



ARTICLE

Ethnography, Incongruity, History: Soviet Poetic Cinema

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Abstract

This essay examines the entangling of the poetic and the ethnographic in the art cinema of the 1960s as an indicator of a broader collision of epistemological/discursive regimes in postwar Soviet cinema—and ultimately, a clash between two fundamentally opposed approaches to the discursive production of history. In the Soviet poetic cinema of the 1960s, the temporal-spatial frameworks of the Stalin era are disrupted, shifting first of all, to what Tarkovsky called a lived experience of time—that is, to the subjective emotions and experiences of individual people; second, to localized histories that may not coincide with the supra-national Soviet developmental narrative; and third, to the positing of an archaic, even pre-historical temporality as a kind of lost ideal. I argue that poetic cinema serves as a site for playing out the contradiction among temporalities and spatialities in post-Stalin culture, and therefore among opposed sense-making projects and representational modes, creating the possibility for subverting the colonial function of Soviet cinema.

In a 1962 interview with French critic Patrick Bureau, Andrei Tarkovsky tentatively situated his work within one of the “more current” trends in Soviet cinema, originating in the Soviet cinema of the 1930s, but “able to free [itself] and to develop” only after the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956: the “poetic” tendency. He described the “poetic” tendency as “not follow[ing] strict narrative development and logical connections” and not “looking for justifications for the protagonist’s actions”: instead of appealing to the intellect, cinema “must above all be emotional and act on the heart.” Tarkovsky added: “One of the reasons I became involved in cinema is because I saw too many films that didn’t correspond to what I expected from cinematic language.”¹

In this glancing explanation of the “poetic” tendency, Tarkovsky alludes to several of its key attributes, which he defines as a negation of the cinematic codes of the Stalin era—that is, of linear chronology and narrative causality, of intellect over emotion, and of a failed “cinematic language.” These concerns align with the Thaw-era sense of the inadequacy of language to express “the emotional and experiential universe” after Stalin’s death, in the face of rapid cultural

¹ “Andrei Tarkovsky: I Am for a Poetic Cinema,” interview with Patrick Bureau, in *Andrei Tarkovsky: Interviews*, ed. John Gianvito (Jackson, MS, 2006), 4–5; I have made some small modifications to the translation. For the original see “Andrev Tarkovsky [sic], ‘Je suis pour un cinéma poétique,’” *Les Lettres françaises*, no. 943 (September 13–19, 1962).



transformation.² For example, film critic Viktor Nekrasov's programmatic essay of 1959, "'Great' and Simple Words," opposed "genuine human intonations," sincerity (*iskrennost'*), humanity (*chelovechnost'*), "truth of human relationships," and "the director's trust in the viewer" to "conventionality, declarativeness, [and] 'megaphonism' (*rupornost'*)"—that is, to the grand, artificial style of the late Stalin era.³

Tarkovsky's reference in 1962 to the inadequacy of cinematic language leans on the broader Thaw-era notion of sincerity in its emphasis on emotion and intimacy, while the name he gives to this approach, the "poetic" tendency, connects his own postwar media moment to an earlier moment of heightened attention to film as language in the 1920s. Viktor Shklovsky, in his contribution to the 1927 Formalist essay collection *Poetics of Cinema*, distinguished "poetry" from "prose" in cinema in terms of poetry's "greater geometricality of devices" and "the prevalence ... of technical and formal [features] over semantic features."⁴ That is, in cinema "poetry," the structuring of a film into a whole is based not on plot or character development, but rather on film form—on elements such as framing, lighting, color, sound, and camera movement.⁵ At the same time, the multivalence of poetic form—the "ambiguity of the poetic image and its characteristically indistinct aura, together with the capacity for simultaneous generation of meaning by different methods"—calls for an active viewer.⁶ In this sense of formal complexity and viewer engagement, the term "poetic" was attached, at various times, to many of the best-known films and filmmakers of the Soviet "montage" school of the 1920s–30s.

The "poetic" label always signals a concern with form, but the aspiration of that form shifted from the radical, utopian anti-realism of the 1920s to the neorealisms of the postwar era. In the postwar, post-Stalin era—that is, the long 1960s, starting after the Twentieth Party Congress and ending as late as 1972, a bit earlier in Russia than in the non-Russian republics—"poetic cinema" emerged as a contemporary trend in art cinema that coexisted with the postwar development of genre cinema.⁷ Soviet poetic cinema looked back to the montage school of the 1920s–30s at the same time that it looked outward to contemporary European cinematic movements of the postwar era, in particular Italian neorealism and the French *Nouvelle vague* (New Wave) and their offshoots.

As the 1960s progressed, the poetic tendency became increasingly associated with the cinema of the non-Russian Soviet republics and, in particular, with the cinema of Ukraine, where it acquired a valence not mentioned by Tarkovsky in the 1962 interview cited above: an "archaic" quality of folklore and legend, connected intimately with a sense of place.⁸ An ethnographic tendency develops in 1960s cinema, an impulse to record, and thereby preserve, a specific local culture, inspired by Oleksandr Dovzhenko's practice in *Earth* (1930) of embedding his filmmaking crew into a particular locale and including the members of the community as extras in the film, though the interest in "ethnographic

² Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 66. See esp. chap. 2, which charts the debates on "sincerity" following the publication of Vladimir Pomerantsev's "Ob iskrennosti v literature," *Novyi mir*, 1953, no. 12.

³ Viktor Nekrasov, "Slova 'velikie' i prostie," *Iskusstvo kino*, 1959, no. 5:57–60.

⁴ Viktor Shklovsky, "Poetry and Prose in Cinema," in *The Film Factory*, ed. Richard Taylor and Ian Christie (London, 1994), 177, 178, originally published in the Russian Formalist collection on film, *Poetika kino*, ed. Boris Eikhenbaum (Moscow, 1927).

⁵ See Karla Oeler, "A Collective Interior Monologue: Sergei Parajanov and Eisenstein's Joyce-Inspired Vision of Cinema," *Modern Language Review* 101 (April 2006): 480.

⁶ Shklovsky, "Poetry and Prose in Cinema," 177.

⁷ Joshua First, "Ukrainian National Cinema and the Concept of the 'Poetic,'" *KinoKultura* (December 2009), available at <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/9/first.shtml> (viewed Oct. 12, 2021). For a periodization of poetic cinema in Ukraine see James Steffen, *The Cinema of Sergei Parajanov* (Madison, 2013), esp. 17–23 and 56–87; and Joshua First, *Sergei Parajanov: Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (Bristol, 2016).

⁸ Gul'nara Abikeeva notes that *Shadows* marks the beginning of the Thaw era in "the 'periphery,' that is in the republics of the USSR." See her *Natsiostroitel'stvo v Kazakhstane i drugikh stranakh Tsentral'noi Azii i kak etot protsess otrazhaetsia v kinematografе* (Almaty, 2006), 51. In Ukraine, poetic cinema functioned, as First has argued, "as a cultural trope to differentiate Ukrainian cinema, both from central productions in Moscow, and from the folkloric mode of representing Ukrainians" ("Ukrainian National Cinema and the Concept of the 'Poetic'").



verisimilitude” in mise-en-scène can be dated to the mid-1920s.⁹ This, too, follows a postwar trend, familiar from postwar Italian cinema and from the film criticism of French critic André Bazin, of “taking the camera into previously unexplored, and in some way untouched, locales ... where the [authentic] links between man and his surroundings remained intact.”¹⁰

On the one hand, the association of Soviet poetic cinema with the cinemas of the non-Russian republics of the Soviet Union has become an intuitive one, established with Parajanov’s *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1964) and continuing through the 1960s and into the 1970s throughout the various ethnic cinemas of the Soviet Union. In the Ukrainian poetic movement, for example, Vitaly Chernetsky has singled out the “fondness for the ethnographic, the emphasis on an impressionistic presentation of experienced reality, and frequent reliance on unusual camera angles and fluidity.”¹¹ On the other hand, an equally intuitive opposition between the artifice of poetic discourse and the neorealist “documentary” preoccupation would seem to render problematic the linking of the poetic trend with the documentary mode of ethnography. In fact, the seeping of the “ethnographic” into the poetic already implies a certain contradiction within the poetic trend, one that was already evident in Dovzhenko’s concern with ethnographic documentation of the village in *Earth*.

In this essay, I examine the entangling of the poetic and the ethnographic in the art cinema of the 1960s, taking as examples two art films from the mid-to-late 1960s from studios located in two different Soviet republics: *Land of the Fathers*, directed by Shaken Aimanov in 1966 at the Kazakhfilm studio, and *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, directed by Sergei Parajanov at the Dovzhenko studio (Ukraine) in 1964. I argue that poetic cinema serves as a site for playing out the contradiction among temporalities and spatialities in post-Stalin culture, and therefore among opposed sense-making projects and representational modes, creating the possibility for subverting the colonial function of Soviet cinema.

