revolutionary (Orthodox), revolutionary, folk traditions and the military review in the ‘invention of tradition’.<sup>133</sup> The ritual raising of the leaders’ imagery visually affirms their power. It shows to whom the people should feel grateful, and also, suggests that the Party, in its heavenly association, will last forever. But ambivalences concerning the idea of ‘rising higher’ were problematic. Historically a large part of the ‘upwards mobility’ (which aviation semiotics speak to) was created by the disruption caused by the purges. Petrone suggests that official celebration discourse could simultaneously create a consciousness opposite to the one intended by the Party. In *Bogatyri Rodiny* close-ups between Voroshilov and a young girl who each concentrate their focus on the same aerial display suggest a symbolic proximity of the Party and people. But ‘for less exalted Soviet citizens, the meaning of celebrations were shaped, in part, by the growing distance between the rulers and the ruled.’<sup>134</sup> This was true for the elite as well. In *Prazdnik Stalinskikh sokolov*, the editing of one poster from the *krestnyi khod* of Party leaders suggests that one official was *edited out* from life itself. The raising of icons and aerial displays which were intended to symbolically celebrate inclusion could also serve as subtle reminders of the threat of exclusion.<sup>135</sup>

*Bogatyri Rodiny* was made in 1937, a year which saw a plethora of ‘heroic’ aviation events. And it reflects what is perceived as the zenith of the ‘heroic’ period in the Soviet Union, one which, according to Günther and Petrone ended in 1938 or 1939 with Chkalov’s death (while testing a new model of a Polikarpov fighter) and Kokkinaki’s crash landing in Canada on the way to the 1939 New York World Fair.<sup>136</sup> But the outstanding social context of these filmic ‘chronicles’ (which celebrate the Soviet Air Forces) are Stalin’s purges. The beginning of the purge of the Air Force was

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<sup>133</sup> Richard Stites, ‘The Origins of Soviet Ritual Style: Symbol and Festival in the Russian Revolution’, in *Symbols of Power*, pp. 23-43 (pp. 23-24).

<sup>134</sup> Petrone, *Life has become More Joyous, Comrades*, p. 203.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

marked only two months before Aviation Day when ‘Less than a year after the Spanish Civil War Stalin made his first moves against the military.’<sup>137</sup> Designed to rid himself of all military and political opposition, the purges decimated his High Command. The first ‘flash of lightening in the storm’ was in May 1937 when Marshal Tukhachevskii was removed from his post of Head of Red Army Ordnance and demoted to the Volga Military District’. Following this, Tukhachevskii and the Head of Osoaviakhim, Eideman, were executed on 11 June 1937. ‘The commander of the Winged Army’, General Iakov Alksnis, was ‘snatched away to the Liubianka’ as he travelled to a diplomatic event in Moscow. He did not outlive the year. At this time ‘most of the senior Red Air Force Command’, that is; the Heads of the Special Purpose Air Arm, Vasilii Khripin, the Head of the Air Force Political Directorate, Troianker, and the Head of the Zhukovskii Air Force Academy, Todorskii, as well as the military district air commanders, Uvarov, Inguanis, Chernobrovkin, Kushakov and Loptatkin, were arrested. Only the year before, they had received awards ‘from the hands of Stalin himself.’<sup>138</sup> The top designer Tupolev was not immune; he was arrested in October 1937 and charged with selling information to Germany. Like Polikarpov before him, Tupolev continued his design work from within prison.<sup>139</sup> ‘Out of 13,000 officers in 1937, the VVS lost 4,724 in the purge – more than 36 per cent of the officer corps.’<sup>140</sup>

By contrast, the mythic idea of Soviet aviation and its heroes (which are fully illustrated in *Bogatyri Rodiny*) became so powerful that even within the context of the Purges and the starvation caused by grain requisitioning in the first half of the 1930s, young people from all walks of life dreamed of becoming Soviet pilots. One villager of Vezhichki in the Bariatinskii region remembers;

‘Until the sad year of 1933 we were four children. In that year my youngest brother died of starvation. (...) We starved because of the “wisdom” of our dear Leader and Teacher. (...) In the spring my sisters and I combed the fields for rotten potatoes (...) I was always hungry, but still, however difficult my childhood was, *it*

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<sup>137</sup> Boyd, pp. 88-89.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.. For an analysis of the mythologies and contradictory realities of 1937, see: Karl Schlögel, *Moscow 1937* (Cambridge, MA: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

<sup>139</sup> Boyd, p. 48.

<sup>140</sup> Pennington, ‘From Chaos to the Great Patriotic War’, pp. 46-47.

*was a childhood. Joy, fantasy, I dreamed of becoming a pilot. Aircraft construction had just begun in our country, but I was already making airplane models.*<sup>141</sup>

Sons of Party leaders such as Leonid Khrushchev, Vladimir Mikoian and Stalin's son, Vasilii, (and also Mussolini's son) became pilots. In *Bogatyri Rodiny* official 'imaging' of Stalinist aviation mythology based on lived events reveals why such assertions as 'ne zria kazhdyi shkol'nik iunoshia mechtaet stat' sovetskim assom' (*Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939)) reflected truth and emotion in such a way that, in turn, it formed Soviet self-perception.

Each of the air-parade films ends with a different focus. *Den' aviatsii* ends with parachutists landing in Tushino airfield and with young women who gather in their parachutes. A young woman's bright face fills the screen. The idea of the airfield as a lyrical idyll is underscored, as is the rising importance of women in aviation. Reflecting an increasing military awareness and idea of preparation in the parade films up to 1940, the 1938 film ends with a sequence of parachutists who run, and then (by means of an edit) are transmogrified into each one of the military's defence forces in turn: troops (pekhota); cavalry (konnaia armiia), tank regiments (tankovyi korpus), and navy (voenno-morskoi flot). *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939) ends with parachutists followed by a ponderous dirigible. Airships were historically important for reconnaissance, and the juxtaposition underscores the air-ship with both the great importance that Lenin saw in them and the contemporary might of the modern air fleet.<sup>142</sup> In *Prazdnik stalinskoi aviatsii* (1940), after a display of *gigant* L-760 the refrain of the 'Aviator's March' is heard as parachutists fall from aircraft. The final image echoes the song's words; 'vse vysshe', as we see the audience (the symbolic *narod*) standing on the angle of the hill. The framing accentuates the upwards-ness of the slope. The parachutists fill the sky behind. The idea of rising higher, striving, and upwards purposefulness in the spirit and ideology of socialism is thus underscored.

The ending of *Bogatyri Rodiny* echoes the ending of Dovzhenko's *Aerograd*. In both films we see the sky off the tail of an aeroplane and through a mixture of edits the

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<sup>141</sup> Mary McAuley, 'Peasant Art, Peasant Blood', *Ford Foundation Report* (2001) <[http://www.for.found.org/publications/ff\\_report/view\\_detail.cfv?report\\_index=280](http://www.for.found.org/publications/ff_report/view_detail.cfv?report_index=280)> [accessed February 2006].

<sup>142</sup> Clive Foss, 'Russia's Romance with the Airship', *History Today*, 47, 12 (1997), 10-16.

sky gradually fills with a quantity and variety of aircraft. In *Bogatyri Rodiny* these images are edited with images of Stalin and Voroshilov, and refrains of images of Vodop'ianov and Molokov in the cockpit as they flew to the Arctic. In *Bogatyri Rodiny* the intertitles say 'na takikh samoletakh [...] s takimi letchikami [...] krylatyi sovetskii narod pobedit liubogo vruga'. But, just as in *Aerograd*, the aircraft on screen are no longer images of real aeroplanes. They have been replaced by animated simulacra. In *Bogatyri Rodiny* the splicing of images from newsreel footage of aircraft with their representation in animation reflects that, in official terms, it is the idea of the collective emotional spirit of socialism that the physical phenomena of aviation symbolised which is important. Therefore the form of the film is only important to the degree it expresses its desired 'logic of emotion'. While *Aerograd* offers subtle ambivalent readings (which are not taken up in this thesis), *Bogatyri Rodiny* is a Socialist-Realist documentary *par excellence* because the 'emotional logic' is equivalent to an ideological intention to show life in its revolutionary development towards socialism. *Bogatyri Rodiny* brings together syntagmas which show a romanticized relationship of the Party to the people. It shows contemporary events and the people who affect history. And it also shows the transfiguration of factual phenomena into sign and myth. This, in turn, draws its power from the fact that it is shown to be based in reality.

#### Chapter Four: Lyrical Flights and *Pravda zhizni*

In the previous chapter we have seen how, in the creative documentary, *Bogatyri Rodiny*, Varlamov and Kiselev use the detail and texture of historical events drawn from the sphere of aviation and transform them into a mythology based on ‘Stalin’s aviation’. By contrast, in *Letchiki* (Pilots) (Mosfil’m, 1935), Iulii Raizman sets a film in an aviation school, and fulfils the Socialist-Realist obligation for film to incorporate values of *ideeinost’* and *partiinnost’*. But what was important for Raizman and his leading actor, Vasili Shchukin was:

раскрыть целостную натуру человека, влюбленного в жизнь. Его отношение к любимой скрывается внутри потока радостных, светлых ощущений, вызванных самой действительностью. Это единство, условно говоря, «личного и общественного» обладает в фильме своей внутренней динамикой.<sup>1</sup>

Raizman says that what attracted him to Macheret’s scenario was ‘the profession of a pilot itself. Even though at that time pilots were for us what cosmonauts are for people today.’ He says it was important:

проникнуть в мир их чувств, познакомиться с особенностью их характеров не только в момент свершения подвига, но и в повседневной жизни.<sup>2</sup>

*Letchiki*’s original script-title, ‘Okrylennye liudi’, echoes the ideological and popular slogan of the day: ‘winged people’ (krylatye liudi).<sup>3</sup> The notion of *okrylennye* can include a sense of a politically and morally inspired people and may also be found in descriptions in *Pravda* at this time. Scott W. Palmer stresses that there are ‘didactic messages’ in the film.<sup>4</sup> Underlying the chosen title is a sense of the winged flier which signifies the Soviet people ‘sovershivshikh stremitel’nykh vzlet k novym vysotam zhizni’, as one Soviet critic interpreted *Letchiki*.<sup>5</sup> And a contemporary review entitled;

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Zak, *Iulii Raizman* (Moscow: Mastera kinoiskusstvo, 1969), pp. 61-87 (p. 77).

<sup>2</sup> Raizman, *Vechera i segodnia*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Boym, Svetlana, ‘From Russia with a Song’, pp. 39-41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Zak, *Iulii Raizman*, p. 66.



‘Okrylennye liudi’ says, ‘there are no negative personalities in the film. In all of the heroes on the screen, one can see (at different stages of development) our own Soviet people’.<sup>6</sup> And the sense of being *inspired* describes those people, such as the pilot, Kokkinaki, who is also called ‘unstoppable’ (neugommonyi) in the government organ, *Pravda*. He ceaselessly aspires to break through ever higher metaphorical ‘ceilings’ (potolok). And this is linked to a ‘dream’ he has had since childhood.<sup>7</sup> This presentation can be seen as a form of ‘appropriation’ of this spirit by officialdom.<sup>8</sup> Kokkinaki thus represents both a sense of being inspired (okrylennyi), and is emblematic of Soviet people as *krylatye liudi*. But Raizman’s choice of *Letchiki* over *okrylennye*, or *krylatye, liudi* suggests a desire to move away from a stock phrase. As Hannah Arendt says, stock phrases have the effect of essentially protecting people from thinking.<sup>9</sup> The notion of authentic inspiration links back to Nikishka in *Kryl’ia kholopa* who cries in the face of torture; “I will fly!” The three main protagonists of *Letchiki*, the Head of the School and aircraft designer (inventor/creator), Rogachev (Boris Shchukin), the flight student, Galina Bystrova (Evgeniia Mel’nikova) and the *test pilot*/flight instructor, Beliaev (Ivan Koval’-Samborskii) have a creative will and inner freedom (volia). This spirit is expressed in the characters’ impulses to fly, create and design aircraft and in their feelings of love. And the notion of *okrylennyi*, in its authentic sense of ‘being inspired’, encompasses not only a sense of the dynamics of creative spirit in the characters, but also a sense of the writer, cameraman and director of the film as pilot-creators themselves.

### Credits and Code

The film begins with credits over which we hear up-tempo parade-style music. Then, in silence, and mirroring a page from a chapter of a book, the first of seven introductory intertitles appears. These seven filmic chapters are: ‘Flight students’ (‘Uchlety’, meaning; *uchashchiesia letnoi shkoli*); ‘2. Catastrophe’ (Katastrofa); ‘3. Return’ (Vozvrashchenie); ‘4. Comrade Chief’ (Tov. Nachal’nik); ‘5. Operation (Operatsiia);

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<sup>6</sup> Palmer, ‘Red Wings on the Silver Screen’, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Boris Gorbатов, ‘Potolek letchika’, *Pravda*, no. 324, 25 November 1935, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> I wish to thank Jeremy Hicks for this conception as formulated for the conference: ‘Russia on Screen: Identity and Appropriation’, Queen Mary College, London University, 20 May 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (London: Harcourt, 1978), p. 4.

‘6. N. R Identifying Sign of the Aeroplane of N. Rogachev’s Design-Construction’ (N.R Otlichitel’nyi znak samoleta konstruksii N. Rogacheva); and ‘7. Assignment’ (Uchraspred). The music speaks to an idea of the parade ground and official celebration. The use of aviation terminology in a literary style suggests chapters in a code of service, or a flight-training book. The intertitles’ contextualizing purpose also has an affinity with those of silent film, and with chapter-headings in literature and, by these means, Raizman both fulfils his desire that the film truthfully communicates the everyday world which pilots inhabit, and foregrounds the film as a creative-construct. In contrast to the notion of a code book, the beginning and episodic structuring of the film reminds the audience that it is a creative rendering of the idea of ‘fliers’ and their code-governed world.<sup>10</sup>

### **Letchiki Begins**

‘Pole – eto aerodrome’: <sup>11</sup>

With the first frame there is a sound like a ship’s bell which marks the students flight inspection. In the following edit the camera tracks the head of the aviation academy, Rogachev, across the airfield towards camera, past empty hangars whose interiors are in deep shadow, towards a line of aircraft and fliers awaiting inspection. On an ideological level, the choice of the early morning is a testimony to the discipline and enthusiasm of the Soviet aviation students. At the same time, there is no sense here of the airfield and the air parade as a Soviet *agora* in which all levels of society come together in order to receive, evaluate and praise the pilot ‘commanders’ of society.<sup>12</sup> Instead Rogachev passes across the space and a line of trees in the distance. His figure casts a single, long thin shadow on the grass before him. We hear just audible bird

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<sup>10</sup> These silent intertitles also draw attention to the transition to sound film in this period.

<sup>11</sup> Zak, *Iulii Raizman*, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> Rosalinde Sartorti suggests similarly that holidays unified people in their beliefs and practices. See Sartorti ‘Stalinism and Carnival: Organisation and Aesthetics of Political Holidays’, *The Culture of the Stalin Period*, ed. by Hans Günther (London: Macmillan and School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 1990), pp. 41-78.

song. The length of the tracking shot and the silence accentuate the sense of a lone figure beginning his typical day.<sup>13</sup>

In English etymology the word airfield reflects the fact that early landing strips were, indeed, fields. Günther links the archetype of the field to lyric song as an expression of love of the Motherland. One important archetype of this composite symbolization is the idea of the moist-earth, '*mat'-zemlia-syraia*'.<sup>14</sup> Aviation-Day parade films, and musicals such as *Tsirk*, communicate a Stalinist aviation mythology which is replete with dew-laden aerodromes at dawn. They are accompanied by either bombastic marches or popular songs, such as Isaak Dunaevskii (1900-1955) and Lebedev Kumach's 'Davai! Tovarishch poletim', and 'Shiroka strana moia Rodnaia'. By contrast, *Letchiki* entwines an idea of *mat'-zemlia-syraia* with the airfield by means of barely audible sounds of nature, and it is the individual who is foregrounded. Furthermore, the idea of the natural field of the aerodrome and the lone figure who steps onto it echoes the Russian cultural idea of a person crossing a field as a metaphor for his journey through life, and one that may not be easy: 'zhizn' prozhit' – ne pole pereiti.' The first frames of the film project a notion of the individual, a delicate sense of the airfield as a space of beginnings: the beginning of the day, and the beginning of a story. Bakhtin says that:

in Alexandrine poetry the love motifs (first meeting, sudden love, lovers' melancholy, first kiss and so forth) were developed in large part within a bucolic pastoral idyllic chronotope. This is a small but very concrete and condensed lyric epic chronotope that has played no small role in world literature. A specific and cycled (but not strictly speaking cyclical) idyllic time functions here, a blend of natural time (cyclic) and the everyday time of the more or less pastoral (at times even agricultural) life.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Zak stresses the importance of tracking to the creation of atmosphere and the link between the aircraft and the characters. *Iulii Raizman*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Günther, 'Poiushchaia Rodina', *Voprosy literatury*, 4 (1997) <<http://magazines.russ.ru/voplit/1997/4/gunter.html>> [accessed 6 November 2006].

<sup>15</sup> Bakhtin, 'Apuleius and Petronius' and 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', p. 103.

Raizman begins *Letchiki* with a lyrical sense of pastoral every day time on the airfield which is devoid of the epic. There is simply a sense that Rogachev is moving towards the things he loves: aeroplanes, flight students, and, amongst them we later learn is the girl he secretly holds in his heart.

**Discipline *ucheby* and *vospriatiie*: the ideological function**

As Rogachev moves towards a line of awaiting students and aircraft Beliaev comes forward and salutes the head of the school as ‘Tovarishch nachal’nik’. Rogachev’s title fixes his identity in terms of hierarchical relation to the students and the men under him. Beliaev identifies himself as the ‘commander’ and refers to the group of students as a regiment (*otriad*) and delivers a high-speed report like a military incantation. The Head of the School, Rogachev, replies with a salute to his subordinate and the film organically communicates ideas of hierarchy, order and military efficiency and discipline. This contrasts with the atmosphere created in the first few frames. The first sequence of the film foregrounds two separate sensibilities, the individual and the public, which meet on the airfield.

**Aural Documentary Creativity**

As students prepare to take-off, shadows of rotating propellers fall onto the grass. Delicate sounds of nature are punctuated by shouts and noises off-screen which are all superseded by a cacophony of motors turning over. Raizman and his cameraman Leonid Kosmatov (who worked with Raizman on six of the director’s films) fill the screen with the movement of aircraft from various angles showing; propellers, wings, fuselage, and tail, or long shots of the whole of an aircraft as each taxis to its starting position. Nikolai Kriukov’s audio-tapestry (*partitura*) of motors and off-screen sounds completes a sense of veracity. Kriukov creates a *faux* sense of stereo in crescendos and decrescendos of guttural splutters and roars as we see aircraft move closer or farther away from camera. When the aeroplanes have taken off a sense of tension is released as the motor-sounds slide into an even hum which envelopes the audience, and this is important in creating empathy with the modern experience. We see the aeroplanes from the point of view of the pilot, now in the distance, now close-up; standing with motor revving, being guided on the ground, being flown. One female pilot veteran of World War Two has said the PO-2 (aka U-2, the *uchebnik*, which features in these sequences) was the training aircraft that was used by everyone who learnt to fly in the Soviet

Union in this period.<sup>16</sup> A sense of documentary realism invites trust from the audience, and the film appeals in its lack of hyperbole which obviates a propagandist register.

### **Documentarism: a Polyphonic Means?**

When Beliaev takes off for the first time it is as part of the initial 'uchebnyi polet', and the camera takes us right into the cockpit. The documenting of the experience of flight is also captured by placing the camera at strategic points in the aircraft. Edits show the play of light on a river below, and this is echoed in the movement of light on the line of the wing support as the aircraft turns. Captured in this way, flight makes strange a sense of movement itself and the earth is seen in untypical beauty. The even flow of light conveys a sense of gliding, or *plavanie*, visually embodying the idea of *vozdukhoplavanie*, with its root in the verb to swim (plavat', plyt'). Inherent in the movement of flight itself is an idea of grace, an archetypal link to the idea of the aircraft as a ship, and the corollary of the sky as the fifth ocean (*piaty okean*).<sup>17</sup>

Further shots in this sequence reveal buildings which from this height look like Monopoly houses on the grass below. This is an image typical of *deshirovanie*. These edits between aerial views create a sense of de Certeau's 'solar eye' of the pilot, who is placed in an 'all seeing' position and who is freed from the detail of daily living.<sup>18</sup> The images express Barthe's analysis of the sense of elation in the sheer freedom of the eye to *glide* over terrain when viewed from a great height, both of these were responses to panoramic views from the height of early skyscrapers at the turn of the century.<sup>19</sup> With these images the film invites the audience to participate in the first sense of being air-born. We sense the movement in the travelling play of light on metal and water. And the respective closeness of the aircraft-parts in the frame accentuates the experience of

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<sup>16</sup> Sissi Hüetlin and Elizabeth McKay (dirs.), *The Night Witches: Soviet Air Women in World War Two*, BBC, 1994.

<sup>17</sup> This links to lines in which the sails of ships and the invention of wings are linked. Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems* (London: William Heineman, 1985), p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Meir Wigoder, 'The "Solar Eye" of Vision: Emergence of the Skyscraper-Viewer in the Discourse on Heights in New York City, 1890-1920', *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 61, 2 (2002), 152-69 (pp. 164-65). See also Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 123 and p. 134.

<sup>19</sup> Wigoder, 'The "Solar Eye" of Vision: Emergence of the Skyscraper', p. 165. See also Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 123 and p. 134.

extreme distance, and the effect of perceiving the earth from an aerial view (vid s ptichego). There is a communication of an archetypal sense of freedom, and of the pastoral harmony of the earth below, which are reported to be a common experience of dreams of flight.<sup>20</sup> Only people who would immediately identify the engine of the Po-2 or the Moscow River would be able to fix an era and place to them. Raizman and Kosmatov's documentary approach can be seen to project an experience of flight which communicates both on the level of universal archetypes and on socialized semantic superstructures to which Soviet aviation ciphers speak. The beginning sequences of *Letchiki* testify to the desire to communicate a sense of life at the aerodrome in all its rich detail. For Raizman authenticity was important. He says: 'nashe stremlenie k dostovernosti kak by dokumental'no zafiksirovalo atmosfery epokhi'.<sup>21</sup> And in doing this the film-makers capture the unrepeatable freedom of a moment, and 'fix' a sense of life as it is lived uniquely.

#### **Flight and Intertextuality: defining the pilot-son**

##### **Flight as 'No Space at All' and Constructivist *Fokusy* and 'Kto ia?'**

In subsequent edits in *Letchiki* an even more intense experience of flight is projected which can be interpreted both ideologically and as an expression of the inner world of the character. This follows a conversation that develops between Beliaev and his mechanic, Ivan Matveevich Khrushchev (Aleksandr Chistiakov) which is filmed in profile as they sit in the open, tandem cockpits of the aircraft. Beliaev shouts back to Ivan asking if he isn't bored? The reply is that after sixteen years of flying he is not, and this leads Beliaev to bait Ivan by saying: 'u vas net romantiki'. This leads to a sparring match which involves flying as one of the weapons. When Ivan accuses Beliaev of being 'Evgenii Onegin' (Pushkin's anti-heroic model of a self-absorbed, superfluous man (lishnyi chelovek)), Beliaev throws the aircraft into a spin. This is captured in a hyper-documentary sequence which has been filmed off the nose of the aircraft as it plummets towards earth, fully capturing the spiralling fall.<sup>22</sup> And Beliaev's aerial spin demonstrates that he possesses the qualities of Clark's paradigmatic pilot-

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<sup>20</sup> N. E. Livanova, 'Sny o poletakh', pp. 116-42.

<sup>21</sup> Iulii Raizman, *Vchera i segodnia*, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Mark Zak asserts that the actor started the camera in this sequence, and that it may have been the first time that the audience would have seen such a spin. See *Iulii Raizman*, pp. 67-68.

son. They are: ‘a positive but childish brand of “spontaneity”; and qualities of ‘impatience, high spirits, reckless daring, and indefatigability’.<sup>23</sup>

What appears on the screen communicates on another level. The image includes the foreshortening of distance that the loss of horizon creates: the motion of the spin foregrounds the geometry of the support struts of the wings, and the fields become a blur of movement which is punctuated by the ninety-degree angles of their borders which appear to move contrapuntally to the circulating wing struts. It is an image which is surprisingly neo-realist in that it creates its own sense of time and space, a sense that what is happening occurs in a ‘no place at all’. Although it is a sequence which continues narrative action, by creating a timeless, universal moment on screen, it powerfully communicates an emotional state. Here, on a purely human level the visual rendering of the aircraft spiralling to earth reflects a mind in a spin. We know from Beliaev and Rogachev’s backward double-take glances at Bystrova (during the preliminary aircraft inspection) that they are both smitten by the young female student. Whether the cause of Beliaev’s action is out of frustrated love, or frustrated creative urge, or is simply a reflection of a state of mind that lacks the ordering influences of ideological consciousness, the spin expresses a psychological death-defying daredevilry as a need for self-expressive release.

The answer to Beliaev’s humorously projected ‘who am I?’ (kto ia?) is not a word but a visual frame (an aerial spin) which also subliminally identifies the pilot with artists who were seekers of new ways of being. The Futurists saw themselves as poets responsible for the construction of the future and rendered it in new geometries and planes of relation in space. On a purely visual level the frames of the aerial spin that follow echo 1920s abstract experiments in the construction of space in works by such painters as Rodchenko.<sup>24</sup> For instance, his ‘Sketch of a Hangar’ (1917), ‘Linoleum, No. 29, 1919’ and his desire that the facts of photography be an emotional expression (‘a concealed romance’). The abstract, constructivist image of flight in the spin and the idea of Beliaev as Pushkin’s ‘Evgenii Onegin’ suggest a sense of Beliaev-Evgenii-Onegin to be as much the a Suprematist-flier as a 1930s ‘lishnyi chelovek’. From the perspective of officialdom at this time both associations would be negatively received.

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<sup>23</sup> Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 126.

<sup>24</sup> Selim Omarovich Khan-Magomedov, *Rodchenko: The Complete Work*, ed. by Vieri Quilici (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), pp. 26, 109, and 38.

The ideological structuring of the character is furthered by Ivan who, upon landing, and in response to Beliaev's still cock-sure 'kto-to ia?' asserts that Beliaev is 'durak – ty, vot ty kto!'

The verbal play between characters who are meant to represent different sides of the same ideological coin can also be seen in *Intrigan* when Vasia Iarochkin lands after day-dreaming that he is rescuing a ship in the Arctic, and also fighting off enemy aeroplanes. He flies so low that he scares the herd of horses below, and he terrifies his navigator, Zinia when he goes into a spin. Zina calls him 'mad' (sumashedshchii), and Ol'ga quips that such tricks should be done in the circus when he lands. Tomilin in *Muzhestvo*, and Chkalov, also have this mad love of risk; 'bezumstvo khrabrikh'. And characters who represent the upholding of law, such as father-figures and wives endearingly call each of these pilots 'sumashedshii'.<sup>25</sup>

### **Stikhiinost'**

In *Letchiki*, students look up at the aerobatics of Beliaev and ask: 'Kto eto?'; one responds: 'Naverno Beliaev'. Bystrova adds: 'a kto zhe drugoi tak mozhet?' In *Valerii Chkalov*; the eponymous hero's 'superior' talent is the theme with which the film begins. Chkalov's commander repeatedly asks who will be able to fly a reconnaissance mission in the thick fog that envelopes the aerodrome? When Chkalov's mechanic, Pal Palych (Vasilii Vanin), immediately says 'Chkalov!' he is met with the commander's 'who else?' (kto drugoi?). Their ensuing repartee implies that there is no 'other' who has the courage and talent to fly in such weather. Both films portray the paradigmatic hero who 'demonstrates human superiority' and this links to the feats of record-breaking fliers who are reported in the press.<sup>26</sup> This singular ability to take any risk is a form of flying which is given their names: 'beliaevshchina', and 'kak Chkalov'. Similarly, Tomilin in *Muzhestvo* says he has his own style of flying, and to change it he would have to change his character (mne stil'; nado kharakter perestraivat'sia). In Eduard Pentslin's *Doroga k zvezdam* (Path to the Stars) (Mosfil'm, 1942), Mitia Eliseev (Cheslav Shushkevich) has a God-given talent for music-composition. Against the wishes of his father he decides to give it up in order to become a pilot and fight in

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<sup>25</sup> Navailh, Françoise, 'The Emancipated Woman: Stalinist propaganda in Soviet feature film 1930-1950', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 12, 3 (1992), 203-15.

<sup>26</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 125.



honour of his brother's death. As he sits waiting with Ol'ga (Irina Fedotova) for his concert, he finds a ladybird on her coat and chants a nursery rhyme 'bozh'ia korobka (...) poleteli v nebo!'. When she gently chides him for his infantile speech, he tells her; 'I speak the same way Bryon speaks (...) and for children anything is possible.' The notion of fliers who are in their element in the sky, and flight as an expression of inner self, is seen in *Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke* (Story of a Real Man) (Mosfil'm, 1948). Aleksei Meres'ev (Pavel Kadochnikov) loses both legs after being shot down. He undertakes the massive work of physical retraining, which is viscerally shown in the film. He recovers his 'golden hands' and returns to the air force. In this film, he is already an *istrebitel'*; his inner *sila* is not something which has to be harnessed. It is expressive of the fact that he is a 'Soviet man'. When the Major hands over control of the aircraft to Aleksei, the image of light on his upturned face, and of the wind which forces back just noticeable tears, and the slow turn of his head as he takes in the space all around him, communicate not only the victory of being given charge of an aeroplane again. Being in the cock-pit, and in flight, is a psychological release and the film communicates his flight as a feeling of coming-home.

The personal significance of flight to the pilot is communicated in a similar image during Leontii Shirokov's first training flight in *Piatyi okean*. And he articulates it when the Commissar of the aeroclub (Aleksei Maksimov) asks Leontii why he, a hunter, wants to join the aviation academy. Leontii tells a story of watching a 'hawk' which was alone, 'kak khoziain', in the sky. He describes the sky; 'dalekoe –takoe sinee kak glaza bol'no' and explains that this is the 'fifth ocean'. And, at the beginning of the film, when he introduces himself to Natasha (Ala Garder)<sup>27</sup> he answers her question about where he is heading with lines which reveal what this means to him:

Четыре синих океана в мире,  
Их воды бьются в берег многих стран,  
Но всех синей, заманчивей и шире  
Над круглым миром – пятый океан.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ala Garder is the surname in the credits of the film. She was also known as Aleksandra Popova.

<sup>28</sup> *Piatyi okean*, Montazhnyi list, Protokol No. 931/4, 24 April 1941, zhanr: kino povest', Gosfil'mofond, p. 3.

The sense of the breadth of the sky, and this ‘ocean’ are linked in the root of Leontii’s last name, Shirokov, from the morpheme (shir) from the adjective *shirokii*, signifying wide and space. Leontii’s identification with freedom and space is linked to his inner spirit which is understood to be as deep as the ocean and as expansive as the sky.

Near the beginning of the film, Leontii’s expert marksmanship is also shown. He shoots a bird, and at a fairground-like stall, he shoots every mark and wins prizes with which to woo the object of his unrequited affection, Natasha. Later Leontii flies his aeroplane, against instruction, to meet her train. Leontii, the hunter, whose name is rooted in the idea of the lion, behaves like the winged-god, Cupid, who is also associated with the lion. And the film charts the civilizing and channelling of this wild spirit according to ideological structuring.

In *Letchiki*, the students’ admiration of Beliaev as he performs his aerobatics stunt also functions as the beginning of the moral structuring in the film. And it demonstrates how important it is for people in authority to set an example to Soviet youth. It is an interesting irony that the image of the group of students’ who are looking skyward resembles a highly symbolic pose from Klutsis’ poster which echoes the slogan: ‘Komsomolets – na samolet!’,<sup>29</sup> but at this point in the film it communicates their admiration of the skills of a flier who is going against Komsomol codes of behaviour.

### **Liapsus**

When we see Rogachev inspect a line of students and aircraft in the first ‘parade’ of the film, he focuses on something just out of screen. He blows a whistle over the sound of the engines, and the next edit is to a forgotten oil-can abandoned on the grass. Instead of another youthful figure emerging backwards off the aeroplane, we see an old, white moustachioed mechanic who climbs down, gives a rather feeble salute, shrugs and, by way of an explanation, says helplessly: ‘liapsus, Tov. Nachal’nik’. The delicate humour of the old mechanic, Ivan Matveevich Khrushchev’s ‘blunder’, becomes the mechanic’s leitmotif (rather daringly, considering the choice of the then First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee. Later, Ivan Matveevich visits the Head of the school in

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<sup>29</sup> This slogan comes from the Ninth Komsomol Congress. See David R. Jones, ‘The Rise and Fall of Aeroflot’, p. 251. Klutsis’ poster is titled *Molodezh na samolet!*. See note 56 and 151 in notes for Chapter Two of this thesis.

hospital and is jovially but severely reprimanded by flight students with the words ‘opiat’ liapsus’, referring to Ivan’s squeaky shoes.<sup>30</sup>

Beliaev has been given the honour of testing the aircraft only on the understanding that he is not to perform the kind of *fokusy* that are subsequently, and perjoratively, given his name. Beliaev takes-off in the aeroplane. It crashes as a combined result of his *fokusy* and another *liapsus* which had, presumably, occurred on the factory floor.