A basic definition of ethnography offered by the French filmmaker and ethnologist Jean Rouch—“the science of the thought systems of others”—draws a distinction between the subject who studies and the object of study, between an external (critical) perspective and an internal (local) perspective.¹² Fatimah Tobing Rony has characterized the dichotomy between the subject and object of ethnographic film in terms of the problem of historical discourse—that is, as an opposition between those who have “written archives and thus a history proper” and “people without history, without writing, without civilization, without technology, without archives.”¹³ This distinction may be blurred in poetic discourse.

The poetic and ethnographic modes have in common both a defined spatiality (inside vs. outside) and an historical impulse—whether we understand it, along the lines proposed by Eric Hobsbawm,

⁹ Emma Widdis, *Socialist Senses: Film, Feeling, and the Soviet Subject, 1917–1940* (Bloomington, 2017), 96. For example, Olga Preobrazhenskaia’s *Peasant Women of Ryazan* (1927) was shot “on location in the village of Sapozhok,” featuring costume and set design “aided by ethnographic research” (ibid., 96). Evgenii Margolit connects Parajanov’s filming of the Hutsuls in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* to Dovzhenko’s filming in Iar’ska village in *Earth* (1930). See Margolit, “Landscape, with Hero,” in *Springtime for Soviet Cinema: Re/Viewing the 1960s*, ed. Alexander Prokhorov (Pittsburgh, 2001), 47.

¹⁰ Ora Gelley, “National Identity and Realism in Postwar Italian Film and Film Theory,” in *European Film Theory*, ed. Temenuga Trifonova (New York, 2009), 293.

¹¹ Vitaly Chernetsky, “Between the Poetic and the Documentary: Ukrainian Cinema’s Responses to World War II,” in *Contested Interpretations of the Past in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Film: Screen as Battlefield*, ed. Sander Brouwer (Leiden, 2016), 9–10.

¹² “Ciné-Anthropology,” interview with Enrico Fulchignoni, in Jean Rouch, *Ciné-Ethnography*, ed. and trans. Steven Feld (Minneapolis, 2003), 185. Note that Rouch aimed in his own work to challenge the “gap between observer and observed” of traditional social sciences: “I contest anthropology in my need to share, to produce in a medium that allows dialogue and dissent across societal lines” (“A Life on the Edge of Film and Anthropology,” interview with Lucien Taylor, in ibid., 143, 137).

¹³ Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, 1996), 7, referring to the “bipolar schema” established by Claude Lévi-Strauss of “ethnographizable” vs. “historifiable” people. See also Kerwin Lee Klein, “In Search of Narrative Mastery: Postmodernism and the People without History,” *History and Theory* 34 (December 1995): 275–98; and Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” *Social Text*, no. 17 (Autumn 1987): 7, which critiques Jameson as dividing “the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it.”



as an “invention of tradition” or, rather, along the lines suggested by Mark von Hagen, as the production of a national—or post-national—history that has the potential “to explore some of the most contested issues of identity formation, cultural construction and maintenance, and colonial institutions and structures.”¹⁴ The historical attitude manifested in 1960s poetic cinema departs from the utopian modality of Socialist Realist historical films—and in particular, the illusion of synthesis that this modality produces.¹⁵

The tension between (poetic) artifice and (ethnographic) realism in poetic cinema can be understood as an indicator of a broader collision of epistemological/discursive regimes in postwar Soviet cinema—and ultimately, a clash between two fundamentally opposed approaches to the discursive production of history. In this sense, I wish to propose a broader definition of poetic cinema, one that incorporates generic hybridity as a foundational characteristic.¹⁶ Thus we might associate the poetic mode with a “subjective” temporality, understood not solely in terms of an individual, personal perspective, but rather from *within* a particular culture—that is, in the sense of poetry as patrimony; the ethnographic mode, on the other hand, corresponds to an external, “objective” temporality—of ethnography as the *study* of culture.

In the Soviet poetic cinema of the 1960s, the temporal-spatial frameworks of the Stalin era are disrupted. Instead of an historically immanent process of becoming modern that radiates outward from the ultramodern urban center of Moscow to the peripheries—eradicating differences as it collectivizes, industrializes, and urbanizes space—we see a shift to the local and the specific.¹⁷ This means, first of all, an interest in what Tarkovsky called a *lived experience of time*—that is, in the (subjective) emotions and experiences of individual people.¹⁸ Second, poetic cinema turns to temporal and spatial specificity—that is, to localized histories that may not coincide with the supranational Soviet (teleological) developmental narrative. And, third, an archaic, even pre-historical, temporality begins to emerge as a kind of lost ideal. In a way, then, in poetic cinema, the so-called “backwards” peoples of the peripheries, who obtained tractors, liberated their women, collectivized their land, and built modern cities in the films of the Stalin era, reclaim their specific cultures, turning “archaic” practices into a positive value—of particularity, of uniqueness, and most important, of History—and thereby creating an historical basis for an alternate, spatially and temporally grounded collectivity: the (all-but-destroyed) local community.

THE BIOGRAPHY OF OBJECTS: *LAND OF THE FATHERS*

The tension between the ethnographic and poetic modes within the poetic cinema becomes evident at moments when they clash openly in an incongruity. An example can be seen in a three-shot sequence

¹⁴ Mark von Hagen, “Does Ukraine Have a History?” *Slavic Review* 54 (Fall 1995): 673; Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, England, 1983).

¹⁵ On the withdrawal of “the very principle of historicity” from “the field of knowledge” in cinema of the Thaw see Petre Petrov, “The Freeze of Historicity in Thaw Cinema,” *KinoKultura*, no. 8 (April 2005), available at <https://www.kinokultura.com/articles/apr05-petrov.html>. Accessed 7/21/21. On the collision of temporalities in 1960s cinema as a symptom of historical trauma see Lilya Kaganovsky, “Postmemory, Countermemory: Soviet Cinema of the 1960s,” in *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World*, ed. Anne E. Gorsuch and Diane P. Koenker (Bloomington, 2013): 235–50. On the historicity of Stalin-era cinema see Evgeny Dobrenko, *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History: Museum of the Revolution* (New Haven, 2008).

¹⁶ Chernetsky argues for “an experimental poetic cinema hybrid of the diary and the essay” in postwar Ukrainian cinema about the war (“Between the Poetic and the Documentary,” 2). I wish to argue that this hybridity is already a characteristic of poetic cinema.

¹⁷ On the “radial” arrangement of Stalin-era cinema see Emma Widdis, *Visions of a New Land: Soviet Film from the Revolution to the Second World War* (New Haven, 2003). On the conceptualization of the peripheries on a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist developmental timeline see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca, 2005). On the attempted alignment of ethnicity with “nation” on the developmental timeline see, in particular, Terry Martin, *An Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, 2001).

¹⁸ As Tarkovsky puts it in “Imprinted Time” (1967), time in the form of “lived experience” (*zhiznennyi opyt*) is what we seek at the cinema. See Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. Kitty Hunter-Blair (London, 1986), 63. I have modified the translation of this expression, which the Hunter-Blair has as “living experience.” For the original see “Zapechatlennoe vremia,” *Voprosy kinoiskusstva*, 1967, no. 10:83.



FIGURE 1 Display of water vessels, *Land of the Fathers*, dir. Shaken Aimanov, Kazakhfilm, 1966, DVD, Open Society Institute, Budapest.

from *Land of the Fathers*. In this film, a young boy, Bayan, and his grandfather leave their village in Kazakhstan during “the first summer after the war” to retrieve the body of the boy’s father, who fought in the Soviet Army and perished in a village in the western part of the Soviet Union. The boy understands this mission, which involves a long journey by train across the Soviet Union, as the epic quest that will make him a man. Much of the film takes place in the train car, which grandfather and grandson share with a multiethnic group of travelers, punctuated by stops along the way. Toward the end of the journey, the boy loses his grandfather at a station, but they reunite at the end of the film, after the boy has found his father’s grave outside a European village, beyond Leningrad, on the other side of the empire. History materializes as genealogy, personified in three generations of a particular Kazakh family traversing the entire expanse of Soviet territory, first to fight the war, and then to make sense of loss.