In the second air-parade of the film, which takes place in the presence of the public for the first time, we see edits between the spectators looking upwards and skyward which could be cut into any Aviation-Day parade film. Raizman uses imagery drawn from life and which echo already socialized representations of the world of aviation. The public of the air parade and the film become witness to the fact that *liapsus* at any level of work, and also self-indulgence in the form of aerial tricks, can only result in disaster. The parade functions as a kind of *agora* in which all present on and off-screen reassert society’s values and as an ideological parable which has at its centre the symbolic air crash. The crash serves as the ideological lesson to be learnt, and marks the beginning of Beliaev’s journey towards consciousness. In *Piatyi okean Leontii* at first fails to pass the examination to become an *istrebitel’* because he does not betray his mechanic’s *liapsus* which led to his aeroplane crashing. The crash thus also functions as a moral test for both the pilot and his colleague. It is passed by each when Leontii keeps his honour by not betraying his friend concerning his *liapsus*; and when the mechanic finally manages to get the Commissar (Maksimov) to hear his confession.

A public statement by aircraft workers’ after seeing *Letchiki* in 1935 said that the film showed with ‘clarity and conviction that undisciplined behaviour, bravado and carelessness are the fundamental causes of misfortune’.<sup>31</sup> But in *Letchiki*, the idea of

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<sup>30</sup> Three pilot Heroes of the Soviet Union; Liapedevskii, Gromov and Doronin, reviewed this film and although they all praised it for its choice of subject, Doronin said it was not clear why the ‘fault’ that caused Beliaev’s crash could not be corrected. Gromov said that along with technical inaccuracies, a flight student would not dream of speaking to the head of the school about his beard, as happens when Bystrova is congratulated by Rogachev on her first flight. ‘Geroi Sovetskogo Soiuzo o “Letchikakh”’, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, no. 20 (511), 10 April 1935, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Palmer, ‘Red Wings on the Silver Screen’, p. 193.

'liapsus' is also presented with delicate humour. Not only by means of oil cans and squeaky floorboards and shoes, which become comic symbols, but the word itself, *liapsus* is the source of a prank. On Beliaev's return from convalescence, Beliaev hides behind a tail-fin and mockingly imitates Rogachev's voice, saying '*opiat' liapsus!*' just to get Bystrova's attention. The the idea of a blunder in this film can be ideologically interpreted to suggest that human mistakes have grave consequences and to treat them lightly is demonstrably hazardous. Yet, on the level of stylization, the absurdity which Raizman attached to the notion of *liapsus* creates an in-joke which gently mocks the political seriousness with which such human blunders were received during the 1930s.

The director uses humour both as an element of entertainment to project vulnerability of character, and as an essential support for the theme of coming to collective social consciousness. At the same time, he gently parodies ideological themes. By means of the collision of two planes of stylization (the humorous and the ideological), on the level of the word the film objectifies the concept of human error and its profound consequences in society of the 1930s purges.<sup>32</sup> The humour in *Letchiki* enables the creation of discourse and, in Raizman's sophisticated hands, it protects against consequences which such a discourse might otherwise provoke.

In *Letchiki*, despite of Beliaev's courage in taking the risk of flying a faulty machine, it is Beliaev's irresponsibility which is laid bare. The air crash not only costs society but damages the image and an idea of truth in dialectical scientific advance. One self-deprecating *babushka* watching the spectacle tells the youngsters 'nauki netu'; then, upon seeing the crash she simply says 'na smert'. In a country that was building its self-image on scientific laws of history, every air crash became not only a matter of personal self-sacrifice but also a political statement. Public services have to deal with this disaster, and the ruin of the aircraft costs the collective in design work, construction time and money. Ideologically, his impulse to fly is part of the risk-taking mind-set which does not value life. This mind-set as part of the aviation-hero paradigm is made explicit when, in *Valerii Chakalov*, it is Stalin himself (Mikhail Gelovani) who has to remind the pilot of the value of life. After a near air-crash on Aviation Day, he asks the pilot 'vy neuzheli ne liubite zhizn'?' In *Letchiki*, Beliaev could have met the same fate as his aircraft, which burns infernally to a charcoal skeleton on the field. Rather than underscore the fearlessness of Soviet test pilots, it is the idea of destruction,

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<sup>32</sup> Craig Brandist, 'Scientific Parody', p. 151.

and the value of the pilot's life that has been saved with great effort by the collective, which is foregrounded. The importance of the pilot to the collective, and the twinning of the idea of flight and a personally experienced consciousness of life, is also seen in *Povest' o nostoiashchem cheloveke* when the double-amputee, Aleksei is recovering in hospital. He is befriended by a Commander, whose words 'to live, to live' are juxtaposed with Aleksei's promise to himself, which is voiced as shadows of birds dance on the ceiling: 'We will fly. We will fly.' Later the dying commander repeats the command 'you must live, you must live a long time', which connotes the necessity of the SSSR surviving the war, and the imperative for Aleksei not to give up the dream of flying again.

*Letchiki* entwines the idea of *liapsus* and *fokusy*, and when Bystrova copies Beliaev's aerobatics and irresponsibly 'buzzes' the aerodrome, flying so low that people run for cover in the hangars, she too is written down in the daily (black) book. Her spins in the air mirror Beliaev's as seen from the cockpit. Once again the earth spins before the lens. And once more, by these means, Raizman asserts an idea of personal freedom in flight which also ideologically signifies the protagonist's moral failings. For these *fokusy* she is written down in the black book and must report to Rogachev.

#### **Tov. Nachal'nik: Personal Identity and Ideological Cipher**

The fourth chapter of *Letchiki*, entitled 'Tovarishch Nachal'nik', weaves Rogachev's personal identity with an idea of official responsibility by the use of a simple, formal title. A long tracking shot down an empty hallway, and sounds from behind closed doors reveal that lessons are being held. Behind now one door, and now another, classes on Russian literature (Pushkin poetry) and English language are in progress. In this context we find Bystrova, Ivan Matveevich and another member of the academy sitting around a table. Rogachev is standing and delivering what is, effectively, a 1930s-style Soviet sermon. In an explicitly ideological speech, he explains the socialist significance of her wayward actions. He says 'Kogda molodost' podmeniaetsia molodechestvom, i geroizm fokusamy, to my eto nazyvaem poshlost'iu.' He equates irresponsible aerial acrobatics with the Western practice of performing aerial daredevilry for (prize) money. As he says: 'Na zapade za khleb zarabatyvaiut'. He expresses the importance of an individual Soviet person's behaviour to society when he says; 'my - eto strana'.

The film-chapter 'Tov[arishch] Nachal'nik creates a sense of character based on Rogachev's ideologically sound consciousness. His character is developed in terms of his function as mentor and father figure, and as a man who fully understands the submersion of his sense of self into collective identity. It is the lesson in Soviet consciousness delivered to Bystrova in Rogachev's office which begins to make Rogachev, instead of Beliaev, the object of her affections. Thus, it is ideology which informs her romantic assessment of the two men, and which resolves the love triangle.<sup>33</sup> What is dramatically important is that Rogachev's ideological sermon is cut short by his collapse from a mysterious illness. Whether it is cupid's arrow in his back, or Eros' wings beginning to emerge, or an ailment from a Civil War wound, here, like the mechanical 'liapsus' of the new aircraft before, the illness that forces Rogachev to reach for his back in pain, turn and slump with manly grace into the chair behind him, is left unknown.

### **Chuzhie slova**

After Beliaev returns from hospital following his air crash, Bystrova is full of her new found social consciousness inspired by Rogachev's 'true' words. She says: 'Rogachev pravil'no govorit'. She derides Beliaev for his 'nedostatki', the most prevalent of which is lack of 'faktor distsiplina'. But her style of delivery and her use of the verb 'otmezhevat'sia' causes Beliaev to accuse her of using 'chuzhie slova'. He says; 'tvoikh net'. With this play on the pronouns 'yours' and 'other' Beliaev identifies the idea of authoritarian values as 'alien', and thus attempts to distance her from his rival Rogachev. Rogachev's speech to Bystrova had re-presented Party values to her. Beliaev thus tries to assert Bystrova's kindred spirit, but inadvertently signals a difference between authentic and Party voicing.

In *Piatyi okean*, Leontii Shirokov is crestfallen at Natasha's resistance to his attention and her faithfulness to his aviation instructor and competitor-in-love, Kirillov (Ivan Novosel'tsev). When Leontii hijacks his training session in order to fly to meet her, he is told that the ability to take a flight-training aircraft in this way indicates he could equally easily leave the front out of irresistible desire for his love. The remedy for this is 'distsiplina' because 'eto shkola khrabrosti'. Later, we hear Leontii repeating his teacher's and the commissar's expressions to Sania (Evgeniia Gorkushka) as he

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<sup>33</sup> Widdis, *Visions of a New Land*, p. 136.

teaches her the basics of cockpit flight practice. She is the girl who was too young to be accepted into the school except as a canteen lady, and who has fallen in love with Leontii. 'Bez vsiakogo "nu"! is one refrain the commissar and Kirillov chuckle at as they overhear the rugged individual, Leontii, taking on their voice of authority. Leontii by the end of the film proves himself in battle and then discovers new feelings, not for Natasha, but for Sania. The moral message is that he has learned his lesson in discipline and graduated from the schools of 'khrabrost'.' This ultimately leads to the mastery of war and love. And an early sign of this transformation is the adoption of reported ideological and hierarchical speech.

In *Letchiki*, Raizman presents the necessity for discipline, and also its mediation in reported speech, but he uses them as a means to foreground different levels of 'voicing'. When Beliaev turns away in disappointment (and disgust) from Bystrova, it is not only because he is hearing the voice of his rival in love in her words, but also because he feels he is no longer speaking to the individual that he knew. He feels that she has been transformed into a mouthpiece for ideology. This scene functions in the ideological structuring of the film because Beliaev's response is in keeping with the paradigmatic 'son' whose character is in need of political and moral transformation. Yet a dichotomy of individual feeling versus Party instruction is also posited. When he accuses her of using *chuzhie slova* it is extremely subtly identified with authoritarian and Party values, and as something 'alien'. Voloshinov says the function of reported speech is a means of 'discursive objectification'.<sup>34</sup> As much as this sequence demonstrates Beliaev's lack of moral fibre, Raizman uses Beliaev's point of view, and Bystrova's reported speech to indicate planes of conflict between personal feeling and authoritarian Soviet moral codes. By this means, the film, whether Raizman intends it or not, delicately objectifies the notion of authoritarian voicing in Soviet society. We really feel for Beliaev at this moment. Bystrova's perplexed shrug as he walks away may make light of the situation. But this interaction creates a third level of communication by which the nature of authoritarian voicing while being part of the ideological structuring of the film, is also opened to examination.

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<sup>34</sup> Reported speech is 'utterance within utterance' and utterance about utterance.' Craig Brandist compares several analyses of parody and stylization and quotes Voloshinov on reported speech. Brandist, 'Scientific Parody', p. 150.

### **Personal Feeling and Personal Pronouns**

In a subsequent sequence, Raizman counters the idea of 'Tov. Nachal'nik', the official figure, with an idea of authentic feeling, which centres on the use of pronouns. When Bystrova seeks Rogachev's advice about Beliaev and enters Rogachev's personal study (as opposed to the more public bureau where his rhetorical speech took place) we find Rogachev alone, and now seemingly fully recovered. No longer the perfectly uniformed figure, the Head of the school has his jacket undone indicating his relaxed absorption in design work for a new aircraft which Bystrova interrupts. As she walks into the room, the tone and gentle surprise with which he says 'Vy' is all that is needed for the audience to know how deeply he feels for the young flight student. The emotive use of the pronoun 'vy' stands in complete contrast to the sense of 'my eto strana', which was the centre of gravity of their last meeting. The contrasting register and significance between the use of these pronouns highlights the collision between an idea of individual emotion and collective consciousness. The foregrounding of the emotional function of the pronoun here also links back to the dichotomy of the use of 'tvoi' and 'chuzhie slova' in the scene in which Beliaev accuses Bystrova of using Rogachev's rhetorical moral words instead of responding to him personally. By this means, the film subtly weaves levels of collision between planes of 'alien' (and Party) discourse and personal identity.

### **Vozvrashchenie**

After having been grounded for his reckless flying, Beliaev still insists that pilots 'rodiatsia, oni ne vospitannie'. The idea of intrinsic talent and flight as an essential emotional and psychological sensibility is the fulcrum of ambivalence in the pilot as ideological sign. In *Valerii Chkalov*, before Chkalov's transformational meeting with Stalin at an air parade, and before he is asked to return from the South and test aircraft, and having risked his current job in civil aviation because of his risk-taking flying style, the pilot says to his wife that he would have to become a different person in order to fly differently. His wife, Ol'ga (Kseniia Tarasova), says that Chkalov is slightly guilty that events have taken the turn they have, and that in future he should try and 'byt' kak vse'. To which Chkalov replies: 'a esli ia byl by kak vse, ia ne letal by kak letaiu'. For Chkalov flight is linked to a sense of striving. Echoing the meaning of heroism given in a Soviet encyclopaedia, he says 'esli byt', byt' luchshem'.



Through an ideological transformation of his elemental yearning for the better, the Soviet pilot is transformed into a Soviet Hero. One means of structuring this transformation in Socialist-Realist flier films is in the portrayal of a *faux-death* of the protagonist. Both *Letchiki* and *Valerii Chkalov* can be seen to follow their protagonists through two such experiences. Chkalov's first crash comes when he tests one of the I-15 series, which is proudly rolled from the hanger as an emblem of the projected great technological and military power of the Soviet Union. An intertitle announces 'Shli gody. U strany vyrastali moguchie kryl'ia.' Echoing the close relations of pilots with specific aircraft designers in life, Chkalov has developed a close relation with the constructor, Myshkin. The hero has to fight to be allowed to prove that Myshkin's aeroplane is a sound aircraft, and one the Air Force needs. But, with Ordzhonikidze (Semen Mezhinskii) as witness, the aircraft takes a nose dive and crashes to the ground. If Beliaev comes out of his first *avariia* alive, Chkalov emerges from his first air crash wreckage claiming it is nothing ('nasmork'). Leontii Shirokov exits his crashed aeroplane after his exam with enough strength to nearly throttle his mechanic. So the pilots emerge relatively unscathed by their first ordeals. It is not until Chkalov's second near disaster and his meeting with Stalin that a desire to live anew is born in him.

It is on Aviation Day that Chkalov's characteristic sense of striving leads him to a *faux death* followed by a metaphoric rebirth into a 'new life'. He has determined that a newly designed aircraft is a good one. When its landing gear will not release, he writes a suicide note and refuses to obey orders to parachute out of the aeroplane. But it is not his final landing itself, but Chkalov's 'kairotic meeting'<sup>35</sup> with Stalin afterwards which makes him understand that his own life is of more value than an aircraft which costs millions. Stalin is not impressed by Chkalov's self-sacrificing heroics. He stresses the value of the longevity of a great flier (as with eagles), and Stalin underscores this with a sense of how much can be done in life. From this meeting, Chkalov is inspired to live 'anew'.<sup>36</sup> The ideological transformation of the pilot is projected by means of *faux death*, like a liminal rite of passage. His transformation is underscored when Chkalov

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<sup>35</sup> Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, p. 127.

<sup>36</sup> The film also entwines the personal with the ideological but makes Stalin seemingly responsible for Chkalov's awakening to his responsibilities on a personal level. Chkalov tells his wife that Stalin has said that 'ia malo liubliu tebia'. This sends him into whirl of new-kindled love for his wife.

reports Stalin's words to Ol'ga, his wife. The pilot feels that great achievements, which have already been performed are as nothing compared to what is left to do.

Immediately following his meeting with Stalin, Chkalov celebrates with a symbolic re-marriage, and when his wife retires from the room we see the pilot drinking with his mechanic. In the ensuing conversation the mechanic asks: 'kak zhit' po novemu?' The film shows Chkalov struggling with himself. The mechanic leaves to answer the door, and in a completely authentic moment Chkalov asks himself if 'really without (aerial) stunts am I a weak person?' (deistvitel'no bez fortelei ia zhidkii chelovek?). The sense of this echoes the aerial sequence following Beliaev's emphatic question 'kto ia?'. It echoes the sense of self-doubt which leads to Beliaev's suicidal depression after learning that he is banned from flying, and that his love is unrequited. Near the beginning of *Valerii Chkalov*, the eponymous hero is discharged from the army's Air Force for recklessly flying under Trinity Bridge (Troitskii Most). He seeks solace in a move to the Volga region. The river is 'dobraia' and we understand that, at this point, he hopes he will be able to live in this new element rather than the air. But when helping a fisherman on the Volga River Chkalov sees aeroplanes fly over head, and he cries out; 'Without this, I cannot live!' (zhit' mne bez etogo, ne mogu!) Metaphorically swimming for the life of his inner self, he plunges into the river to get to the other side and to return to flying. Flight symbolizes an inner *sila* and *volia* which is also a source of feelings of connection with the world.

This intuited sense of personal fusion with wider natural forces enables such pilots to take risks beyond the capabilities of others. It is the source of their magnificent flying skills, by which the pilots have the respect of those around them. But it is also the source of conflict with the status quo. And the orientation towards inward individual intuition over collective responsibility makes this characteristic ideologically problematic. During the course of those films with protagonists who are romantic 'Onegin's' (*Letchiki*) or 'Byrons' (*Doroga po zvezdam*), the pilot's exceptional talent is not of value until it has been given over to the service of the state and the collective. In Kalatozov's film, Chkalov harnesses his *volia* and flies the 'Stalin Route' to America. Tomilin, in *Muzhestvo*, defeats an interventionist (diversant) working for a Japanese spy by using the aircraft in a spin and changing altitudes in order to subdue and defeat his opponent. The view of the earth spinning in *Muzhestvo*, is thus, not so much a psychological expression of his inner-spirit which needs ideological correcting, but the spin is a practical weapon. Aleksei's risk-taking ability (which it represents) defeats his

enemy. As a result of this, he is promoted and given command of a unit, and he is finally able to unite with his love, Faizi (Tamara Nagaeva). In Boris Shreiber's *Budni* (The Ordinary) (Mosfil'm and Sovetskaia Belarus', 1940) the pilot, Zubov (Novel'seltsev) manifests this same quality and approach to life, but in this film he proves his moral unfitness by taking a child up in the aeroplane and crashing as a result of the risks he takes. He also becomes the lover of the central figure of the film, Elena Slavina (Galina Sergeeva). She is the wife of a civilian pilot, Nikolai Slavin (Boris Terent'ev). The film contrasts Zubov's character, which manifests itself in his flying style, to the husband who flies responsibly. Thus the film divides characteristics which deserve approval and opprobrium between two different characters. Sharing the same super-structure to *Letchiki*, the love triangle is resolved ideologically. But Slavin's 'ordinary' approach to flying exemplifies all the boredom which his wife feels with life. Slavina follows Zubov when he has to leave the aerodrome. In this film, Zubov is not redeemed, as Beliaev is in *Letchiki*. His fate is ultimately left beyond the screen. The film ends with the husband following Slavina to Moscow and their reconciliation. But in a chilling moment, when Slavin turns to go to his flat he leaves her alone on the stairs, and her slow tread as she resignedly follows him suggest the opposite of joy. In a film that has elements which seriously expose a woman's psychological malaise, the final scene of collective celebration registers as an ideologically joyful (and perhaps ideologically imposed) false-ending.

#### **Vse Vysshe: Not *Faux* Death But *Faux* Transformation**

In *Letchiki*, after Bystrova tells Beliaev that she will not go to the South with him but will stay and become a 'letchitsei', she leaves him on the dance floor. After a short time Beliaev is tracked as he follows her up the stairs. The close angle of the framing accentuates the 'upwardness' of the staircase, and the slow heaviness of Beliaev's tread accentuates the psychological reversal of the joyful aviation semiotics of *rising higher*.<sup>37</sup> Bystrova seeks Rogachev's council and they find Beliaev slumped at a desk in one of the empty classrooms. It is full of aeroplane motors on stands. If, since the 1920s, movement of propellers had been associated with constant momentum forward,

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<sup>37</sup> Papernyi, writing on the culture of the Stalin period, says that in it people are projected as progressive, free, inclusive and upwardly mobile. Paperny, *Architecture in the Age of Stalin*, pp. 32-43.

life, energy and progress (that ‘propelleri peli’), and in the 1930s this had become entwined with further projections of building the New World, here the motors are divorced from the aircraft.<sup>38</sup> Like Beliaev, they are just shells. They are not equated with ideological fervour but are a metaphor for individual heart-break. Rogachev, speaking as though to himself, warns Beliaev of their entrance as he turns on the lights. He endeavours to give Beliaev time to hide what the logic of the film suggests is a gun. He appears to be thinking of killing himself, and the placement of incapacitated aircraft parts as part of the *mis-en-scène* reflects the character’s own moribund state.

The ideological structuring of this scene is made clear when Bystrova scornfully voices her contempt by ironically calling him ‘ekh ty, geroi’. His thoughts of suicide are the seal on her romantic choice. Instead of reacting with sympathy, her ironic use of the word ‘geroi’ posits an ideological position. And this sequence also demonstrates that it is Rogachev’s humanity which is understood to be truly heroic. The desire to help a fellow man and competitor in love and his words; ‘to est’, eto chelovek; pomoch’ nado’ underline this. Raizman paints a portrait of a man whose qualities can support an ideological Father-Stalin model, but whose characteristics are simply those of a fine individual. And it is Shchukin’s sensitive performance which makes Bystrova’s love for him completely believable.

Unlike the scene which serves the same ideological redemption of the pilot in *Valerii Chkalov*, this scene takes place in the relative privacy of an empty classroom, not at an air-show with Stalin and the Party in attendance. These sequences exist in human time rather than symbolic epic time on the airfield. Beliaev, after his air crash and first *faux* death, still insists that it is his birth-given, individual talent which makes him a pilot, and that ‘menia ne perevospitaiut’. Chkalov, after his first crash, goes on to fly with the same ferocity until he meets Stalin. And, near the beginning of the film, Commander Aleshin insisted that Ol’ga marry Chkalov in order to rescue his talent. But Chkalov, as a direct result of his second *faux* death, and because of his meeting with Stalin, learns his ideological lesson. He puts his talents to the service of the state. His flight over the Arctic in the aeroplane ‘Stalinskii marshrut’ represents his change of consciousness, and carries Stalin’s name. He no longer flies ‘kak Chkalov’

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<sup>38</sup> In Khait’s ‘Marsh aviatora’, and also in Maiakovskii’s poems *Daesh’ motor!* and *Avia dni*, propellers and motors are equated with the human heart. Metaphorically, they enable utopian dreams to come true, and make the building of the new world possible.

for himself alone, but for Stalin and for the country (who personally signal their Great Soviet Familial support in a radio greeting over the Arctic) as he and his crew are running out of oxygen at the climax of their ordeal.

In *Valerii Chkalov* the role of Stalin represents the paradigmatic figure of *Father-Stalin*. It is Stalin who guides his ‘son’ to consciousness and leads him to want to live, and ultimately, to fly ‘po novemu’. He also takes a personal hand in the next stage of Chkalov’s flying career when he gives permission for the record-breaking Arctic flight, *Stalinskii marshrut*, to go ahead.<sup>39</sup> It is given only when Chkalov has understood that the flight represents all the work of the collective. And true to Clark’s ‘father-son’ model, Stalin is shown to take a personal interest in his ‘chosen son’. Thus, in *Valerii Chkalov*, flight, the idea of ‘letat’ kak Chkalov’, is transformed into a flight which is born of the collective not the individual. It ultimately serves the function of ideology. And ultimately we see the hero transformed from a leather-flier-jacket-wearing, tumble-haired, impulsive dare-devil at the beginning of the film into a uniformed, statuesque rhetorical speech giver in its penultimate sequences. At the end of this scene, we are returned to Chkalov’s image in casual thick sweater and pilot clothes. He still wants to fly the world - seemingly ceaselessly (‘Pasha, povedem mashinu, gazanem vokrug sharika zemnogo, a potom...’). Thus, just as Nikishka in *Kryl’ia kholopa*, and Tarkovskii’s peasant who all his life thought of himself as flying, Chkalov’s spirit has not changed. But the adjective ‘indefatigable’ (neugomonnyi) which describes Chkalov’s at the end of the film was not infrequently used in *Pravda* to describe pilots and zealous workers of any sphere. I believe that the continuity of Chkalov as a ‘restless man of action’ supports a projection of the positive hero while at the same time hinting that underneath the rhetorical figure there is an incorrigible man. Like Chkalov’s, Aleksei’s and Beliaev’s ultimate ‘transformation’ is left open to question, but even this may be part of an ideologically approved paradigm. It is our

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<sup>39</sup> Chkalov, Baidukov and Beliakov flew a record-breaking flight (8,504 kms; 63 hours, 16 minutes) over the North Pole from Moscow to Vancouver, Washington, USA, 18 June 1937. Boyd, p. 65n15 (Boyd says Portland, Oregon, and Gunston says Portland, Washington, *Osprey Encyclopedia*, p. 400 and Chkalov’s daughter says Vancouver, USA. See V. V. Chkalova, *Valerii Chkalov: Dokumental’no-publitsisticheskaia povest’* (Moscow: Tipografia ‘Novosti’, 2004), pp. 11 and 174). That it was Vancouver, WA is clarified by Bill Alley. See note 111 of this chapter.

empathy with the sincere free spirit communicated in the film which makes audiences' hearts soar irrespective of ideology.

### **'Winged-Eros'**

In *Letchiki*, during the meeting between Bystrova and Rogachev in his office, there is a telling detail which is expressive of how an idea of 'winged-ness', rather than being a socialized sense of *krylatie*, is linked to a projection of personal feeling. We see Rogachev's hand in close-up over his drawings of his own aircraft (we clearly see the shape of its mono-wings). This is juxtaposed with a close-up of his face in which the unconscious pleasure he feels while looking into Bystrova's face as she speaks is fully communicated. The image of his own designs for a winged machine, and the delicate emphasis on his feelings of love demonstrate that the film uses the idea of winged-ness as a dual metaphor which links creative work with a sense of being drawn to another person.

The idea of personal attachment linked to the idea of learning to fly can also be seen in the sequence of Bystrova's first independent flight. As she raises her arm to signal her readiness to take-off, Beliaev corrects its angle and, just perceptibly, his hand lingers on hers. He also identifies with her flight to the extent that he tracks it from the ground, unconsciously talking her through it as if she can hear from the sky. Beliaev mirrors her first independent landing with his own body and ends up squatting 'kak panteru' as his own centre of gravity lowers to the ground. We again see personal feeling woven with, and superseding, social metaphors when Bystrova is congratulated on her first independent flight by Rogachev. He ends his professional assessment of her by noticing how she has caught the sun (*zagorela*) while flying in the open cockpit. Later, when she takes off in a display of unauthorised flight and aerobatics, we see Rogachev compelled to imitate her landing in exactly the same way that Beliaev had on her first flight. While the two potential lovers' identical responses to Bystrova's flights create a delicate humour, and the parallelism links the two men emotionally, it also creates a platform on which their contrasting and similar qualities meet and can be compared for ideological purposes. But flight in this film is a metaphor for love; these sequences describe unconscious authentic moments of feeling and personal connection which completely counter a sense of 'collective' and of Kollontai's sense of Winged-Eros. In analysing the role of love for the New Soviet Man and Woman in the 1920s Aleksandra Kollontai used the metaphor of 'winged-ness' to describe an ideal of

brotherly love. For her, 'love is not at all a "private" phenomenon, a matter only of two "loving hearts"', rather, 'love is a connecting principle valuable to the collective'.<sup>40</sup> The idea of 'winged Eros' can also be seen to equate the ideology of *I equals We*.

When Bystrova comes to seek Rogachev's advice, the revelation of his feeling (by means of the intonation given with the pronoun 'vy') is given the context of his personal creativity in flight-design. Raizman creates an expressive matrix which centres on self-identity (and personal pronouns) the significance of which can be gauged in two ways. On the one hand he weaves personal sensibility with ideology and thus fulfils the Socialist-Realist mandate to create living heroes (these moments of feeling create empathy with the projected social family of Soviet *krylatye liudi*). On the other hand, the affect of the specificity of individual feeling and the ephemeral moments of daily life in the aviation school dwarf feeling projected on the level of State.

### **The Art of Love**

The twinning of flight and love, within the setting of a school echoes themes of Ovid's *The Art of Love* (*Ars Amatoria*). The great Roman poet's work includes the Daedalus and Icarus myth as an episode in which the idea of the father and son's striving for flight and freedom from state oppression is placed within lyrics which instruct the reader in 'the principles of how to make and to teach the art of love' (and how to find and secure a lover).<sup>41</sup> Ultimately the work demonstrates that the object of these lyrical 'lessons' and erotic drives is the creation of the artistic work itself. Ovid begins by creating a parallelism between a school of love and his poem. ('If anyone among this people knows not the art of loving, let him read my poem, and having read be skilled in love.')<sup>42</sup> He demonstrates that the motivating force behind the subject of the poem, and also the creation of the form itself, are lessons of love.

In *The Art of Love*, Icarus' death is linked to the passing of all materiality (beauty and the violet and lily bloom and rose perishing). This is countered by the

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<sup>40</sup> Aleksandra Kollontai, 'Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle' and 'Make Way for Winged Eros', in *Alexandra Kollontai: Selected Writings*, trans. by Alix Holt (London: Alison and Busby, 1977), pp. 237-49 and pp. 248-49.

<sup>41</sup> Minos refused to allow Daedalus permission to leave Crete after the engineer had built a labyrinthine prison for the ruler. Ovid, 'The Art of Love', trans. by J. H. Mozley, p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

poet's desire to 'hold fast the winged god'. The name of the god is not written. But Cupid, the god of Love, and the youthful, fiery winged daredevil and seducer of married and unmarried women who finally falls in love, rescues and marries Psyche, is suggested. The idea of Icarus' mortal wings are countered by Ovid's lesson to 'youth' to make 'a soul that will abide the pyre'. Ovid is the creator-constructor of the lines of *The Art of Love* (as an art form and as the creative work, *The Art of Love*, itself).<sup>43</sup> The lessons of love and flight described in the poem and the lessons in creativity, the poem itself, are lessons in how to overcome death. Ovid's 'father-figure' is a creator-constructor in a way that pre-echoes the poet-constructors of the Russian Futurists. And Raizman's dedication to capturing on film the ephemera of daily life is comparable to 'a holding fast the winged-god'. His filmic creation of the experiences of love, and the social context of the period, in a film which is set in an aviation school is an equivalent creative invention to Ovidian *wings*. The Ovidian school of love involves the tale of the invention of wings and the ability to fly which self-reflexively suggests the creation of the work of art as the greatest love. Raizman's film delicately creates a parallel between the idea of the flight-designer-engineer, the creator of the lines of the poem and the film-maker. And in doing so, delicately points to Stalin's, and the Socialist-Realist, requisite that artists (writers) should be the engineers of people's souls.<sup>44</sup> Inherent in the parable of creation of Icarian wings is an underlying thirst for freedom which Ovid links to a search for love.

### **Creative Inventor and Eros**

Flight in *Ars Amatoria* underlines Ovid's sense of compelling forces of Eros (Cupid's name which more strongly signifies sexual pleasure) and places notions of creative invention (the metaphor of the design of flying aircraft) within this context. The theme of a creative inventor of flying machines linked to an exploration of the relation of love as a creative drive echoes the role of themes of flight in Iakov Protazanov's 1924 film *Aelita*.<sup>45</sup> In this film the 'engineer' constructor, Los' (Nikolai Tsereteli) strives to build a space ship, and finally succeeds and flies to Mars. The film begins with the reception

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>44</sup> 'Prazdnik Sovetskoi kul'tury', *Pravda*, no. 216 (?), 17 August 1937, p. 1. (The final digit of the newspaper number is not quite legible.)

<sup>45</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Philip Cavendish for this insight and our discussion of this film.



of unintelligible radio signals from space. Russian radio engineers who work with Los', ironically suggest that the signals may come from Mars. The radio signals and the engineers' jest engender Los' desire to build a space-craft, they also inspire his visions of Aelita, Queen of Mars (Iuliia Solntseva). The film entwines his erotic longing for Aelita with his metaphoric gazing from his studio window towards Mars. His visions of her exotic beauty fuel his drive to create a space ship.

Soviet utopian revolutionary spirit becomes a matter of discourse in this film through the parallelism of its representation on Earth and its dystopian representation on Mars. Earth's Soviet Socialist revolution is seen in the documenting of the period of 1921 with images of population displacement, and by means of references by characters to Soviet Republics (which they have helped to found). It is also projected by means of documentary footage of parades, and the staging of plays, which celebrate the creation of the Soviet Union. Dystopia on Mars is seen in the enslavement of the workers of Mars, in the hierarchical power structures there, and in Aelita's final desire to acquire *all power* for herself. But the all-powerful erotic appeal of Aelita and her lust for personal power are paralleled with the abstract idea of 'All Power to the Soviets' on Earth. Los takes off on a day of a Soviet Revolutionary parade which celebrates of the creation of the Union. But his flight ends with the realization of the inauthentic nature of the object of his desire, Aelita, and of the revolution on Mars. He rediscovers authenticity in his life on his return to Earth. It was not found in Soviet construction (to which he flees when he thinks his wife has been unfaithful) but in the realization of his own personal delusion concerning his jealousy. The fantasy of murdering both his wife and Aelita becomes the death of inauthentic love. The impulse of erotic love is linked to creation of a 'false', fantastic space craft and a false-utopian (dystopian) world. The function of flight (as a building of a space ship and a flight beyond Earth) is, in part, a metaphor for a negatively coded Eros and dystopian dreaming. Ultimately, it serves the function of the discovery of authentic love and creativity when Los returns to his wife on Earth and they embrace in front of the fire in his own hearth.<sup>46</sup>

Raizman's filmic aviation academy is not an Ovidian School for Love in its most obvious sense (learning where and how to secure an erotic liaison), and neither is it a setting for the inculcation of a 1930s rendering of Kollontai's utopian sense of

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<sup>46</sup> Raizman was assistant director on Protazanov's *Protsess o trekh millionakh* (Mezhrabpom-Rus', 1926) and *Sorok pervyi* (Mezhrabpom-Rus', 1926).