The sequence in question begins with a graceful jug, held by a person shown only in midsection, his head and feet cut off but his tattered and patched clothing visible, shuffling somewhere (Figure 1). The camera follows as this jug moves across a line of other vessels—that is, people, similarly framed to show only their midsections, holding the vessels, which in contrast to the narrow-necked, elegant jug are quite simple: buckets, glass bottles, an enamel mug, and a handled (but lidless) enamel milk pail. The line turns out to be a queue for water at a station stop, and we see the jug cut into the line—which with some grumbling the others waiting in line allow, apparently in deference to its bearer’s age. The jug cuts into the line directly behind another “oriental”-looking water vessel, a slightly more mundane one made out of metal, with a narrow neck and a cover, that resembles the tea kettle at the very front of the line. The camera moves up to frame the bearer of this second vessel, revealing the familiar face of the grandfather, who glances down at the first jug, then up at the face of the old man carrying it, and asks, in Kazakh, “Are you Karachai?” The other man grunts in apparent assent. A cut to the next



shot, centered on the water spigot and first the teapot filling with water, then the grandfather's jug, and then the "Karachai" jug, but instead of cutting to follow the conversation that has just begun between the two elderly men, the camera lingers as the next vessel, a glass soda bottle, is filled, before cutting back to the two oriental jugs, still with their bearers framed in midsection as they walk away, then following them as their bodies are finally revealed and they sit down and resume the conversation, as the "Karachai" man says in Russian, "I am Chechen."¹⁹

The two old men continue their conversation in Russian, and the Chechen explains that he was deported to Kazakhstan, and is riding on the roof of the train in order to return to the Caucasus, so that he can die in the mountains where he was born. Later in the film, after the Russian soldier guarding the train refuses to allow him to come inside the traincar, he will disappear—apparently swept off the train as it enters a tunnel. The Soviet train's inexorable forward movement to the future entails unbearable loss.

The ethnographic display of the "water vessels" sequence serves as an example of the poetic cinema's rejection of "strict narrative development and logical connections" (in Tarkovsky's words) in favor of capturing a fleeting moment of lived experience, of sensations and emotions. Along these lines, the sequence eschews character psychology: here human beings seem to form the background for the display of objects, which are framed so that they, rather than their human bearers, are the clear subjects of the shot. Many of these objects are repurposed from their intended use, revealing how the war has disrupted the temporal flow of historical development, and severed them from their purpose. The metal tea kettle is domestic equipment for boiling water; an enamel cup is camping or military equipment for drinking; a milk pail is farming equipment; a soda bottle is the detritus left over after the distribution and consumption of commercially produced drinks. (Only the bucket appears to be serving its intended purpose.) Among these fragments—or artifacts—of the temporal process of industrialized modernity, the traditional jug from the Caucasus appears incongruous: out of place—and out of time.

The centering of objects in the frame evokes the approach proposed by Sergei Tretiakov in his 1929 essay "The Biography of the Object," where he argued that the "classical novel" fails to reveal the social, political, and economic processes underlying the lives of its characters, instead focusing exclusively on character psychology. Tretiakov suggests a literary "compositional structure" akin to a "conveyor belt," in which the object is processed from raw material into a "useful product," with people interacting with it along its journey (a journey that ends with consumption). He explains: "not the individual person moving through a system of objects, but the object proceeding through the system of people," a process that will reveal the human being "in a new light and in his full worth."²⁰ Although it does not reveal production processes, the display of objects in *Land of the Fathers* nonetheless provides the kind of perceptual shift advocated by the avant-garde: instead of constructing the film exclusively in terms of the young hero, Aimanov shows us cross-sections of Soviet society meeting in various public and semi-public spaces (the traincar, the station, the memorial) that serve as a conveyor belt; moreover, the coming-of-age journey of the young boy Bayan takes place along the ubiquitous railway tracks of Soviet progress, which function as the conveyor belt that produces him. In the short water vessel sequence, the diversity of objects arranged in a line both represent their bearers—the Chechen jug carried by an exiled Chechen; displaced soldiers and civilians, severed from the trajectory of their everyday lives, repurposing the detritus of those lives—and attest to the general conditions experienced by all the people waiting for water.

At the same time, this sequence introduces the most provocative theme of the film, with a direct allusion to the genocidal state policies of the Stalin era.²¹ The "Karachai" jug serves the narrative purpose of bringing the Chechen man's story—and the history of his people—into the film, in von

¹⁹ The Karachai and Chechens are ethnic groups from the North Caucasus, both deported en masse, as entire nations, in 1944, to Central Asia.

²⁰ Sergei Tret'iakov, "The Biography of the Object," *October* 118 (Fall 2006): 59, 61, 62, originally "Biografiia veshchi," in *Literatura fakta*, ed. Nikolai Chuzhak (Moscow, 1929), 66–70.

²¹ Abikeeva notes that "in the mid-sixties people only passed on the information about the deportation of Germans, Chechens, and Koreans to each other verbally, and no one dared speak about the scale of these deportations" (*Natsiostroitel'stvo v Kazakhstane*, 88).



FIGURE 2 The Chechen exile and the tunnel, *Land of the Fathers*.

Hagen's sense of history as the exploration of *contested issues*. Later, just before the train passes through the tunnel, we see the Chechen sitting on top of the train, first in shadow, then directly; two horrified, quick zoom reaction shots of the Russian soldier and the aksakal (elder) tell us that the Chechen man was thrown from the train, though the child Bayan, whose point of view dominates throughout the film, does not understand what has happened (Figure 2). Here the film represents, through indirect means, the destruction and erasure of ethnic groups and their distinct ways of life under Soviet power.

While the film's ostensible ideological aim is the assimilation of the young Kazakh into the Soviet multiethnic community, accomplished through his quest across the expanse of the Soviet Union, what emerges instead is a tour of postwar devastation—the destruction of modernity by modernity, with people severed from their homelands wandering among the ruins of the Soviet project (Figure 3). Under these circumstances—of dislocation and of return to premodern conditions—the Chechen's water vessel serves the purpose it has accomplished for centuries: it is in fact *not* out of place or out of time; rather, it is the Soviet utopian temporality that is out of step with lived experience. In this sense the display of water-carrying implements serves as a kind of reverse ethnography, in which the objects of ethnographic knowledge return the gaze, and the incongruity brings out the conflict between two contradictory temporalities.

The temporal conflict of this ethnographic display connects to a more overt ethnographic theme within the film, which involves two of the fellow passengers in the train car—a father and his daughter-in-law, both Europeans from Leningrad, on their own quest, in this case to complete the scientific work of their dead son and husband. The father, an archaeologist like his son, and the daughter-in-law, a specialist in Turkic languages, represent the Soviet (European) metropole and its ideological position with respect to Central Asia—including a fascination with its ancient objects as artifacts of an irrecoverable past way of life. At one of the stops, the grandfather heats his soup on a brick that the archaeologist dates to the ninth century, leading him to a larger site that he believes is a lost magical city, potentially the scientific discovery of a lifetime (Figure 4). Bayan's grandfather disapproves of



FIGURE 3 Soviet ruins, *Land of the Fathers*.



FIGURE 4 The brick as contested object, *Land of the Fathers*.



FIGURE 5 The jug in everyday use, *Land of the Fathers*.

the archaeologist's handling of Kazakh relics and mistrusts his interactions with his grandson in an obvious clash between old and new, tradition and modernity, local/national and Soviet/supranational—in fact a clash between opposed epistemological regimes, attitudes toward memory and, ultimately, toward History. At stake is precisely the biography of objects—their status as fragments of a Marxist-Leninist historical narrative, as opposed to integral objects that have a continuous function in everyday lived experience, through the *longue durée* of history.

The attitude of the European scientists to the objects all around them—which they understand as objects of study, artifacts—contrasts throughout the film with the way the Kazakh characters use similar objects in everyday life. The Kazakh jug had appeared at the very beginning of the film, in the Kazakh village, when the boy and his grandfather prepared a grave for his father: the boy used the jug to help his grandfather perform his ablutions before praying, then took a drink from it (Figure 5). The opening of the film presents an extreme close-up of a stone with a calligraphic Arabic inscription—a *bismillah* (basmala), an invocation “In the name of god, the most gracious, the most merciful” (Figure 6)—followed by the film's credits, which appear over long moving shots across large, ancient stone structures, metal railings, small trees and poles tied with pieces of cloth, and shrines, transitioning to a shot of the feet of the main character, Bayan, helping his grandfather make a grave and memorial for his father.²² Before the ninth-century brick captivated the Russian archaeologist, it served to heat the aksakal's dinner.

In all these cases, the sensual quality of the object in its everyday use is revealed: the texture of writing on stone, the flow of water on a hot day, the heat of a brick in fire. For the travelers from the metropole these are artifacts of an irrecoverable past to be studied or displayed, but for the Kazakh

²² Thanks to my colleague Valerie Anishchenkova. The opening long shot, apparently using a handheld camera, is somewhat difficult to discern beneath the credits. Abikeeva describes the opening bismillah as a tombstone (*nadgrobie*) followed by “a *mazar*—a Muslim burial site (*zakhorone-nie*),” and argues that this was a “very bold” opening for that time period (*ibid.*, 87). For a discussion of the incorporation of “practices associated with earlier faiths” into everyday religious practice of Islam in contemporary Central Asia, see David W. Montgomery, “*Namaz*, Wishing Trees, and Vodka: The Diversity of Everyday Religious Life in Central Asia,” in *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, ed. Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (Bloomington, 2007), 356.