‘Winged-Eros’ alone. But the Ovidian archetype which associates an idea of striving for flight and creative invention with love can be seen in this 1930s Stalinist film and in *Aelita*.

### **Pilot-‘devushka’ to ‘letchitsa’**

In *Letchiki* certain details become expressive of the subliminal link between flight and a very delicately posited Eros. Near the end of the film, in the film-chapter entitled, ‘Uchaspred’, after they have been given their new postings, Rogachev and Bystrova are seen sitting on a tram talking. In a register which echoes enthusiastic rhetoric, Bystrova animatedly tells Rogachev about the necessity ‘stat’ odnim organizmom’ with a particular ‘him’ (on) Rogachev mistakenly takes the masculine pronoun to represent Beliaev. It turns out that she is talking about Rogachev’s aircraft (which has the same pronoun because it is a masculine noun). In this comic moment Raizman uses the idea of the aircraft motor not as an emblem of dialectical drive towards a socialist future but as a pun whose fulcrum is desire.

A subsequent close-up of a bell-chord as it rocks up and down under the weight of the tram driver’s hand, and the motion of the tram, continues a sense of their journey together. Raizman then pays great attention to the evocation of a night’s passing through a subsequent visual elaboration of Red Square at dawn. Rather than consciousness of the patriotic setting, the audience is thinking only of Bystrova and Rogachev. They are then seen together on an airfield. Bystrova is not in her usual white attire, but in a completely black uniform. The cape of her coat, wing-like, blows freely behind her. The nose of a powerful ANT-9 stands proudly behind her. The new imaging of Bystrova suggests the transformation of a girl who aspired to gain her wings in a technological sense but has now also gained a sense of womanhood and an emotional sense of gaining wings (*razpravliat’ kryl’ia*). Here the idea of winged-ness and flight as a metaphor for erotic love is underscored in a de-eroticized Stalinist film by a change in the register of glamour. It is also supported in the creation of a sartorial impression of wings against a back-drop of powerful machines. If *Aelita* represented a raven-haired Futurist image of exotic and erotic appeal, the transformation of Stalinist female fliers is similarly coded but to different effect.

A sense of synthesis and collision of autonomous feeling and socially guided feeling can be discerned in the meeting between Rogachev and Bystrova in his personal bureau. In this meeting Bystrova asks for advice on a problem which is ‘liubovnuiu’.

Rogachev, as the true mentor-Father figure who is concerned to help his student, does not reply straightaway. He goes to the mirror and takes stock of himself. The problem turns out to be about Beliaev. She asks Rogachev, as a person with twenty years in the Party, what she should do. In terms of voicing, the ideological function of their roles is reversed. She is upholding the Party line by stressing the qualities that Beliaev lacks ('komsomolskaia vyderzhka') and which, by contrast, Rogachev, with his Party experience, clearly has. But it seems that really all Rogachev is thinking about is how to make sense of what she says and to overcome his own feelings. On one level, this scene can be interpreted to reveal the depth of character of this long-serving Party member. It functions as a cipher which projects the symbolic humanity of all Party-mentor figures who put others before themselves. On another, Rogachev's ensuing, enigmatic reception of himself from a reflection in a mirror foregrounds an inward looking self-examination.<sup>47</sup> In fact he turns away from Bystrova as she starts to assert the value of 'komsomolskaia vyderzhka'; and Beliaev's lack of it.

Vasilii Shchukin's performance in this role has been justly acclaimed by the director and critics alike.<sup>48</sup> The close-up was for Raizman the centre of gravity of his film's communicative power (*mashtab*). He felt that the close-up lifts cinema above theatre because it enables the viewer to see into the soul of the character (*krupnyi plan –vozmozhnost' zaglianut' v glaza cheloveka*).<sup>49</sup> It can be seen as a form of 'unmasking'. In aviation-parade film, close-ups and medium close-ups are used to project a sense of the authenticity and intensity of feelings of audience members who nonetheless function as ideological ciphers. By contrast, Shchukin's performance is what Macheret

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<sup>47</sup> This psychological moment is refrained by Raizman fifty years later when at the end of his film, *Chastnaia zhizn'*, public and personal life is counterpoised.

<sup>48</sup> Aleksandr Macheret, 'Dukh Vakhtangova', in A. Macheret, *Khudozhestvennye techeniia v sovremennom kino* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1963), pp. 283-85 (p. 283). See also Iu. Raizman, *Vchera i segodnia*, pp. 19-20, M. Zak, *Iulii Raizman*, p. 70; N. Zorkaia, 'Raizman', pp. 193-94.

<sup>49</sup> 'Iulii Raizman', in *Kak ia stal rezhisserom*, ed. by B. Kravchenko (Moscow: Goskinoizdat, 1946), pp. 220-30 (p. 223). (This book is a collection of artistic autobiographical essays by various Soviet directors.) See also Raizman, *Vchera i segodnia*, p. 3.

calls ‘*dukhovnaia faktura aktera.*’<sup>50</sup> And Raizman paradigmatically links different expressive means: word (‘*vy*’ signifying the object of Rogachev’s love), *mis-en-scène* (aircraft design work), and the close-up to create an expressive matrix based on personal feeling, creativity and inner identity. In this way, he also communicates a deep sense of Rogachev’s personal inner autonomy. The filmic chapter ‘*Tovarishch Nachal’nik*’ purports to show Rogachev in his official position and ideological function but, by different levels of cinematographic means, ends by revealing an extremely individual portrait of a man as an introspective aircraft designer and lover, as well as a man of commitment and ideals. On the one hand, the film draws on the sphere of aviation to project the era’s socialized optimism entwined with a projection of authentic human feeling. On the other, it reverses the metaphor of winged-ness as spiritualized collective consciousness (reflected in Kollontai’s ‘*Winged-Eros*’) and the socialized metaphor of becoming part of the collective family of *krylatye liudi*. Raizman projects a sense of Rogachev as an individual who is drawn to one specific person, and a sense of love which is a matter of ‘two loving hearts’ (which later the state will separate).

#### **Illness and love: Humanity Predicated over Ideology**

In the following film-chapter, ‘*Operatsiia*’, Rogachev’s vulnerability as someone who is ill and his feelings for Bystrova, are laid bare. Notions of personal feeling are foregrounded. When his flight students come to visit him in hospital, in an endeavour to let them stay, Rogachev insists that they are ‘*svoi*’. He thus also projects both collective, socialized family kinship values and sincere feeling. But when Bystrova agrees to stay behind and he interrupts her question on whether he will be able to live without flying, the film-makers avoid the ideologically loaded complex of flight-flier. Rogachev answers with a personal remark: ‘*A tvoi glaza, okazyvaiutsia karie (...), a ia dumal serye*’.

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<sup>50</sup> Aleksandr Macheret, *Khudozhestvennye techeniia*, pp. 154 and 243- 48. He states that ‘*Ona vnosit v nego element bezyskusstvennoi psikhologicheskoi pravdy, pridaet voploshcheniiu dukhovnogo mira cherty dokumental’nosti.*’ The close-up also reflects the essence of the actor himself, and thus contributes to the creation of ‘*psikhologicheskii-bytogo fil’m*’. Macheret argues that the psychological depth and humour which Shchukin demonstrates are qualities which led him to be chosen for the role of Lenin in Mikhail Romm’s *Lenin v Oktiabre* (Mosfil’m, 1937).

Details such as the bouquet of Asters ('star' in Greek) further underscore planes of imagination in which spheres of flight and love are entwined. As Rogachev is about to be wheeled into surgery he reminds Bystrova (and tells the audience) that this is Aviation Day. Instead of 'Den' aviatsii' he calls it 'letnyi den'. He continues to wish her well by saying to her 'letai'. His creativity and love are entwined in his wish. He says good-bye to her with the faintest suggestion that he is not sure if there will be a future meeting. Instead of romantic feeling predicated on ideological heroism or metaphoric baptisms (as in *Tsirk*, *Valerii Chkalov*, *Muzhestvo* and *Piatyi okean*), by these means Raizman takes official discourse drawn from the sphere of flight (the idea of her flying on Aviation Day) and uses it to serve personal feeling. The fact that it is Aviation Day is emphasized again when Beliaev comes to visit (just as Rogachev is wheeled away). He calls out that it is the eighteenth of August (the annual date of Soviet Aviation Day since 1933). And it is in the subsequent treatment of Aviation Day and of the flight of his aircraft piloted by Bystrova, that personal feeling and individuality is explicitly foregrounded in preference to ideological values of the collective.

**'N.R. Otlichatel'nyi znak samoleta konstruksii N. Rogacheva'.**

When Bystrova leaves Beliaev in the hospital ward the film cuts to the intertitle of the next filmic chapter: 'N.R. Otlichatel'nyi znak samoleta konstruksii N. Rogacheva'. The title refers to the emblem painted on the tail wing of the aeroplane which Rogachev has designed, and which is made up of the constructor's initials. This pride in 'konstruktory' is shown in the officialese of Aviation Day parade films when we see aerial views of Tushino airfield filled with ranks of aircraft accompanied by a narrative which announces their designers by name.<sup>51</sup>

In *Letchiki*, Raizman's first images of the celebration begin by referencing official Aviation Day celebration culture. The first frame is of a flag suspended half-way up a turret of the Kremlin. The following edits are between crowds waving from buildings and streets. And aerial formations of bombers could be spliced into any Aviation Day chronicle of the 1930s. Nurses who have been watching the parade, however, are seen going from the street into the hospital. By this simple means the site of celebration in the film is transferred from Moscow streets to a space which is defined

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<sup>51</sup> See the entries for individual designers in Gunston, *Osprey Encyclopedia*.

by illness. Instead of the aerodrome, or Moscow, or the Kremlin as a metaphoric *agora* in which both society and its commanders and flier ‘sons’ are affirmed, this simple juxtaposition creates a parallelism which implies a society which is ill, and that the standard of values brought to the ‘square’ are equally in need of a cure.

The film shows nurses going upstairs and into the wards. Here an edit reveals Rogachev hanging half out of the window straining to see the aerial display. His white garments are flowing in the wind, and he looks as if he himself is partially in flight. When the nurses approach him he is no longer addressed as *tovarishch Nachal'nik* but instead he has a new identity: *tovarishch Bol'noi*. He forcefully tells them to leave. Clark says that the paradigmatic Father-Stalin figure never acts with the bumptiousness of the ‘pilot-son’, but here Rogachev is acting with the same uncontrolled lack of probity and with the same spontaneous behaviour that is attributed to the ‘son’.

Brandist, in his analysis of the history of parody in early Soviet Russia shows the importance of the historical culture of *prazdnik* to parody. Underlying this relation is the tradition and relation of holiday reversals such as the ‘feasts of simpletons’ and the ‘feast of “duraks”’ with festivals of new births. The *Prazdnik* is a period in which the Tsar may swap robes with the Jester and in which priests gorge themselves before the altar.<sup>52</sup> Rogachev’s behaviour as ‘Tov. Bol’noi’ seems as childish as Beliaev’s when Matveevich called him ‘durak-to’ after his flying stunts at the beginning of the film. Here Raizman not only reverses a positive social coding of national parade holiday (by transferring the setting to a hospital, and exchanging white aviation jackets or athletes costumes for white hospital gowns) but also undermines Rogachev’s model behaviour as a ‘Father-Stalin’ figure. The notion of *prazdnik Stalinskoi aviatsii* as a festival dedicated to Soviet fliers and to aircraft designer-inventors, which celebrates Soviet aeronautic might, can be seen to be lightly underscored with a sense of a festival of *duraki*.. Rather than simply entwining social and personal responses, these edits in *Letchiki* highlight a contrast between organised state enthusiasm and the spontaneous authentic joy of a man in love.

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<sup>52</sup> Brandist cites Olga Freidenberg whom he demonstrates was a strong influence on Bakhtin’s thinking on *carnival*. See Craig Brandist, ‘The Theory and Practice of “Scientific Parody”’, pp. 155-56.

### Tail-wing Emblems and Love Given Wings

On the airfield on Aviation Day Beliaev is acting as ‘spontaneously’ as ever, even without wings. He runs the length of the airfield to get to a phone to try and report to Rogachev on how Bystrova performs while flying Rogachev’s new machine. To get his way Beliaev pulls a young woman out of a phone box, and kicks a bystander (who looks remarkably like Raizman) who is trying to capture the air show on camera.

In a following sequence, Rogachev is tracked as he glides through the wards of the hospital; now with his arms out-stretched in a verisimilitude of flight, now climbing over other patients’ beds in his endeavour to catch a glimpse of Bystrova’s performance. The motion fully communicates the sense of someone whose feelings of love have metaphorically given him wings (*raspravliat’ kryl’ia*). He goes from ward to ward and, drawing an aerial loop with his finger, looking at his plane through a window, he says to another patient ‘Smotri! Vot on!’ He then heads for the roof. Here upwards-ness does not correspond to a poetic matrix built on ideas of dialectical progress, rather it is a representation of uncontrollable feeling and a desire to see the fruits of his creative invention. He has completely surrendered to his emotions, and this has a dramatic affect on those around him. Patients start to accumulate behind him, mimicking his every move as he crouches to see through the window better. When he starts to climb a staircase he has a crowd of patients in his wake. We see a surgeon horror-struck at the sight. A nurse exclaims ‘Bozhe moi’ to the debris of slippers left on the stairs after the patients have abandoned them for the roof.

In contrast to this, the typical 1930s Aviation-Day film includes sequences which track Stalin up stairs when he arrives at Tushino aerodrome.<sup>53</sup> In *Letchiki*, enthusiasm for flight is led not by Stalin but *tovarishch Bol’noi*. Standard representations of the *pafos* and *entuziazm* of parade-culture discourse are briefly referenced when we see spectators watching the parachute jump after Rogachev is told to get down from the window, and also when we see spectators in stands during the air show/meeting earlier in the film. But in these sequences levels of officialdom meet with levels of anarchy and create a comic effect, the charm of which masks the fact that Raizman is lightly subverting hospital authority and a national air parade in the process.

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<sup>53</sup> This imaging is repeated in Aviation Day films such as *Den’ aviatsii*, *Bogatyri Rodiny* and *Prazdnik Stalinskikh sokolov*, *Prazdnik Stalinskoi aviatsii* (1939) and *Prazdnik Stalinskoi aviatsii* (1940).

With Rogachev's arrival on the sun-roof, for a split second, we see patients in the background who are sitting almost zombie-like, or who appear not to be interested in events in the air at all. It is not until Rogachev bursts onto the scene that they all join in. Yet it is personal motivation rather than public fervour which lies behind Rogachev's impetuous behaviour. When Rogachev looks up he says 'vot on' as he spots his aircraft. As we have already seen, this resembles a moment in Dovzhenko's *Zemlia* when a Komsomol leader looks skyward and points towards an off-screen Bolshevik 'aeroplan' during the main protagonist, Vasil's, funeral. The aeroplane symbolises Vasil's spirit and the eternal spirit of the Bolshevik dream of a bright socialist future. In *Letchiki*, when Rogachev looks skyward he in no way expresses a collective 'my - eto strana'. Nor is he projecting an idea of a bright future just off-screen. He is also not projecting a sense of 'my' as the collective who made his aircraft and to whom he thus owes his success, which is seen in *Valerii Chkalov* and in Macheret's *Rodina zovet*. Rogachev's feeling links back to the title of this filmic chapter which foregrounds the aircraft insignia based on the designer's name. And the aeroplane at that moment also represents the woman he loves. We see Rogachev's lone aircraft in which Bystrova takes two aerial rolls and there is then a cut back to Rogachev. He looks up and points to his chest (his heart) saying 'ia'. At this point in *Letchiki* Rogachev is fully expressing a personal moment of 'carnival'. That is to say, a 'moment of enablement – inevitably transitory – during which the self feels itself to be an agent in the world, that moment when a human being no longer feels helpless, nor prays, nor begs.'<sup>54</sup> This sequence is an example of supreme artistry on the director's part. Raizman uses socialized enthusiasm to express a sublimely personal moment.