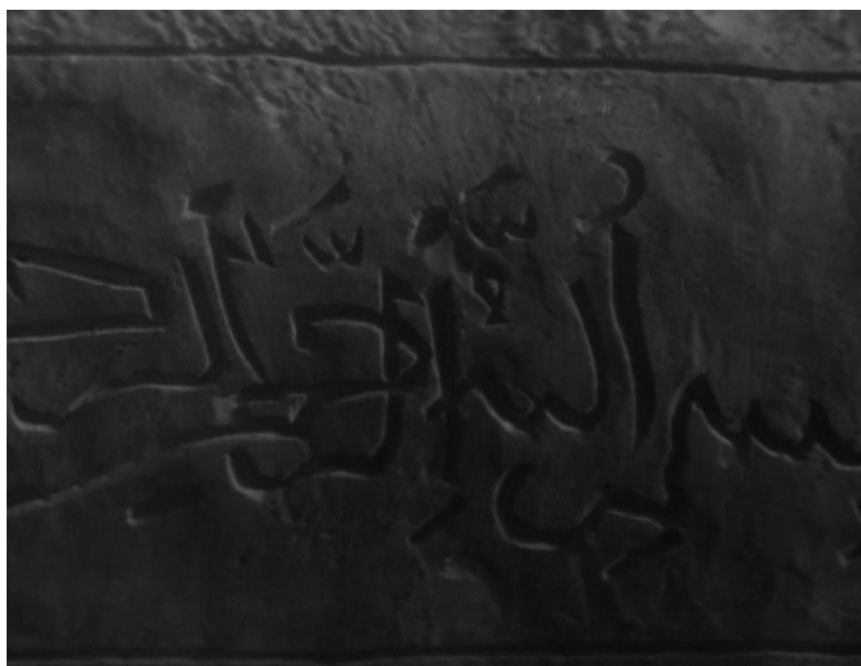


FIGURE 6 The inscribed stone bismillah, *Land of the Fathers*.

travelers they are part of everyday life lived in the “land of the fathers”—a life the film presents as *continuous* with a distant past. This connectedness emerges through poetic repetition—geometricality, in Shklovsky’s terms—in which objects reappear with slight variations in meaning, like the inscribed stones or the water jug. The modern Soviet world, on the contrary, creates dislocation, forcing people out of their homelands and into a shared space defined as much by the uniformity of industrially produced objects (such as tin mugs, bottles, and buckets) as by the ruins, scarring of the earth, and uncanny anti-tank structures that disrupt the landscape of the western borderlands (Figure 7).

Land of the Fathers culminates with the Kazakh boy finding his father’s grave: actually, a communal memorial to “around a thousand” fallen soldiers (Figure 8). A strong irony makes itself felt, as the camera pans down the names of the soldiers: *here* is the modern, multiethnic common home promised by Communism: the communal (*bratskii*) grave. At the same time, the monument completes the poetic “geometric” equation of the film, of the Edenic place with the utopian non-place: the Kazakh village at the beginning of the film is balanced with the Russian village at the end of the film; the fatherless boy Bayan with the fatherless boy Vasily; the grandfather’s quest to bring his dead son’s body home with the archaeologist’s quest to complete his dead son’s work; the ruins of a ninth-century lost city in the steppe (whose loss alludes to some long-ago historical cataclysm) with the twentieth-century ruins of the war; the bismillah in the village, with its Arabic writing conveying a universal prayer, with the twentieth-century monument, hidden in the woods beyond a tiny village, conveying a universal loss. History becomes a series of repetitions with variation, like poetry.

The point of view from the Soviet periphery reveals the perception of any one historical event as just one more disruption in the continuous temporality of lived experience. *Land of the Fathers* counters the ethnographic knowledge produced by the Soviet metropole—by archaeologists and scholars—by revealing material culture in *continuous use*; it counters a patronizing archeological study of ruins of an ancient past (which attempts to situate modernity within an historical trajectory of progress oriented toward the future) with the ruins of modernity; it counters the dream of a Soviet multiethnic utopia with the Soviet multiethnic communal grave. An *incongruity* engenders a “geometric” problem: a system



FIGURE 7 Landscape with anti-tank fortifications, *Land of the Fathers*.



FIGURE 8 The Soviet memorial, *Land of the Fathers*.



of parallels between the lived experience of the Kazakh village and the rest of the Soviet Union. As a Soviet film, *Land of the Fathers* offers an uplifting message of shared mourning, of Russians and Kazakhs encountering one another and realizing that their lives and outlooks are quite similar, that the suffering of sons who have lost their fathers is equal.²³ But the resolution of the geometric problem is illusory: the contradiction of temporalities and spatialities—of continuity and rootedness vs. modernity and dislocation—remains unresolved.²⁴

TEMPORAL DISPLACEMENT AND POETIC FORM: HAIKU

The joining of heterogeneous material—slices of celluloid exposed at different times and places—relies on incongruous juxtaposition as its foundational principle, most famously embodied in the theory and practice of Sergei Eisenstein.²⁵ In his programmatic essay “Beyond the Shot” (1929), Eisenstein explicated his theory of montage with reference to poetry, specifically the Japanese *haiku*, whose “method” is the collision (*stolknovenie*) of “verbal combinations” that unfold and transform “into an image—that is, form,” moving from the concrete, material plane onto the psychological or emotional plane—that is, the plane of thought.²⁶ According to Eisenstein, the haiku enacts a process of collision and transformation of heterogeneous material at the grammatical level of the phrase, while still preserving the internal collisions of each separate word. The understanding of this “most laconic” poetic form as an almost chemical transformation through “unfolding” and “collision” resonates with Shklovsky’s notion of poetry’s “geometrical resolution,” suggesting not the resolution of a simple equation, but rather an explosion or leap into a new dimension. At the same time, the haiku presents a provisional unity of heterogeneous material: a synthesis and an explosion within a single phrase.

Citing two of the same classical Japanese poems quoted by Eisenstein in 1929, Tarkovsky noted in his programmatic essay “Imprinted Time” (1967) that “what attracts me in haiku is its observation of life—pure, subtle, one with its subject.” Despite his insistence on cinema’s specificity as a medium with its own “aesthetic principle,” and his reluctance to compare cinema to any other art, Tarkovsky uses the example of haiku, “this particular example from poetry,” to explain cinema: “The poetry of a film is born of direct observation of life; that, in my view, is the key to poetry in cinema.”²⁷

Tarkovsky’s analysis of the haiku shifts away from “sequential juxtapositions” of shots to “the play of distances and planes within the shot”: as Robert Bird argues, “instead of destroying the sense of continuity, the dynamic focus reveals the hidden possibilities within it.”²⁸ For Tarkovsky, the “pure observations” of the haiku are slices of time: that is, they are the objective recording (or “imprinting”) of subjective lived experience—the director’s, the character’s, the viewer’s—that are then “picked out and joined together” into a whole, a recreation of life as subjective or lived experience.²⁹

²³ Stephen Norris argues that Central Asian films of the Thaw era “stressed shared suffering among Soviet citizens.” See his “Landscape and Loss: World War II in Central Asian Cinema,” in *Cinema in Central Asia: Rewriting Cultural Histories*, ed. Michael Rouland et al. (London, 2013), 75–76. A review in *Iskusstvo kino* proposed that “the old man realizes that he is not only a Kazakh, that he is a Soviet citizen—that his people (*narod*) includes Russians and Chechens and Belorussians and Karachai. ... The feeling of a homeland unites all Soviet people.” See M. Sul’kin, “Put’ k rodine,” *Iskusstvo kino*, 1967, no. 7:78–79.

²⁴ The discursive evasiveness of the film resonates with Harsha Ram’s analysis of a later work by the film’s screenwriter, Olzhas Suleimenov, *Az i ia: Kniga blagomamerennogo chitatelia* (I and I: The book of a well-intentioned reader, 1975). See Ram, “Imagining Eurasia: The Poetics and Ideology of Olzhas Suleimenov’s *Az i ia*,” *Slavic Review* 60 (Summer 2001): 289–311.

²⁵ See Mikhail Iampolski, “Film Resisting Theory: The Formalists and Cinema,” in *The Flying Carpet: Studies on Eisenstein and Russian Cinema in Honor of Naum Kleiman*, ed. Joan Neuberger and Antonio Somaini (Paris, 2017). On Eisenstein’s “dialectic of division” see Luka Arsenjuk, *Movement, Action, Image, Montage: Sergei Eisenstein and the Cinema in Crisis* (Minneapolis, 2018).

²⁶ S. M. Eizenshtein, “Za kadrom,” in his *Izbrannye proizvedeniia v 6 tomakh* (Moscow, 1964), 2:285, 286, available at: http://teatr-lib.ru/Library/Eisenstein/Select_2/#_te0120001 (accessed July 25, 2018), my translation, referring to the translations in *Film Form and Selected Works*.

²⁷ Tarkovsky, “Imprinted Time,” 66, 62, 67, translation modified.

²⁸ Robert Bird, *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (London, 2008), 200.

²⁹ Tarkovsky, “Imprinted Time,” 66, 65.

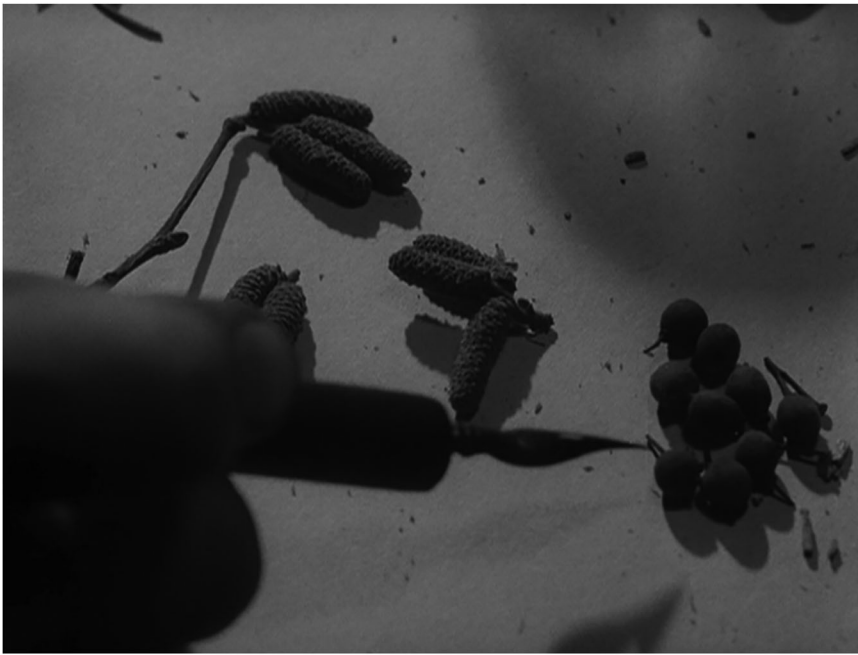


FIGURE 9 A record of lived experience: Ivan's pocket, *Ivan's Childhood*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, Mosfilm, 1962, Criterion Collection.

In fact, we are still talking about montage, simply with a different emphasis: for Tarkovsky, (poetic) montage is all about (dis)placing slices of lived experience into a new temporal sequence. As Nariman Skakov argues, Tarkovsky's cinema not only "does not hide the discontinuous nature of cinema ... it amplifies the discontinuity of the filmic experience."³⁰ Because Tarkovsky is talking about sound cinema, the temporal displacement can also happen vertically—that is, a displacement of the soundtrack and the image track.

Consider, as an example of Tarkovsky's haiku, a very short sequence toward the beginning of *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), in which Ivan, having finally established his identity, performs his job as a scout. In a single unbroken shot, Ivan empties the contents of his pockets onto the table, draws a chart, and begins to fill in the chart as he looks over the various objects from his pocket—pebbles, grasses, and seeds of various shapes and sizes (Figure 9). As he looks at the objects, we hear a completely incongruous soundtrack: sounds of marching soldiers, moving vehicles, and clipped, military dialogue in German. The sequence begins with Lieutenant Galtsev, who had been initially suspicious of the young boy asking him to call Headquarters, telephoning his orderly and asking for hot water for bathing; it ends with Ivan putting the chart into an envelope, sealing it, then standing up and revealing his scarred and emaciated body as he casts a shadow on the wall (where we first see an inscription carved into the wall attesting to the murder of eight children: "There are eight of us. All under 19. In an hour they'll shoot us. Avenge us."), and stepping into the bath. Setting aside the Eisensteinian collision of key thematic strands in a single shot—the inscription of suffering on a child's body and on the wall, the performance of a key military function by a child, the transcription of military information (reconnaissance) through the transcription of mnemonic devices into a document that will become part of the historical record—what interests me here is the *displacement* of two records of lived experience: the visual track and the soundtrack. This visual track presents the present-tense experience of transcription, of recalling the past and writing it down, the conversion of memory into useable information

³⁰ Nariman Skakov, *The Cinema of Tarkovsky: Labyrinths of Space and Time* (London, 2012), 11.



with the help of small objects that apparently represent military vehicles, weapons, and soldiers. The soundtrack, on the other hand, presents a record of Ivan's past experience, severed from what he saw and from his actions as he looked. The audience must work to make the connections, to decipher the referential purpose of the objects that Ivan takes from his pocket, deducing that when he saw a certain number of tanks pass him, he picked up the same number of stones or seeds to represent those tanks. Yet the viewer never learns the timespan of Ivan's scouting, the relationship of his sighting of various significant objects: the soundtrack consists of individual moments of witnessing, spliced together.

The visual track presents a long take set in Ivan's present time, an undefined span of time he spends on the Soviet side just before his last journey across enemy lines. The soundtrack presents different layers of experience, from Ivan's recent past *before* the "present time" of the image track—not the idyllic childhood we see in his dreams, but rather an earlier trip behind enemy lines. Like the layer of the visual track, the soundtrack seems to record reality; unlike the visual track, with its slow-moving camera creating thematic resonances that will repeat, poetically, through the film, the soundtrack presents Ivan's perspective, getting louder when Ivan begins his work of transcription, and receding when he puts the finished document into the envelope. Like the slices of lived experience of the haiku, the soundtrack and visual track convey separate, unsynchronized "observations of a phenomenon passing through time," connected through the natural elements taken from Ivan's pocket, and creating, for and through the viewer, an illusion of "real time."

Tarkovsky's cinema, with its non-linear, subjective temporality, is nonetheless a cinema concerned with history—with the subjective experience of the past, but equally with its broader implications. In both the "transcription" sequence and the penultimate scene of the film, when Galtsev discovers Ivan's file in a Nazi office in Berlin, Tarkovsky establishes a concern with documentary modes for conveying lived experience. The inscription on the wall, the seeds and stones in Ivan's pocket, the photographs and documents in Ivan's file (as Skakov notes, "real and factual documents of war"), the sounds on the soundtrack: all serve as documents of experience—slices of imprinted time—that are layered into a haiku, suggesting an alternative, poetic approach to history.³¹ Of course, the haiku model of history is irreconcilably opposed to the Socialist Realist historical narrative both formally (the camera that refuses to follow the hero or the action; the montage that refuses to clarify temporal or spatial relations) and thematically (experience and sensation over achievements). Like the water vessels, inscribed bricks, and stone shrines of *Land of the Fathers*, in Tarkovsky's haiku the sensual texture of objects and bodies, whether in the form of inscriptions, scarring, deterioration, corrosion, or simple wear bears a physical imprint of time, emphasizing the traumatic dislocations of history.

LAYERS OF EXPERIENCE IN SIMULTANEITY: *SHADOWS OF FORGOTTEN ANCESTORS*

A different possibility for arranging the layers of experience was offered in Parajanov's 1964 film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. Rejecting not only the linear sequentiality of narrative, but even the temporal succession and spatial displacement of discrete observations in the haiku, Parajanov presents the layers of experience in simultaneity, in the flat spatiality of a collage or palimpsest.³² An adaptation of Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky's eponymous Ukrainian novella of doomed love, set in a remote region of the Carpathian Mountains in Western Ukraine, the film features an isolated ethnic group, the Hutsuls, whose distinct dialect and culture has been seen within the wider Ukrainian culture both as "other" and as an idealized, more authentic, even "Ur-Ukrainian" culture.³³ The film

³¹ Ibid., 34.

³² Elizabeth Papazian, "Ethnography, Fairytale, and 'Perpetual Motion' in Sergei Parajanov's *Ashik-Kerib*," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 34:4 (2006): 308.

³³ Steffen, *Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, 79. First notes that the Hutsul culture "straddled several contiguous sites of meaning production, at once a 'colourful' oddity on display for poets and tourists alike and as a scene of national belonging for various generations of Ukrainian artists and



FIGURE 10 Display of attractions, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, dir. Sergei Parajanov, Dovzhenko Film Studio, Ukraine, 1964, DVD, Kino International.

is known for how it “openly rejected the plot-centered vision of narrative cinema, and celebrated ethnographic spectacle” with stunning camerawork and gorgeous displays of material culture and ritual.³⁴ In fact, it is often considered the first film, and the inspiration, of the “poetic film” movement both in Ukraine and in Soviet cinema in general.³⁵ At the same time, there were occasional voices raised during the process of state approval of the film, asking whether the film “fetishiz[ed] Hutsul backwardness.”³⁶ The “ethnographic spectacle” of *Shadows* can be understood as a collision between the “objective” record of ethnography and the subjective experience from within a remote, unknown culture.

An early sequence begins at the new grave of the main character Ivan’s brother, Oleksa, where we hear Ivan’s mother mourning her son, following a pattern of death and mourning that will only end with the mourning for Ivan himself. In this sequence, the child Ivan wanders off and seems to pass through a series of individual performances, then finds himself in front of the village church, where his mother beckons him inside (Figure 10). The spatial plan is impossible; the cuts are nearly imperceptible; the camera’s viewpoint unclear, yet somehow concrete—present, yet hidden—as it will continue to be throughout the film, offering what various critics have argued is the viewpoint of nature, of spirits, or perhaps of a narrator.³⁷ As the camera travels through the snow, it passes several different people and what appears to be fairground or market booths or attractions. Each attraction engages the camera frontally, whether with a gesture, a performance, or words.