The image of Rogachev looking skyward towards his aircraft and Bystrova, who is flying it, echoes that of Los' who, when dreaming of Aelita, stood before his window, back predominantly to camera, looking upwards and out. Her equal erotic attraction to him is conveyed in the subsequent cut to her straining to 'see' Los' from Mars. The earthling taught her what it means to kiss (to have a physically expressed relation) when, in her first view of Earth, she saw Los' and his wife embrace. But in *Letchiki* it is not Eros, but the link between love and creativity that is the dominant significance of this image. Flight universally represents connectivity between the

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<sup>54</sup> Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) p. 103.



beloved in the air and on the ground. This is communicated in aural terms at the end of Gerbert Rappaport's, *Vozdushnyi izvozhik* (The Aerial Cabby) (Tsentral'naia ob"edinennaia kinostudiia, Alma Ata, 1943) when the voice of the young opera singer, Natasha (Liudmila Tselikovskaia) is picked up from the stage of the Bol'shoi by the radio of the fog-bound aeroplane of Baronov (Mikhail Zharov) as he returns from battle: thus metaphorically, her love guides him home.

In *Letchiki* when Rogachev says 'there it is!' (vot on) and 'I' (Ia), and he places his hand to his chest with a synchronized gaze upwards, he recognizes himself in his creative work and also projects himself spatially. The moment projects a sense of 'consummation' in the Bakhtinian sense, that is; Rogachev's 'gazing outward' projects a sense of 'I existing for myself', projected in space and completed through the recognition in the existence of the 'Other', in a dynamic which also models the director's and the viewers' positions in relation to the screening of the film.

### **Subversive nuances**

In the following sequence there is scope for a further carnival interpretation when inmates wave frantically as shadows of aeroplanes (first small fighters followed by larger and larger bombers) fly over them. With an unbroken downward movement diagonally across screen, rows of their shadows cover the sunlit roof-terrace and the inmates. Besides being an imaginative representation of an air parade, the inauthenticity of the shadows over the white of the patients' robes and beds creates both a celebratory and a mildly sinister effect. Their cheers are directed at what is, at this point, only a simulacrum. The downward movement reverses a typical official rendering of *klin* (wedge-formation) flying upwards diagonally off-screen in Aviation-Day parade films.

This sequence includes a close-up of one person who is so delirious with excitement that he holds his rocking head in his hands as he exclaims: 'oi, yoi, yoi!'. A nurse tries to persuade the man to go and lie down. She tugs at his white robe and asks him what the doctor will say when he sees him. But when the *patient* turns we see that it is the doctor-surgeon himself. The nurse cries out, horrified and dismayed: 'professor!' Not only is there a complete carnivalesque reversal of roles (doctor becomes patient) but the image is a reversal of the style and messaging of poster art and Aviation-Day film *entuziazm*. Instead of representing Soviet citizenry expectantly

projecting a brighter Socialist future, the doctor looks like an inmate of an insane asylum.

The zombie-like look of some patients on the sun-roof who at first ignore the air show, and the energetic but mindless manner in which all the *inmates* follow Rogachev up the stairs onto the roof, create humour and farce. In Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master i Margerita* the idea of the mental hospital is equated with the poet, Bezdomyi's, sentencing and imprisonment. The sight not of white air-force jackets but of hospital coats subliminally reverses the serious symbolic code of the air parade.<sup>55</sup> And instead of the idea of collective judgement and praise located in a microcosmic *public square* symbolized by the airfield, a hospital-asylum suggests a society gone mad, and if not mad, imprisoned. Raizman creates a narrative context which puts Rogachev in hospital on Aviation Day. He creates an expressive matrix centred on images of spectators watching aerial displays in the film. By this means, through a collision of the idea of officially acceptable Aviation-Day responses, expected behaviour of patients who are ill, and the outlandish behaviour of supposedly sick people in response to the parade, Raizman not only creates humour but also he comments on the nature of official enthusiasm. (Eerily he creates a precursor of the fact of Tupolev having to watch a May-Day flyover of his team's aircraft from the 'monkey cage' on the roof of the *sharaga*, a prison design bureau.)<sup>56</sup> Raizman uses the patients' displays of *pafos* and *enthuziazm* to comic effect, which can be seen to both express ideological enthusiasm and make it the brunt of a delightful joke.

When the doctor recovers, and looks back at the patients in their apparent rapture, he complains to the nurse that 'On vsiu bol'nitsu na vozdukh podnimaet'. This communicates his anger at the whole hospital being brought to the roof. But *podnimat' na vozdukh* also signifies to blow up. The implication is that Rogachev has caused a microcosmic revolt. The figure of Rogachev thus lightly echoes Pushkin's romantic leaders of rebellion, Razin and Pugachev, and the explosives expert and rocket inventor, Kibalchich. The idea of chaos links back to the meeting between Rogachev

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<sup>55</sup> Mikhail Bulgakov, *Master i Margerita* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskaiia kniga, 1994), p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> David R. Johnson, 'Review [of]: Leonid Lvovich Kerber, *Stalin's Aviation Gulag: A Memoir of Andrei Tupolev and the Purge Era*, ed. by Von Hardesty, Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996', in *Aerospace Power Journal*, <<http://www.airpower.af.mil/AIRCHRONICLES/apj/apj00/win00/kerber.htm>> [accessed 28 September 2011].

and Bystrova when she refers to the problem she needs advice about as both 'liubovnuiu' and 'khaos'. Rogachev then agrees, saying: 'Da. Khaos'. Love has seemingly made Rogachev step out of his mentor-father role, and instead of leading people to an awareness of their responsibilities to the collective, he creates mayhem. In this way, flight becomes a metaphor for personal love and chaotic feeling.

Zak argues that this scene 'zavershila obshchuiu rezhiserskuiu kontseptsiiu fil'ma'.<sup>57</sup> However, whereas he feels the following self-appraisal by Raizman supports its ideological function, his comment is as enigmatic as the film. Raizman says: 'Sozdavaia v svoem voobrazhenii edinyi obraz zhizni liudei, zhizni strany, togo momenta v razvitii sovetskogo obshchestva, kotoromu posviashchen budet fil'm, rezhisser sozdaet i vidit samoe glavnoe – to edinstvo mnogoobraziia, kakim iavliaetsia proizvedenie iskusstva'.<sup>58</sup> But in this quotation he does not give adjectives which suggest a sense of a glorified 'razvitie', 'zhizni liudei' and 'zhizni strany'. His purpose is to bring all of these levels together and create a unified film. What is important is the idea of 'myriad forms' (mногоobraziie) of life.

#### **'Uchraspred'**

In this syntagma we see that Rogachev and Bystrova are given their new work placements by the 'The Secretariat's Files-and-Distribution Department (Uchraspred) (which) compiled a file-index on all high-ranking functionaries so that sensible appointments might be made.'<sup>59</sup> Bystrova is despatched to the Pamirs. And Rogachev is to go to Sakhalin in the Far East to help with defence. The Party official says it has 'oboronnoe znachenie' and that 'nuzhen chelovek kak ty [...] odno tolko, ne blizok [...] dalekovato'. He also seems to allude to Rogachev's romantic feelings when he asks 'ne meshaet drug drugu?' The ensuing dialogue is understood to reveal the essence of Rogachev's stoic loyalty to the Party:

Rogachev: A solntse est'?

Party Official: Samoe vykhodaishchoe!'

Rogachev: A Partiiia?

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<sup>57</sup> Zak, Iulii Raizman, p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 81. Zak is citing from *Voprosy mastersva v sovetskom kinoiskusstve* (Moscow: Goskinozdat', 1952), p. 147.

<sup>59</sup> Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, p. 148.

Party Official: Est' !

Rogachev: 'A vlast', sovetskaia, est' ?

Party Official: Eto est' !

Rogachev: No, chego stradaesh'? Pishi.

But it cannot be overlooked that this new instruction immediately follows the spontaneous revolt at the hospital which was born out of Rogachev's uncontrollable expression of love and creative self-fulfilment. I believe that while the dialogue represents an assertion of Party loyalty (and shows that the Party rewards its long-serving members), Rogachev's new posting is very subtly structured as a punishment and form of exile. Would the Party really send an aircraft designer away from the centre to the periphery of the country if it were not a form of demotion? Raizman holds up a camera to the fact that, just like Aeroflot's flight paths, the Party decides people's fate. And it shows what the fate might be of people who seemingly set their own personal values above a consciousness of the collective. The idea of *uchraspred* represents a journey of separation and discontinuity as much as *vse vysshe* and a life lived for the Party.

In the following syntagma, which is the penultimate one, Rogachev and Bystrova are together at an airfield before Rogachev's flight to the East. It begins with a slender ANT-14 standing in profile on the field. The ANT-14 had been involved in numerous joy rides over Moscow since 1932.<sup>60</sup> In the public mind the image could well be associated with such events. Here, the aircraft is also used to progress a personal narrative. And rather than a public or group send-off by fellow aviation students or Party comrades, Rogachev and Bystrova are the only two people on the field.

Bystrova asks how many kilometres it is from the Pamirs to Sakhalin. When she is told that it is ten to twelve thousand kilometres, she replies with conviction: 'Ia budu trenirovat'sia i sovershu etot perelet'.<sup>61</sup> This spare dialogue functions on two levels.

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<sup>60</sup> The film also appears to use the ANT-9; its prototype was called Soviet Wings (Kryl'ia sovetov) and was involved in early long-distance record-breaking flights. Both the ANT-9 and the ANT-14, were part of the Maksim Gor'kii propaganda squadron. Gunston, *Osprey Encyclopedia*, pp. 390-91.

<sup>61</sup> Palmer points out that Rogachev is told that it is 12,000 kilometres. 'Red Wings on the Silver Screen', p. 190.

One is that it accentuates the will and spirit of the young Soviet pilot. It speaks of the power of Soviet aero-technology, the expanse of the Soviet Union, and the commitment of its citizens to their Party work and to their professions. But this is not her meaning: her desire to be a better pilot is the desire to fly out and be with Rogachev in Sakhalin. Her flight is not about conquering the peripheries and unifying the country in Soviet construction. The professional language masks the fact that she is simply a young woman who loves a particular individual and will fly any distance to see him. Flight here is a metaphor for love.

We then see Rogachev getting into an aeroplane, and Bystrova is left standing on the grass. The aircraft is filmed in close-ups which reveal the texture of its *kolchug* (metal skin). Edits focus on route-signs attached to the side of the fuselage. They signal a pride in, and celebrate the establishment of, long-distance air routes across the Union ('Moskva-Tashkent', 'Moskva-Khabarovsk'). But the aeroplane here is not an advertisement for the accomplishments of Aeroflot alone. The image of the ANT-9 standing behind Bystrova echoes official patriotic Air-Parade views of aircraft on the field. The style of this backdrop suggests pride in technology and indicates the country's capabilities to fly across its vast territories. The aircraft is then dwarfed by the new image of Bystrova in her relatively eroticised black 'winged'-cape. The aircraft does not function as a symbol of the coming of a bright new world and horizon alone. Her brave figure does not simply signal the brave stoicism of Soviet New Woman. The powerful machines contribute to a new sense of Bystrova's 'winged' identity as an independent graduate aviation student who is no longer a girl-pilot (pilot-devushka) but a woman-*letchitsa*.

Once again Raizman closely weaves official semiology with his own personal nuances. There is no rousing chorus of song to which flight becomes part of an 'ever higher', forward-towards-communism metaphor. The sound of the engine is a weaker echo of the acoustic tapestry of the aerodrome at the beginning of the film. We see Bystrova running after the huge aeroplane unable to stop the inexorable moment when Aeroflot's scheduled flight takes off. Rogachev's last 'fatherly-mentor' act is to shout a warning to get away from the moving aeroplane: 'Letit! Letit!' The poignant moment highlights her fragility and the fragility of their new found feelings for each other in the face of an officially determined destiny. Moreover, in a Socialist-Realist poetic matrix, the idea of *uchraspred* and the suggestion of tram-rails which extend out from Red Square (that precede this sequence) signal an idea of Soviet values extending from the

centre to the peripheries. At the beginning of the film Rogachev's lone walk across the aerodrome suggested both the beginning of new day and also that 'zhizn' - ne pole pereiti'. The refrain of a setting of an airfield and the notion of *uchaspred* suggest separation and the possibility of meeting again also as an ambivalent feeling of hope, and as part of that uneasy journey through life.

### **Razluka**

The last sequence of *Letchiki* takes place inside the aircraft. We see Rogachev's point of view as he looks through the aircraft window. The land blurs with the speed of take-off, and the film projects the moment of lift from the earth. Here *vid s ptichego poleta* does not express the paradigm of 'conquering' and 'making known' of the great *ne obiatnyi prostor* of Russia as seen in *Bogatyri Rodiny*, and identified by Widdis. Rather, the documentary element creates a 'timeless' authentic moment. It conveys a universal sense of parting which is metaphorized in the aircraft's separation from the earth. After turning to Khrushchev and being confronted with a wall of *Pravda* newspaper, Rogachev turns back to the window with just detectable wistfulness. In *Piatyi okean*, near the end, a railwayman reads a newspaper. It celebrates Leontii's battles with Soviet enemies and the pilot's being awarded the honour, Hero of the Soviet Union. The refrain of the train journey to the aero-club with which *Piatyi okean* began, and the reading of the newspaper, emphasize Leontii's transformation during the course of the film from the rough, spontaneous, self-willed hunter at the beginning into a Soviet pilot and national hero at the end, one who then recognizes the person he loves. In *Letchiki*, the newspaper and Rogachev's response to it signal a contrast between public and personal spheres. He prefers to turn back to his own thoughts, and his past exploits are not being celebrated. The cinematographic projection of every detail of the moment of take-off, and Shchukin's fine performance, communicate a growing consciousness of what it means to be separated from both the Moscow region and Bystrova. The interior shot of the fuselage mirrors the function of close-ups of pilots in the cockpit throughout Stalinist flier films and signals the expression of an emotional or psychological state of the protagonist. Instead of a surrender to gravity, take-off is a surrender to forces of lift which signify, not joy in the prospect of building communism, but a just perceptible sadness in parting. Rogachev is not looking back in celebration of the aviation school and what it gave him, nor is he looking out over industrial construction sites, or dams, or expanses of field which all might indicate the

building of a bright socialist future. Instead, with exquisite subtlety, the former pilot simply watches domestic buildings and fields pass under the aeroplane's wing.

Rogachev's back is turned away from the other two in the cabin. This is the first completely private moment in this sequence. The mechanic Ivan Matveevich and Rogachev's 'nephew' (who is parentless during a time of purges and famine for reasons which are never explained) are the only other passengers. Noticing Rogachev's mood, Khrushchev begins to sing about parting as exile (*razluka*). The young boy corrects him saying: 'Separations were in the times of the Tsar' (*razluka pri Tsare bylo*). This simple sentence communicates the archetypal emotions of parting from people who are loved. The word *razluka* also resonates with its archaic; meaning death. The mention of Tsarist times in conjunction with the idea of Sakhalin, and combined with notions of parting and death suggest a Tsarist identity of Sakhalin which, since the 1850s was a Russian penal colony to which many revolutionaries were sent. This subtle juxtaposition of ideas may colour the nature of Rogachev's posting. When the child tells Ivan Matveevich that 'razluka' only happened in Tsarist times Ivan asks; 'And what is it now?' (*A chto, teper'?*). In serious reply, and using a quintessentially Soviet word, the child says that nowadays it is called 'a business trip' (*kommandirovka*). The child expresses a contrast between exile of Tsarist times and Soviet practices, but the film ambivalently implies a comparison.

Using a similar structuring of information employed by Gogol', Dostoevskii, and also Protazanov (for instance *Aelita's* parallelism between 'All Power to the Soviets' and *Aelita's* drive for all power), Raizman artfully suggests one ideologically or socially appropriate thing, and allows the possibility of its opposite meaning to enter the communication. By using a child's voice to foreground the notion of Tsarist exile, the film projects potentially punishable observations as a light-hearted look at a child's endeavour to make sense of the world. And, in a way that mirrors an effect of melodrama in pre-revolutionary period, Raizman uses the auspices of charm and delicate humour to reveal authentic shared assumptions about the nature of Stalinist life in the mid 1930s. In behaving as he did on Aviation Day, Rogachev not only subverted his own and the hospital's authority, he also transformed a national, *collective* event into a moment of deep personal freedom and self-fulfilment. And instead of a Decembrist revolt, Rogachev created a comic 'revolt' and led a microcosmic 'uprising' at the hospital by endeavouring to *podnimat' na vozdukh*.