This early sequence serves to establish the setting—as isolated, “exotic,” “timeless,” or “legendary”—as well as the formal rules that the film will follow, in particular, the paradoxical coexistence of an extremely mobile camera and Parajanov’s signature “tableau” aesthetic. Like the “cinema of astonishment” that Tom Gunning has posited in early cinema, the miniature performances engage

intellectuals.” See First, *Ukrainian Cinema: Belonging and Identity during the Soviet Thaw* (London, 2015), 77. Perhaps for this reason, the Ukrainian poetic cinema produced several films set in Hutsul villages. The Hutsul area in the Carpathian Mountains in Bukovina was part of Romania before 1939, when it was incorporated into Soviet Ukraine; then occupied by Germany from 1941–44; then reintegrated into Soviet Ukraine in 1944.

³⁴ First, *Sergei Parajanov*, 9.

³⁵ Many members of Parajanov’s cast and crew became renowned figures of Ukrainian cinema, though Parajanov himself embodies the “radial” model of Soviet cinema: an ethnic Armenian from Tbilisi, Georgia, educated in Moscow, sent to work in Ukraine. But through the process of making this film, including the struggle to have the film released Union-wide with the soundtrack in the Hutsul dialect, Parajanov became, as he joked, “like a father” to Ukrainian intellectuals, starting with a protest at the film’s premiere in Kiev in September 1965 (Steffen, *Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, 81).

³⁶ First, *Sergei Parajanov*, 9.

³⁷ Bohdan Nebesio, “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors: Storytelling in the Novel and the Film,” *Literature/Film Quarterly* 22:1 (1994): 42–49. See also Steffen, *Cinema of Sergei Parajanov*, chap. 2; and Margolit on Thaw cinema’s use of “nature’s point of view” (“Landscape, with Hero,” 37).



the camera—and the viewer—directly, with the *display* of people, technology, and processes.³⁸ At the same time, along the lines of Eisenstein's "montage of attractions," we are shocked and disoriented by the camera, unsure of what is happening in each quickly passing tableau, unable to determine whether each "attraction" displaying dress, local crafts, and customs represents some aspect of Hut-sul culture—introduced to us in an initial explanatory title as "far away"—or whether it is something invented. Each "attraction" becomes a part of the poetic structure of the film to be deciphered and interpreted by the viewer.

What David Cook has called the film's "perceptual dislocation" is related to Parajanov's play with pictorial perspective—his rejection of so-called Renaissance (or "linear") perspective in favor of the tableau aesthetic of medieval painting, Orthodox icons, and Persian miniatures.³⁹ Parajanov not only filmed artifacts that present a flattened perspective; the tableau aesthetic governs his composition of *mise-en-scène* and of the film frame—in which, as various critics have noted, each tableau appears as an autonomous unit. At such moments, a haptic visuality emerges, entailing a shift in the relationship between viewer and image: the perception of deep space in the frame is impeded, drawing the viewer's attention to material and texture, to the sensual qualities of form—in a way that can be disorienting, causing the viewer "to lose her/himself in the image, to lose her or his sense of proportion."⁴⁰

The formal problem of perceptual dislocation arises from the conflict between two separate and opposed projects in the film: storytelling and ethnography, "linear" perspective and the flattened "tableau" perspective.⁴¹ As in many Soviet poetic films, we see a tension between the competing modes of poetry and ethnography, but here the various layers collide in simultaneity, in the flattened perspective of collage.

The Soviet historical timeline of development clashes with the continuous temporality of lived experience (perceived as "timeless" or "legendary"), a conflict between external and internal realities—exemplified by the train in *Land of the Fathers*, which alternated between the external view of the ubiquitous Soviet train of progress and the everyday life inside the train and at the station stops. Parajanov's practice of ethnographic spectacle permits the collision of these contradictory temporalities: ethnography as the study of people without history by people with history—as opposed to ethnography as a display of practice, of ritual, and of material culture in use.

In his 1966 essay "Perpetual Motion," Parajanov described an incongruity that struck him when he arrived to shoot *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*:

When I arrived on the spot and looked around, I was not exactly gripped by enchantment. Rather the opposite. The first thing you noticed was connected with the most everyday modern life. I saw European shoes, asphalt, bicycles, high-voltage towers. ... Honestly, I was distressed by this strange combination of the ancient and the young. The buzzing of wires and the drawn-out grief of the horn (*trembita*). ... One window of my hotel room overlooked the Cheremosh [River], rapid and meandering, and the other overlooked the asphalt courtyard, across which an old woman once went to the market with her cow.⁴²

³⁸ On the relationship between spectator and film of early cinema, and its exhibitionistic, "display" aesthetic vs. the voyeuristic mode of narrative cinema, see Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)credulous Spectator," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 7th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York, 2009), 862–76.

³⁹ David Cook, "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors: Film as Religious Art," *Post Script* 3.3 (1984): 19.

⁴⁰ Laura U. Marks, "Video Haptics and Erotics," *Screen* 39 (Winter 1998): 341. See Masha Salazkina on Eisenstein's use of the baroque's "distorted flattened surfaces and emphasis on ornamental detail" as part of his rejection of "a linear evolutionary model of social development"; historical progress must pass "through regression" or the prelogical, making a leap to the modern: "Baroque Dialectics or Dialectical Baroque: Sergei Eisenstein In/On Mexico," in *European Film Theory*, ed. Temenuga Trifonova (New York, 2009): 214, 217.

⁴¹ Olga Kim argues that Parajanov's composition of tableaux with respect to (mismatched) perspectival scale "potentially invites the viewer to see the space not from an outside position but to experience it from inside." See her "Cinema and Painting in Parajanov's Aesthetic Metamorphoses," *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema* 12:1 (2018): 26.

⁴² Serge Parajanov, "Perpetual Motion," *Film Comment* (Fall 1968): 44, originally "Vechnoe dvizhenie," *Iskusstvo kino*, 1966, no. 1:63.



Parajanov poses the discontinuity—"this strange combination"—not as a collision of the Soviet forward march with the continuity of lived experience, as in *Land of the Fathers*, nor in terms of a Soviet understanding of the constructive role to be played by the "archaic" elements of non-Western ways of life in the periphery, but rather as a collision of the idealized world of a legendary past (which Parajanov connects across cultures by referring to "Romeo, Tristan, and Ferhad"), with the ugliness of everyday lived modernity.⁴³ The old woman's continuous and repeated trajectory, her traditional way of life, has been paved over with asphalt.

Parajanov's impulse to look out of only one window of the hotel suggests an attempt to remove the evidence of modernity from his vision and from his film.⁴⁴ This attempt aligns not only with the Thaw-era drive for "sincerity" (and, related to it, for authenticity) but, at the same time, with the kind of "salvage ethnography" associated with Robert Flaherty's 1922 film *Nanook of the North* and its fantasy of a pure "primitive man" untouched by technology, as well as with Parajanov's evolving tableau aesthetic, in which each composition has a certain autonomy within the sequence of shots. The link between Parajanov's hotel window and his cinematic style calls to mind an issue discussed by Bazin, of "frame" vs. "mask." A picture in a frame, according to Bazin, presents an autonomous "microcosm," a self-sufficient whole rather than a part of some larger whole, whereas a mask—like a window—offers a fragment of a larger whole, a part of a continuous world. As Karla Oeler explains, the way that space is revealed in a long take, with the "mask" moving to reveal more of the whole, gives a sense of its continuousness or endlessness.⁴⁵ Parajanov's reminiscence of the views from two different hotel windows alludes to the issue of framing both in cinema (as a window to reality) and in ethnography (as a way of capturing, framing, and displaying a way of life understood to be different from, and usually prior to, one's own). The framing of an "exotic" and, from the perspective of modernizing ideology, "primitive" culture from the encroachment of industrial modernity, the direct address to the camera, and the use of voiceover establish a display aesthetic that hinders our entrance into the space of narrative.

In *Shadows*, even the mobile camera of Yuri Ilyenko does not reveal the "true continuity of reality" that Bazin advocated.⁴⁶ The mobile camera serves not to establish a sense of spatial and temporal continuity, but to plunge us into a sensual experience of form in which space and time are *layered*. In the early "booths" sequence discussed above, the apparent long tracking shot that follows Ivan through the snow turns out to be illusory: the sequence is constructed to appear as a single long take, but actually consists of several shots spliced together, with abrupt pans and tilts into snow and sky concealing the cuts. In other words, the sequence resembles a continuous tracking shot, but one that the viewer perceives as impossible even without recognizing how it was done. This creates a perceptual dislocation: the movement of the camera fails to reveal the spatiality of the village.

In narrative terms, the sequence might be understood as a transition between scenes and themes—connecting the opening scene of death to the beginning of the Romeo and Juliet story—and as a demonstration of the formal rules of the film, cuing the viewer's active role in deciphering it. The layers of experience are structured almost in the Tarkovskian haiku style, but the tableau arrangement of each "booth" along with the elision of the cuts bears comparison with visual art rather than literature: a collage effect.

But let us consider the ethnographic display in this sequence, which connects it to the water vessel sequence at the train station stop in *Land of the Fathers*. In *Land of the Fathers*, the display of water vessels standing in line ended in a close-up of a face—the grandfather's face—which provided a kind of alibi in the plot for what otherwise might seem an excessive moment of ethnographic display and, as argued above, one that establishes a critique of Soviet modernity: the grandfather was looking at

⁴³ Parajanov, "Perpetual Motion," 46, referring to Ferhad and Shirin, a Persian story of doomed love.

⁴⁴ See First on Parajanov's insistence on location shooting, including having a road built "through a remote valley" (*Sergei Parajanov*, 9).

⁴⁵ Oeler, "Collective Interior Monologue," 482–84, discussed also by Kim, "Cinema and Painting in Parajanov's Aesthetic Metamorphoses"; based on André Bazin, "Theatre and Cinema, Part II," in *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray, vol. 1 (Berkeley, 1967), 105.

⁴⁶ Bazin, "The Evolution of Film Language," in *What is Cinema?*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal, 2009), 103.



the water vessels and noticed the Chechen jug cut into the queue, identified it and its bearer as having something in common with him, and addressed the Chechen man. In this sense the ethnographic display manifests both the objectivity of a documentary record and the subjectivity of a character's internal state activated by his glance.

The booths sequence of *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* seems to follow the child Ivan without always including him in the frame, suggesting that what appears onscreen is shaped by his perspective. Ivan is distracted by the external world and apparently falls behind his mother as they walk to church, as is clarified by the reverse shot of his mother at the end of the sequence, urging him into the church. But are the booths located in the same temporal and spatial continuum as the church service that follows—perhaps a holiday market in front of the church—or are these memories or fantasies, called to the boy's mind by similar occurrences? Only one of the figures is confirmed as part of the diegesis by Ivan's mother, who says, "Don't pay attention to him, he is mad."

In his 1965 essay "A Cinema of Poetry," Pier Paolo Pasolini proposed the category of the "free indirect subjective"—by analogy to free indirect discourse in the novel—or "immersion" of the author into the mind of a character, adopting not only the character's psychology, but also his language.⁴⁷ Free indirect subjective, unlike direct quotation (which Pasolini associates with the point-of-view shot) enables the subjectivity of a character to infect the film, overwhelming the author and allowing the emergence of what Pasolini calls "the other film"—that is, the film "the author would have made even without the pretext of the visual mimesis of the protagonist—a film whose character is completely and freely expressive/expressionistic." Pasolini argues that this technique frees the film from the constraints of "narrative convention" and affords a return to the "almost prehuman ... pregrammatical and even premorphological" level of visual communication. Free indirect subjectivity serves as a "pretext" for the "other film."⁴⁸

In *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*, Parajanov enters the subjectivity of a hero quite distinct from himself—a hero who at the same time represents an eternal archetype (Romeo, Tristan, Ferhad)—a hero who is afflicted by a despair that spreads over the entire film. Throughout the film, we seem to be located both inside and outside of Ivan: external views present neighbors' gossip about Ivan recorded as voiceover as we see him from afar (in the section called "Loneliness"); sometimes we see what appear to be point-of-view shots; and at other times, the camera presents a mysterious viewpoint that seems to offer Ivan's way of seeing the world as universal to the film.

APPROACHES TO HISTORY: TAXIDERMY, PERPETUAL MOTION, ANACHRONY

In "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," published in Russian translation in 1965, Bazin endorsed Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* as an example of what can be attained by avoiding (analytical) editing: the experiential quality of Nanook's relationship to his environment, the experience of lived time, "the real extent of his wait," which Bazin argues is "the very substance of the image, its true subject."⁴⁹ But at the same time that it offers us an experience of lived time, *Nanook of the North*, as an early ethnographic film, presents us with another example of incongruity in the reenactment of an imagined (invented) "first encounter" of the Inuit with technological modernity. When Nanook visits the trading post, the trader shows him a gramophone and plays a record, as Nanook watches and

⁴⁷ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry," in *Heretical Empiricism*, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett, 2nd English ed. (Washington, 2005), 175, originally given as a speech in June 1965 and published in *Empirismo eretico* (Milan, 1972). A different translation, based on the French translation published in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no.171 (October 1965), appears in *Movies and Methods* vol. 1, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley, 1976), 542–58. I cite mainly from the Lawton/Barnett translation, with modifications based on the *Cahiers* translation.

⁴⁸ Pasolini, "Cinema of Poetry," 182, 178, 169, 180.

⁴⁹ Bazin "Evolution of Film Language," 91. John MacKay argues that Tarkovsky's "Imprinted Time" was clearly influenced by the appearance in Russian of André Bazin's essay "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema" in 1965. See MacKay, "Montage Under Suspicion: Bazin's Russo-Soviet Reception," in *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife*, ed. Dudley Andrew (Oxford, 2011), 291–301.



FIGURE 11 Taxidermy: the imagined first encounter, *Nanook of the North*, dir. Robert Flaherty, 1922, DVD, Criterion Collection.

listens in smiling disbelief, eventually picking up the record and even biting it (Figure 11).⁵⁰ Here the gramophone, a visualization of technology, is incongruously juxtaposed to the Inuit as the “myth of the authentic first man.”⁵¹ Even the seal hunting scene admired by Bazin conceals the presence of technological modernity—and of History—in the everyday lives of the Inuit, including guns for hunting, and currency used in trade, in what Rony calls ethnographic “taxidermy”—that is, the preservation of an already dead way of life as “a Utopia of life-like reproduction.”⁵² In this sense, Parajanov’s careful framing of the Hutsul village to reveal the beauty of the river while concealing the banality of asphalt follows a long tradition in ethnographic cinema.

In Soviet poetic cinema, “taxidermic” authenticity is not the sole purpose for evoking ethnography, even if viewers in the metropole might have found it the most compelling aspect of these films.⁵³ Certainly a related elegiac impulse in the “poetic” cinema can be felt even in some of the titles of the films—*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*; *Land of the Fathers*; and Tolomush Okeev’s *Sky of Our Childhood* (1967)—and a general preoccupation with *death*, framed not as the essential sacrifice of a martyr that leads the collective forward, but with death as a loss to be mourned, and possibly as a loss that unbalances the world. And it is here, perhaps, in the intertwining of the mourning for the hero and the mourning for an already lost culture, that we might find where the poetic aspect interlaces with the ethnographic function. As Parajanov wrote: “We tried to reveal the Carpathians for ourselves, not as ethnographic material. Love, despair, solitude, death—these are the frescoes from the legend of a man that we were trying to create.”⁵⁴ In *Shadows*, in the multiple contradictory tensions between story and ethnography, between tableau and frenetic camera movement,

⁵⁰ On the participation of Allakariallak, who played the role of Nanook, in the technical production of the film, including camera operation and development of film stock, as both an influence on the “‘collaborative feedback’ process in ethnographic filmmaking” and, perhaps, an example of “more subtle forms of indenture,” see Jeffrey Geiger, “Nanook of the North (1922),” in *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Jeffrey Geiger and R. L. Rutsky (New York, 2013): 99–100.

⁵¹ Rony, *Third Eye*, 103. Rony argues that the “ontological realism” Bazin finds in *Nanook of the North* “stems as much from the status of the Ethnographic Other as inherently ‘authentic,’ and from Flaherty’s self-fashioned image as explorer/artist, as it does from his style” (ibid., 117).

⁵² Ibid., 101, quoting art historian Stephen Bann. In fact, the seal hunt “was actually staged” (ibid., 114).

⁵³ A review in the mainstream cinema magazine *Sovetskii ekran* emphasized the film’s authenticity, suggesting that its artistry lay precisely in inventing rituals that even the Hutsuls themselves could accept. See M. Bleiman, “Pis’mo zriteliam: O vechoi zhizni, o liubvi: Teni zabytykh predkov,” *Sovetskii ekran* 13 (July 1965): 6–7. On Bleiman’s role in the later reception of *Shadows* see First, *Sergei Parajanov*, 54–56.

⁵⁴ Parajanov, “Perpetual Motion,” 46.



FIGURE 12 Free indirect subjectivity, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*.

between the presentation of Ivan's interior and exterior world: which is the pretext, and which is the "other film"? The elegiac impulse in poetic cinema bears a certain regressive quality, not unlike the "restorative nostalgia" critiqued by Svetlana Boym.⁵⁵ Is this regressive quality a symptom not solely of resistance to the colonial function of Soviet cinema, but of a longing for an imagined Edenic past?