The romantic idea of *razluka* also contributes to the film's generic definition as a lyric-drama. Just as the lyric poetry of ancient Greece varied in forms from the funeral dirge to educative treatise and the love poem but was unified by style of language and rhyme, so too Stalinist lyric flier films differ in their genre but are similar in certain formal qualities.<sup>62</sup> They all project a combination of romantic and heroic sensibilities. They are structured on a romantic plot or a passionate love of flying itself. Often feeling is expressed in song, or in an emotive instrumental score, in soft atmospheric visuals and in representations of flight, which further equate these films with definitions of 'lyric' as that which should be sung, and that which is expressive of the author's thoughts and feelings.<sup>63</sup> The idea of *razluka* here links to another pre-Revolutionary archetype; Evgenii Onegin', and thus extends to Pushkin, and to his lyrics by the same name. Pushkin's poem 'Razluka' (1817) speaks of the sadness of parting from his friends at the Lycée. His poem of 1816, which is also entitled 'Razluka', communicates the sadness of eternal parting from life, which is paralleled to the greater, implied, fear of separation from poetic inspiration. But in this poem, parting from his muse is not eternal, and the poet is comforted and spurred on to write the lines which make up the poem. Similarly, Raizman's use of *razluka* is multivocal. It communicates the poignancy of Rogachev's and Bystrova's fate, but Raizman also draws attention to the use of a euphemism for exile, and thus both to the masking of meaning, and its creation in an artistic work. The director's play with the multivocality of the word and its bisociative fields produces meaning on the level of humour, emotion and psychology, societal comment, and it draws attention to the idea of creative form and the quality of the lyric.

In the final scene, as Rogachev looks out of the aeroplane window, he overhears his nephew tell Ivan Matveevich that Bystrova intends to visit the little boy. When Ivan Matveevich asks why she would want to do that, with simple, honest conviction the boy replies 'because she loves me' (potomu chto ona liubit menia). Ivan humours the boy, and asks 'you?' Again the boy with pure heart says 'me'. To this we hear a laugh off-screen. The camera cuts to Rogachev. Bystrova's feelings have been made clear through the words of the child. The film does not end with a typical trope of people

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<sup>62</sup> 'Lyric', in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and T.V.F. Brogan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp.713-27 (pp.713-15).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 715.



walking forwards in a line towards camera which signals collective joy in being part of the 'Soviet Great Family'. Rogachev's laugh and knowing look out to audience is followed by his turning his back to the camera. His thoughts have not gone out to an off-screen perfect socialist future. We see an opaque window behind him. There is no indication that he is thinking of his future work defending the country. It is a completely private moment. And with completely autonomous voicing of the character and of the director, all we see is Rogachev's shoulders lightly move (with laughter) as he looks out of the window.

### Chapter Five: Inculcating Courage

In the 1930s the way in which aviation imagery was used in relation to the portrayal of independently-minded women on screen moved forwards from that of *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia* and *General'naia liniia* in contrasting ways. In the 1920s the defining characteristics of the utopian Soviet 'new woman', as summarized by Barbara Clements Evans were 'independence' and 'activism'. Kollontai's pre-revolutionary article, 'New Woman', in which she expressed her thoughts on heroism in relation to the new woman, had been republished in 1919. Kollontai saw women's procreational desires and their desires to contribute to life as part of the social-construct that defined woman as man's facilitator or 'rezonator'.<sup>1</sup> For her, female heroism involved women freeing themselves from this. As she argues: 'the "New Woman" is (...) a heroine who maintains her sense of self, a heroine who protests against every aspect of enslavement in the state, in the family, in society; who fights for her rights as a representative of her sex. "The Single Woman" is how, more and more often, she is typified.'<sup>2</sup>

Kollontai describes her heroine (geroinia) in terms of the need to overcome the psychological habits that were profoundly embedded in gender relations. She used her fiction and critical work to illustrate practical and emotional issues that women faced when trying to resolve the tensions between their passion for work and their passion for another person. (It is interesting to note here that although Liuda, in *Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*, is far from being one of the Party activists who populate Kollontai's fiction, the expression of feminine inner, emotional perspectives in response to daily life is also the perspective adopted by the male director, Room.)

Kollontai also focused on systemic issues which determined women's lives. Evans Clement says that the Party perceived that the resolution of women's issues lay in the transformation of women's role in productivity. Women's issues were perceived by the Party as a problem to be resolved from the top down, by means of large programmes.<sup>3</sup> Women, in fact, were seen as 'cogs' in a social machine that would create the new Soviet World.

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<sup>1</sup> Kollontai, 'Novaia zhenshchina' p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', pp. 486-88.

In the 1920s Gor'kii wrote an essay entitled 'On the Hero and the Crowd.' This essay is cited by Günther who says that it demonstrates Gor'kii's 'creed' that heroism is a 'general fact of life.' Gork'ii writes 'For human beings it does not matter at all who the hero is: Max Linder, Jack the Ripper, Mussolini, a boxer or a magician, a politician or a pilot.' Part of this appeal, according to Gor'kii, is that these people

have managed to free themselves from the dullness of everyday life (...) They are a magnet, which attracts everyone and everything (...) That is why every hero is a social phenomenon, and extremely important for educational purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Here Gor'kii's writing suggests an idea of a heroism which obviates the daily experience of reality. But for Kollontai female heroism lies in women's overcoming of problems faced in the private as well as in the public sphere. Her writing examines various practical and psychological experiences of women trying to develop all aspects of women's potential. For her, heroism involves changing patriarchal thinking and the practices associated with it. She believed that life would be transformed through the direction of women's energies against all levels of enslavement. Gor'kii's romantic heroism, on the other hand, speaks of the extraordinary in humanity. His model of the elevated hero obviates the problems of reality. The heroic act of courage presents a hyponym, the heroic model of humanity which strives against all odds. As Günther demonstrates, Gor'kii's model leads to a Soviet mythology of the miraculous which typified the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> If every one strives to become extraordinary, then life itself will become the 'fairy tale' that is destined to come true.

In 1930 the zhenotdel' was formally closed because it was thought that with acceptance of women into spheres of work generally thought of as male, and with women's roles a part of the forces of production, the 'woman question' was closed.<sup>6</sup> At the IX Komosomol Conference of 1931 the government made the call 'Komsomolets-na samolet'. By 1936 the Komsomol together with Osoaviakhim created one hundred and forty-four aero-clubs in Moscow, Gor'kii, Voronezh, Sverdlovsk, Novosibirsk and other towns across the Union. As many as eight thousand pilots were trained under the

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<sup>4</sup> Hans Günther, 'The Heroic Myth in Socialist Realism' (hereafter: 'The Heroic Myth'), in *Dream Factory Communism*, pp. 106-24 (p. 108)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-07.

<sup>6</sup> Evans Clements, 'The Utopianism of the Zhenotdel', pp. 495-96.

slogan and rubric: 'From models to gliders, from gliders to the aeroplane!' (Ot modeli k planeru, s planera – na samolet!).<sup>7</sup> (The ideological importance of this slogan was discussed in chapter three.) In children's films, as well as those made for adults, each stage of this programme of flight training, aircraft model-making, parachute jumping, glider flight and/or invention, and finally pilot training, symbolizes stages in what Katerina Clark calls the 'liminal rite of passage' by which a person became a Soviet New Man/Woman/Child. In films ranging from Aviation Day newsreels, to Vertov's *Tri pesni o Lenine* and *Kolybel'naia*, and Artemenko's *Gornyi tsvetok*, women's and girls' (and young men's) courage to perform a parachute jump and to fly are symbolic of moral courage, the kind required to build a Soviet New World.

Between 1927 and 1929 the Osoaviakhim clubs (which taught aviation skills and riflery) claimed a female membership of 700,000.<sup>8</sup> In 1938 three female pilots, Valentina Grizodubova, Polina Osipenko and Marina Raskova created a world, 'straight-line' long-distance record by flying, in the significantly named 'Rodina' (ANT-37), six thousand four-hundred and fifty kilometres to the Amur River basin in the Far East (the nearest village was Kerbi).<sup>9</sup> They were subsequently made the first female Heroes of the Soviet Union, and were the only women to receive the award before the Great Fatherland War.<sup>10</sup> After an emergency landing in which the navigator, Raskova, had to bail out of her vulnerable and internally inaccessible cockpit, Raskova wandered for ten days with little food and water, before meeting up with the mired 'Rodina'.

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<sup>7</sup> K. Gribovskii, 'V poiskakh massovogo samoleta', <<http://base13.glasnet.ru/text/g25/g25.htm>>, [accessed October 2008].

<sup>8</sup> One hundred thousand of these had joined by March of that year. And, in 1931 it gained a total membership of approximately eleven million people. See Adrienne Marie Harris, 'The Myth of the Woman Warrior and World War II in Soviet Culture' (unpublished MA thesis Kansas University Press, 2008), Proquest UMI Microform 3315191, p. 33.

<sup>9</sup> Marina Raskova, *Zapiski shturmana* (Moscow: Izdatel'tsvo Vsesoiuznogo dobrovol'nogo obshchestvo sodeistviia armii, aviatsii i flota, SSSR, 1976), pp. 212-14. See also Lois K. Merry, *Women Military Pilots of World War II: A History with Biographies of American, British, Russian and German Aviators* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Pennington, *Wings, Women and War*, p. 17.

They were eventually rescued after a search by the state which included the deployment of Soviet air-clubs and military aviation in the Far East, and which covered over two million square kilometres across the Taiga. The women and their flight were the subject of such films as Vertov's; *Tri geroini* (1938), and Ivanov's *Taezhnye druz'ia*, (Taiga Friends, Soiuzmul'tfil'm, 1939). But Vertov's documentary was stultified by the authorities<sup>11</sup> and Ivanov's film is an animated film for children in which their rescue is described by a Soviet film encyclopaedia in the following terms: 'the animals help the pilots gather Mother-(nature)-Russia's gifts' (*Taezhnye druz'ia-zveri pomogaiut letchitsam sobrat' podarki Rodiny*).<sup>12</sup> So, unlike Valerii Chkalov's record-breaking flight to Vancouver, Washington, and in spite of the women's glamorous appeal, a contemporary biographical film or fictional transposition of their record-breaking flight and ordeal in the taiga seems, in effect, never to have reached the public. Instead, a pamphlet-book about their ordeal was published, and the women were transformed by the media into almost mythological models of female courage, in keeping with the romantic heroism which was a central socio-ideological theme of the thirties in the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> Numerous films included women as either flight-students, instructors, mentors or pilots. Furthermore, transformation of the flight of the *Rodina* into a children's animation reflects the importance that was attached to children's film in the propagation of Party values and entertainment.

In the late 1920s films were already being made which were directed at young women and encouraging them to think in terms of competition with men. *Khochu byt' lechitsej*, (I Want to be a Woman-Pilot, 1929) is described in the Soviet feature-film encyclopaedia as a story of a young girl who enters a model aeroplane competition. Her

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<sup>11</sup> Natasha Drubek-Maier, 'Kolybel' Griffita i Vertova: O Kolybel'noi" Dzigi Vertova (1937)', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 30 (1996), 198-212, (pp, 199. 209n6). And see Aleksandr Deriabin, "'Plod sozrel i ego nado sniat": K istokam vertovskogo shedevra', *Kinovedcheskie zapiski*, 49 (2000), 192-211 (p. 197). For a sense of the director's celebration of these women as heroes which also communicates an ambivalent register of parade culture, see Vertov's script-plans *Tri geroini* and *Vozvrashchenie geroicheskikh letchits v moskvu*, in Dziga Vertov, *Iz nasledia: Dramaturgicheskie opyty* (Moscow: Eisenstein Centre, 2004), pp. 242-43 and 244-49.

<sup>12</sup> *Sovetskie khudozhestvennye fil'my*, II, no. 1588, p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> Brontman, Lazar and L. Khvat, *Geroicheskii perelet 'Rodiny'* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'tsvo politicheskoi literaturoi, 1938). See also Günther, 'The Heroic Myth', p. 108.

desire to win the competition leads her to buy a model plane that has already been proven to be good. She then tries to invent her own. Her hopes are rewarded in a successful flight, but then dashed when one of the boys destroys her plane before the competition. Making amends for destroying her invention, the young boy makes an air balloon in which he flies off into the night to the delight of all the children.

Films such as Artemenko's *Gornyi tsvetok*, and Vladimir Nemoliaev's *Po sledam geroia*, Dmitrii Poznanskii's, *Vozdushnaia pochta* (Air Mail) (Soiuzdetfil'm, 1939) demonstrate the way heroic historical events are present in the psyche of Soviet children. They also show that acquiring physical courage and developing *volia* is no less important for young girls than for heroic men. But when a female pilot is the main protagonist, and made a 'queen' of the skies, unsurprisingly in Soviet Socialist Realism, her talent, like that of the exceptionally gifted male-pilot, is not allowed to exist outside the collective.

#### ***Diadia letchik* : Male and Female**

In *Po sledam geroia*, five wily orphans, including one girl, Maika, are inspired by tales of the flights of the Cheliuskin rescue and the Papanin expedition to the North Pole which are read to them at the beginning of the film. One child, whose propensity for falling is signalled by the bandage around his head, says to the head of the orphanage 'A ia budu vse ravno kak Shmidt'. This refers to the famous mathematician and scientist of the 1930s who led both the Cheliuskin steamer-ship's exploratory naval passage through Siberia and the Papanin expedition to the North Pole. And it evokes the ensuing 'golden era' of heroism that these exploits were understood to have ushered in. This film is a delightful, heart-warming film which communicates the children's will-power, imagination, and their endeavour to fulfil their dreams with a light, comic touch. We see the children sneaking away from the orphanage to test the flying machine they are making. We see their winged-sled lift into the air on fabric and pole wings, with an umbrella for added aerodynamics. And, in an unlikely and enchanting flight, and with their dog yapping below, the children's invention takes Pet'a and Maika above the trees. Maika sits behind Pet'a in the navigator position, but it is clear that the girls in the audience are expected to identify not only with Maika, but also with all the lads of the wayward, rebellious inventor-group.

The children learn that one of the first people to become a Hero of the Soviet, a pilot who was involved in both the Cheliuskin *epopei* and the Papanin scientific

expedition, Vasili Molokov, will be giving a presentation at the neighbouring village. The children decide to take their flying invention as a gift to him. They run away from the orphanage, dodge all the authorities in the town, and crash-land their flying-sled onto the stage just as Molokov (the pilot, himself) is describing one of his aerial feats. There is applause, and laughter, and Molokov encourages the youngest, Ryzhik (Igor' But) to speak. 'Diadia Molokov, my tebia ochen' liubit i kak ty [...] spasal zhenshchin i detei; tol'ko my nikogo ne spasli'; and there is laughter all around. Ryzhki was at first not allowed on the children's adventure because he 'budet boiat'sia'. Molokov asks him 'ty letchik ot chego plachish'?' But the little boy replies; 'mashinu zhal'ko'. Ryzhik's courage has been demonstrated, and the hero promises to give him a new (good) aeroplane. When the group arrive back at the orphanage, there is a beautiful wooden model aeroplane, and 'hurrahs' from all the children and staff. Molokov carries the bandaged young 'Shmidt' (Vasenska), in from the car. Then the youngest children come down the stairs and one asks: 'Ty diadia Molokov?' His presence in their orphanage is itself nothing short of a miracle. The great pilot replies: 'Da, ia diadia Molokov [...]', and in order to dispel the youngster's awe, the pilot teases the child, saying: 'Vo pervykh, ia ne diadia; ia – geroi'. The introduction of a real pilot into the children's film legitimizes and verifies both humanistic values, and the belief in dreams coming true. As Günther says, this is a period of the 'cult of heroism', when belief in the miraculous (achievements in the Five-Year Plans, heroic feats by pilots and Stakhanovites) underpinned Soviet culture.<sup>14</sup> In this film the propagation of the miraculous is free from the bombastic register of slogans of mass media, and the resulting film is full of charm. The children's dream of flight, and their longing to give their invention to a Hero of the Soviet Union stands in for the connectivity, love and feelings of self-worth which they may lack as orphans. Their *miraculous* flight is born of an emotional complex of desire to be recognized, to be embraced - if not by a personal family, then by the extended social family. 'Diadia letchik' stands in semiotic relation to Father Stalin. The metaphoric uncle represents both the state, and the absent father. And, at the end of the film, the orphans' faith in miracles, in the tales that are read to them about Soviet heroes, in their country, and in their own potential, is confirmed.

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<sup>14</sup> Günther, 'The Heroic Myth', p. 109.

Beyond the common address of Russian children to adults as ‘uncle’ or ‘auntie’ (diadia or tetia), ‘Diadia letchik’ travels across children’s films, demonstrating that the idea of the ‘uncle-pilot’, irrespective of actual gender, can become a surrogate benevolent fairy-god-father figure. In *Po sledam geroia*, in the children’s consciousness, he/she is an inspiring model of courage and protection. These films suggest, that the idea of *Diadia letchik* is experienced personally, as a guardian angel with almost magical goodness, who can be entreated to play a hand in one’s fate, ensuring its best outcome. With his association to a miraculous flight over the Arctic it is not difficult to think of him as a kind of Soviet Santa Claus, someone who is able to bring good fortune to all deserving children. The film reveals the degree to which, in children’s psyche, the idea of *Diadia-letchik* makes personal, historical and mythological experience coetaneous. Contemporary legend becomes cathetic, and by this means veracity in the legendary is achieved, and, so simultaneously, is veracity in humanistic values.