In "Perpetual Motion," Parajanov refers to Ivan as an artist. We might then take refuge in the self-reflexive element of many of the poetic films, and suggest that the "other film" is the vision of the artist. In the "wedding" sequence that follows the "Loneliness" section, a village ritual is presented by a camera that moves constantly, pausing occasionally, then spinning to the point of blurring shapes: the tableaux pass by so quickly that the viewer cannot discern objects, people, spatial relationships, or even cuts (Figure 12). In a shot that provides a transition to the sequence, the camera frames Ivan in an apple tree, from below, rotating slightly as he reaches for an apple, before cutting to the brightly colored shots of the celebration through branches of trees and bushes—as though to suggest that our perspective is shaped by Ivan's. But it would be impossible for Ivan to see these kinetic images from the position in the tree: here Pasolini's concept reveals the sequence's haptic visuality as free indirect subjectivity that both internalizes Ivan's experience of the world, of his partial emergence into life from death after his beloved Marichka's death, yet remains outside it, as an ethnographic display of an imagined, ideal, untouched way of life at the periphery of Soviet modernity. This dizzying effect is compounded by the use of the long lens that telescopes foreground and background: instead of depth, we end up with blurred color. The perspective is again impossible. We are administered a series of dislocations or "shocks" and are caught up in the aesthetic—and ritual—system of the film, becoming participants. Here, Tarkovsky's notion of time as what the viewer seeks in cinema, time as lived experience, is realized: the possibility of history not as the inexorable forward movement of modernization, nor of the regressive movement of recovery of an originary moment, but as a creative act.

To return to *Land of the Fathers* and the problem of incongruity: while *Land of the Fathers* is a later film, with a much more "neorealist" and much less "avant-garde" style than *Shadows*, its use of incongruity can be understood as functioning along the lines suggested by Pasolini, as a way into the "other film." Specifically, the use of incongruity constitutes a kind of *deliberate anachrony*—not an erroneous projection into an anachronistic future, or an historical past marred by anachronistic

⁵⁵ Svetlana Boym, "The Future of Nostalgia," in *The Svetlana Boym Reader*, ed. Cristina Vatulescu (London, 2018), esp. 233-41.



FIGURE 13 The umbrella as deliberate anachrony, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*.

reference to the film's present, but a confrontation of heterogeneous and opposed temporalities in play throughout the film.⁵⁶ The incongruity forces the viewer to consider the confrontation itself. Thus it is an operation of montage—a collision of heterogeneous material that leads to thought and, at the same time, a poetic operation preoccupied with form itself.

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors includes a few anachronies, for example in the extremely “sixties” hairstyles and makeup of the two love interests of Ivan that reveal the overlap of heterogeneous temporalities in a collage—an art form that Parajanov incidentally also practiced—or palimpsest. Or, as Parajanov would put it, a fresco. As he wrote in “Perpetual Motion”:

I once saw a country woman whitewashing a stove, and along with it a very good, colorful fresco. And thus she did every spring, not at all worried about the previous drawing. Knowing that a new one would appear, in no way worse. If this is an allegory, then not at all of the ease of self-renunciation, but of its necessity.⁵⁷

If the occasional incursions of contemporary styles into the *mise-en-scène* (hair, makeup, clothing) reveal the seams that ostensibly separate the layers between heterogeneous temporalities (the legendary temporality of the Romeo and Juliet story; the scientific present of ethnography; the present time of the making of the film; the temporality of the Soviet master narrative of development), the *deliberate anachrony* creates a collision.

The clearest example of a deliberate anachrony in *Shadows* is the appearance of a modern, industrially produced red umbrella in the first scene featuring Palagna, the woman Ivan marries after Marichka's death (Figure 13). The incongruous object disrupts the timeless world of legend of the film. But more crucially, it disrupts the ethnographic illusion of authenticity of the film—an illusion the filmmakers created not only by choosing the window of the hotel that overlooks the river and by rejecting the asphalt, but also by creating fictional rituals that the locals reportedly accepted as

⁵⁶ Jacques Rancière argues for a “multiplicity of lines of temporality present in any ‘one’ time,” explaining that “an anachrony is a word, an event, or a signifying sequence that has left ‘its’ time, and in this way is given the capacity to define completely original points of orientation (*les aiguillages*), to carry out leaps from one temporal line to another.” See Rancière, “The Concept of Anachronism and the Historian's Truth (English translation),” *InPrint* 3:1 (2015): 46, 47, available at <https://arrow.dit.ie/inp/vol3/iss1/3> (last accessed August 26, 2018). For a contemporary media example of an historically grounded aestheticism built on “innovative play between mimesis and [deliberate] anachronism” see Lauren Goodlad et al., eds., *Mad Men, Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style, and the 1960s* (Durham, 2013), 5.

⁵⁷ Parajanov, “Perpetual Motion,” 48.



authentic.⁵⁸ The red umbrella playfully draws attention to the act of filmmaking; it opens the hermetic world framed pictorially to the external, surrounding world of its making (as opposed to its projected authenticity).⁵⁹ In this sense it is an (excessive) extension of Parajanov's practice of the tableau aesthetic and collage—or layering in simultaneity—of the miniature. This kind of temporal or spatial incongruity is a recurrent characteristic of Parajanov's films, from the llama in *Color of Pomegranates* (a spatial, or geographical impossibility rather than an anachrony) to the toy machine guns in *Ashik Kerib* (1989). It is precisely the deliberate anachrony that counters the regressive impulse, forcing us to consider the confrontation of overlapping, heterogeneous temporalities: such critical engagement on the level of style is as a key concern of the “poetic” movement.

At the same time, the deliberate anachrony calls attention to the temporality of Soviet cinema as a whole, and to the very operation of Soviet montage. What is more incongruous than the arrival in *Earth* of a tractor in a Ukrainian village, or the arrival, in Dziga Vertov's *One Sixth of the World* (1926), of a gramophone and a record of Lenin's voice beyond the Arctic Circle? The tractor spawns an entire bread factory in the span of a few minutes; listening to the recording of Lenin's voice is just one strand of an economic argument about industrialization that will lead, within the span of the film, to the emancipation of all the workers of the world. The problem of the montage cinema was to convey the notion of an imminent—and immanent—future. The montage filmmakers, the first Soviet poets of cinema, reveled in anachrony, whether it was the image of a Nenets listening to Lenin's voice in an obvious reimagining of Nanook and the gramophone, a camel sniffing train rails in the desert, as we see in Viktor Turin's *Turksib* (1930), or the Battleship Potemkin steaming into the bright future (instead of eventually surrendering at Constanta).

In *Ivan's Childhood*, the problem of attribution of perception that reaches its extreme point in the penultimate scene at the Nazi archive represents a similar kind of anachrony: Galtsev cannot experience Ivan's death, as he is separated temporally and spatially from that event. Tarkovsky overcomes the apparent paradox throughout the film through his use of dreams, which gradually train the viewer to accept a surrealistic explanatory logic instead of searching for linear logic. In *Land of the Fathers*, the anachronies that result from the juxtaposition of a legendary temporality (the hero's quest to become a man) with the Soviet developmental framework (the train to the future) are concealed through simple eyeline matches (the grandfather's glance at the Chechen water vessel) and occasionally clunky plot devices (the discovery of a lost city in a brick used to heat tea).

Jacques Rancière has argued that the “real difference” between documentary and fiction film “isn't that the documentary sides with the real against the inventions of fiction, it's just that the documentary *instead of treating the real as an effect to be produced*, treats it as a fact to be understood.”⁶⁰ The deployment of the ethnographic mode in Soviet poetic cinema turns the permissible (even encouraged) apparatus of folklore into historical evidence, creating the possibility of history. Thus the purpose of ethnography in poetic cinema lies in the possibilities it engenders for countering the Soviet historical discursive regime—that is, the developmental narrative that justified the hierarchical relationship between the Soviet metropole and its peripheries—without yet embarking on the process of writing alternate histories. Ethnography becomes the nodal point that allows for the possibility of History for people without History—or, more accurately, for people who have History imposed on them.

⁵⁸ The wedding ritual with the oxen yoke is the most famous example (ibid., 44).

⁵⁹ Rancière writes: “To say that Diogenes had an umbrella is simply, in so far as we know, an error about the accessories available to Athenians in the fourth century BCE. There is no particular reason to put this in a specific class of errors that would be ‘errors against time’” (“Concept of Anachronism,” 45). The “sixties” hair and dress in *Shadows* can be understood in Rancière's terms as anachronies that reveal the seams between the heterogeneous temporal layers and allow them to seep into each other. Parajanov's umbrella, unlike Diogenes' umbrella, is no mere error: it is a deliberate anachrony.

⁶⁰ Rancière, *Film Fables* (Oxford, 2006), 158 (emphasis added). See also Nico Baumbach, “Rancière and the Fictional Capacity of Documentary,” *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 8 (March 2010): 57–72.



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