The importance of the pilot in the imagination of an orphan is also seen in Vasil’chikov’s *Brat geroia* in which a young orphan boasts that a record-breaking pilot who happens to have the same name as his, Kliment Cheremysh (Nikolai Kriuchkov), is his brother. After the whole country has followed the pilot’s long-distance flight the pilot happens to visit the orphanage, and helps the boy to have the courage to reveal the truth to the collective.

In *Goryni tsvetok* a young girl, Galia (Lena Ryzhenkova ) lacks courage and is recommended by her friends to a ‘neobyknovennyi’ doctor who sends Galia on a quest to find a magical flower to make a medicine which will cure her. She sets off on her journey, first flying, then parachuting; and then scuba-diving ‘v podvodnom tsarstve’ (in a sequence which employs animation). She then climbs a mountain where she faces an avalanche, and befriends a bear. On the mountain-top she is told by an old man that there is no ‘magic’ flower, only Edelweis (‘volshebnyi tut ne byvaet’). She is distraught and cries, ‘ia vseгда stanesh’ trusliva?’ But then is made to realise that through her endeavour to find the flower, she has developed and demonstrated courage; ‘ty prygnul s parashiotom; proshla propast’ [...] i ty vse eto sdelala [...] ty eshche ne trusikha’. She returns to her friends, who would not play with her at the beginning because she was a coward, and is not in the least scared when her new acquaintance, the bear, wanders into their midst. Her friends are amazed, and lavish her with respect. The film ends with a cinematographic trope of the period signifying acceptance into the great Soviet



family: everyone sings, carrying triumphal, celebratory bouquets, as they gradually move collectively towards the camera.

In this film Galia's rite of passage begins with her being sent to an airfield. She runs towards the aeroplane, desperate to get the attention of the pilot, crying 'Pilot! Uncle Pilot!', over and over again. For the audience there is a surprise when the pilot turns around and reveals herself to be a woman. Despite her gender, as in *Po sledam geroia*, the pilot functions as the symbolic benign protector-uncle, *diadia-letchik*. When the plane is in flight, with Galia aboard, the film foregrounds the sound of the aeroplane's motor. The sound envelopes the child; the motor is both terrifying for her and expressive of the very power that she seemingly lacks. The pilot (G. Don), echoing the children who do not want to play 's trusikhoi', asks 'chto s nei delat' ', and asks 'chto s toboi budu delat' ?'. The pilot gives the command; 'Vylevai na bort. Vnimanie prygai!' Nothing happens. The pilot asks: 'chto sluchilos'?' Galia's small voice replies 'mne strashno' but the female pilot reminds her of her goal; 'A tsvety. Razve ty ne poidesh' k vodolazu za vol'shebnymi tsvetami?'. The young girl asserts that she will go; the command is given again; 'vnimanie prigai!' We see a parachute in the air; the female pilot smiles as she looks down from the open-air cockpit. The sound of the motor is mixed with Galia's voice crying 'ia boius', ia boiu...'. The pilot says; 'Rasti, bud' smeloi. Vyrastesh' - stanesh' letchitsej.' There is the sound of the aeroplane's motor over which we hear Galia reply 'Khorosho.' And then we hear: 'I'm afraid' (Ai Mama, ia... ia boius'...) and there is the sound of the aeroplane engine which ends the sequence.

Galia's cries of 'mama' underscore the cross-gendered place that the idea of the guardian-*letchik* has in the young girl's consciousness, and in this moment the authority-father figure and her own mother have become one. *Diadia letchik* not only represents an idea of courage and protection, but, because this *Diadia letchik* is a woman, Galia's own potential, if she can overcome her fears, is underlined.

### **Daughters Conquering the Heights; Becoming Sons**

On one level, the film is a testimony to a young girl's ability, equal to any boy's, to overcome her fears. Her potential to become a pilot is underscored, with its theme of self-development and self-creativity for young girls. It supports the prerequisite 'ideenost' of the period. The ability to overcome fear is central to the mythology of the parachute jump as a rite of passage. In this film, true to aviation semiotics, the

beginning stage of development into a Soviet New Woman is a parachute jump into metaphoric collective consciousness. One of the lines of the children's song which is sung at the beginning and the end of the film reflects this: 'We strengthen children and each becomes a deserving son of the country' (see below). In a film whose heroine is a little girl, and which is seemingly targeted at young girls, there is an underlying patriarchal assumption of collective consciousness, and also a patriarchal value judgement on the nature of courage. In Aviation-Day parade films of the 1930s-1940s official semiology of parachute and aviation activities communicates a pride that is democratic in terms of gender: intertitles proclaim the participants to be: 'brave sons and daughters of our motherland' (smelye syny i docherei nashei rodiny). But in *Gornyi tsvetok* Galia must identify with the spirit of being a 'son' of the Great Soviet Family. In the final sequence of the film she has joined the group of friends singing:

В счастливой стране мы живем и растем  
Мы старшим на смену идем.  
Мы окрепнем ребята и каждый ...  
Станет сыном достойным страны  
Мы как летчики будем отважные  
Будем сильны, смелые и дружны  
Если встретиться синее море  
Мы дорогу по звездам найдем.  
Если встретятся снежные горы  
Мы вперед по вершинам пойдем.

*Gornyi tsvetok* and *Po sledam geroia* both demonstrate society's interest in inculcating ideas of physical bravery, and humanistic values in the young. In *Gornyi tsvetok* the role of a symbolic mother who guides her daughter towards womanhood is ambivalently masked in a symbolic male-signifier.

### **Women and Children**

In *Vozdushnaia pochta* Nastia Koroleva is a female pilot who braves a storm to take medicine to an orphanage after diphtheria breaks out. As a result of a forced landing she meets up with a young boy hunter, who guides her on skis. Nastia falls as she tries to keep up with him. She is badly injured and it is the boy who sends people from the local collective to help. By braving the storm on foot, he also manages to bring the medicine to the hospital. He arrives at the orphanage's hospital just in time to save a

dying child, and just at the time nurses, and mothers, despair of receiving the cure being flown in by Koroleva.

The film begins with the arrival of the heroine by air. Her status is communicated to us by means of the admiring reactions of her peers to her flying skills and also by her name, Koroleva. Koroleva in Russian signifies 'queen', and this is made much of by her colleagues. Underscoring her role as the risk taker, she is shown attempting to fly through severe weather when she runs out of fuel. The *metel'* and aerial views of expanses of forest covered in snow semiotically function as Clark's natural force (*stikhiinost'*) which Koroleva's heroism should overcome. But instead of *braving* the elements, and successfully getting medicine to the children's hospital, Koroleva is put in a helpless position. The heroic act of rescue is achieved by the combined effort of child-hunter, female pilot, and collective. In terms of gender, and the equality promised by the Stalinist constitution of 1936, the female pilot on screen is not publically honoured, nor does she become a *Geroi sovetskogo soiuza*. But like the romantic Beliaev, Tomilin, and Chkalov, her spirited flight is valued when it is serving a higher cause.

When Nastia and the young hunter, Anton Ivanovich, first meet, we see the aeroplane through needles, introducing his point of view. He shouts: 'Kto zhivoi?' In the ensuing conversation it is apparent that their celebrity precedes them both. When he asks her why she is there, she says that her petrol ran out. He asks her 'A letchik, gde?' Nastia repeats the question, and also answers it: 'letchik? Ia – letchik.' But the young hunter's response is to say: 'Ty chego? – baba.' Nastia replies: 'Ia ne baba, ia – letchik. Menia zovut Nastia Koroleva.' The hunter repeats her name showing that he is impressed. He then tells her his name. She is equally impressed, and equally does not believe that a person of his repute can be the young person standing before her. When Koroleva describes herself to Anton Ivanovich she does not use the feminine form of the word for pilot (*letchitsa*) which might link her to his negative spectrum of femininity; '[old] woman' (*baba*). The masculine form, *letchik*, underscores Koroleva's assumption that the masculine form is the generic for the profession, and her desire to identify only with it. But the film counters this by showing stereotypical male/female role-play when Anton Ivanovich teases her about not being able to light a fire in the wilderness. And she is portrayed as a victim who is beholden to a youth for her rescue. So the film begins by projecting an unusual image of a female pilot - one who is a peer of her male counterparts and is truly esteemed by them. But it then undermines this

communication of female-male equivalence by creating a situation in which she becomes helpless. She shows courage when she shoots at the pack of wolves which surround her. But Nastia must wait for rescue by the kolkhozniki that the youth will send. Ultimately, heroism in this film is not allowed to rest with either a male or female protagonist. This film suggests that in the Soviet Union anyone - man, or child –and the collective itself, can be a hero.

In films of this period achieving flight is an emotional fulfilment for the pilots, and provides a source of empathy for the audience. The courage needed to fly or to perform a parachute jump is in itself a self-creative dynamic. The notion of self-creative development is projected as an ideological theme, but it is underpinned by a subtext of self-creativity in love. Although women (in their overalls) have been described as ‘women robots’ and ‘women zombies’ of Socialist construction in fiction film, this can also reflect a voyeurism in the imaging of female pilots.<sup>15</sup> The questions arise: is this imaging of women fliers eroticized? If so, how does this contribute to, or stultify, the notions of development of courage, self-reliance and self-expression for Soviet Women on screen? And how does it support or take away from the ideological messaging of the film?

In *Letchiki*, as in other films of the period a female flying student is initially dressed in neutral tones and then subtle shifts in the style of her clothing communicates her development into a woman as her flying skills develop. After having successfully flown Rogachev’s aeroplane on Aviation Day, Bystrova enigmatically leads Rogachev from a trolleybus and this is followed by a sequence in which the dawn of the following day delicately fills Red Square. When Bystrova is next seen at the airfield to wave him off, the sartorial register is altered. Instead of the light dungarees in which we saw her at the beginning of the film, or the white skirt and dark jacket of her formal uniform, she is now in an all-black coat with a wing-like cape that blows out behind her. The striking adult figure she cuts, together with the close-up of her face under the black cap, with its focus on her eyes and lips, are in complete contrast to the girliness which has hitherto been portrayed.

Although she is just on the verge of graduating, the first image of Ol’ga, in Urinov’s *Intrigan*, echoes publicity stills of Marlene Dietrich in pilot’s leather jacket and jodpurs from the 1931 Sternberg film *Dishonoured*. In *Intrigan*, Ol’ga looks

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<sup>15</sup> Liliia Mamatova, ‘Mashen’ka i zombie’, pp. 111 and 113.

straight into camera, and, pulling off her leather pilot cap, she mirrors the sultry bombshells of Paramount. She accuses the wayward hero of this semantically confused film of being 'sumashedshii'. Thus the erotic undercurrent is in tension with her seeming function as the voice of societal 'norms'.

In *Piatyi okean*, Sania (Gorkushka) is only allowed in to the aeroclub as a waitress in the staff canteen because she is too young to be enrolled on the flight training course.<sup>16</sup> Dressed in a white frilly apron, which hangs over a pretty dress, she holds up a milk jug to her chest and sings of her love for the flight student Leontii Shirokov. This benign, nurturing image, which coos at the audience has a mixture of sweetness and glamour similar to that of certain Hollywood films of the period. The whole of Sania's flight training happens offscreen. We do not see her again until Leontii Shirokov has returned from battle. With thanks, in part to her help during his mathematics class, he graduates and goes on to become a Hero of the Soviet Union.

Returning from war, we see him on his former airfield admiring the skill of a student's landing. He enquires after the pilot, at which point Sania comes out of the aircraft. Although the camera focuses on her and we empathize with her feelings as she runs across the field towards him, the camera's gaze in this sequence is male. It is filmed from Leontii's point of view. In contrast to the pale dungarees and milk-maid's outfit that we last saw her wearing, we now see her in black flight overalls and cap. In a reversal of his former attitude to her, Leontii recognizes her as a young woman. He says: 'How you have changed; you've become so beautiful' (Kak ty izmenilas'; krasivaia stala) and she replies: 'How you have changed. You've become perceptive.' (Kak ty izmenilsia; nabliudatel'nyi stal). Achieving mastery of the air for him is transformational; not only has he become a Hero of the Soviet Union, but he has been given the ability to perceive love. For her, mastering the air simply leads to being recognized for having become beautiful, and for having become a desirable woman. Her story is a rite of passage into recognition as a woman. His is the story of the love-triangle resolved through coming to consciousness and recognition by the nation. He gets both the girl, and the glory, whereas her reward remains solely in the sphere of romance. Her flight skills are only recognized to the degree he notices them.

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<sup>16</sup> This mirrors the experience of the world record-breaking pilot, Polina Osipenko, when she first applied to the Kachinsk Aviation School, near Sevastopol. Pennington, *Wings, Women and War*, p. 11.

The making of films with women aviators as their main protagonists reflects the contemporary social desire to promote and heroize women. In these films women either inculcate courage in the young or a desire to study as in *Gornyi tsvetok* and *Semiklassniki*. But when the heroines become pilots, their flights are often so closely linked to the male protagonists' creativity or wild spirit (as in *Letchiki* and *Muzhestvo*), that in spite of their independence, their flights convey a sense of their position as *resonators* (in Kollontai's terms).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Kollontai, 'Novaia zhenshchina', p. 34.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Flight as signifier of connectivity between two people in love; flight as signifier of man's inner-world in connection with the forces which motivate the universe; flight as signifier of thought freed from form; flight as signifier of internal thought finding realization; flight as signifier of personal transformation; flight as national transformation and power; flight as a sign of *sila* and of *energia* (the dynamic of language) all are found in Soviet films of 1926-1945.

In films made between 1926 and 1945 (and films just made outside these parameters) images of flight and aviation contributed to the self-perception of the Soviet people as a unique and perfected people (*krylatye liudi*) who are able to realise what were perceived as the socio-historical dreams of centuries, heavier-than-air flight, and freedom from oppression by the formation of the first communist state. Gaining wings signified the transformation of the Old World to the New. And whether on a personal or societal level, flight and aviation semiotics in these films foreground the notion of making dreams come true. They attest to the universal place flight has in the imagination: flight communicates the sense of self-expansion in love, in creative work, and in the acquisition of knowledge (*raspravliat' kryll'ia*). And the sub-structuring semantic spheres to which flight and aviation speak are transformation, freedom (from oppression), creativity, love, Eros, transcendence, unity and grace.

Progress in the aviation industry verified the progress of the SSSR. *Aviatsionnaia derzhava* signified a country based on values of protection of the weak, and Stalin's aviation was ideologically constructed to be the manifestation of these values. We have seen how aviation and flight semiotics and semantics served different periods with key symbols such as the 'wings' of perfected people of the thirties. And it has been shown how in the films examined, the 'fakt' of aviation and aviation events were transformed into ideological signs, and how these, in turn, defined Soviet self-perception. Soviet pilot-heroism was predicated on collective consciousness. The pattern of acquiring aviation knowledge and training, beginning with model aeroplane making, then parachuting, and glider design (and flight), to piloting and designing aircraft, were all stages on a real and symbolic path to becoming 'courageous' (*otvazhnye*) sons and daughters of the Motherland and Stalin's 'falcons' (*sokoly*). The pilot was as much a metaphorical pilot-constructor linking notions of the dreamers of new worlds, such as Lenin, to the film-makers who created worlds on screen. Flight

and aviation served the general line of the Party at any given time. But in their capacity as denotative and connotative signifiers, cinematographic flight and aviation semiotics represent the material world as well as psychological states. They communicate at the interface between subconscious and external worlds, and are able to express liminal sensibilities. Thus film-makers were able to address their audience outside the ideological requisites, and point up ambivalences between state ideology and individual desire. Flight as motion, and as cinematographic means, represents the dynamic movement of inner thought in its upwards trajectory towards expression, and in this, it mirrors the dynamic of language.

Flight in the hands of certain directors is not only a servant of ideology, it is a vital 'significant form'. It communicates intuitively creating planes of meaning which transcend ideological messages. Soviet identity in the films examined is reflected in the creation and understanding of multivalent planes of meaning which extend outwards. On one level, mythological and allegorical self-identity involving Soviet pilot-heroes as builders of Soviet socialism are created. On another, the use of flight and aviation and their semiotics in the films 1926-1945 create a trace of discourse based both on the nature of the relation between the state and individual and on the nature of creativity. These semiotics highlight the tension between the need for the country to protect itself from perceived internal and external enemies, and the desire of film-makers to protect their ability to communicate what they perceived as authentic life in authentic film-forms. And, flight and aviation semiotics as filmic elements or cinematographic means reflect the nature of Soviet life at the time the films were made. The Soviet-ness communicated in images of flight and aviation is overwhelmingly based on the notion of being able to realise dreams which are constructed according to ideological requisites. But the ability to create and to read subtle levels of meaning found in flight and aviation semiotics suggests that being Soviet is also to be a sophisticated pilot and navigator of signs.



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