

Engendering Genre: The Contemporary Russian Buddy Film

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

University of Pittsburgh in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2009

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

College of Arts and Sciences

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# ENGENDERING GENRE: THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN BUDDY FILM

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University of Pittsburgh, 2009

My dissertation situates itself at the intersection of several fields: Soviet cultural studies, film genre theory, and masculinity studies. It investigates the articulation of genre categories in Soviet and post-Soviet cinema industries, with a specific focus on the cultural context within which the buddy film emerges in late Soviet culture. This genre is unique within contemporary Russian cinema for providing a visual and narrative structure within which the masculine crisis—a topic widely written about by Russian sociologists and gender scholars—becomes visible. This masculine crisis is more often than not masked by compensatory, hyper-macho images in other genres (e.g., war films, gangster films, historical epics). The buddy film, by contrast, exhibits a type of masculinity rarely glimpsed on screen; these characters are the disillusioned, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised men of late- and post-Soviet society.

My argument is grounded in a thorough examination of male-centered Russian buddy films from 1970 until the present day—specifically, I look at such films as A. Smirnov's *Belorusskii vokzal* (1970), P. Lungin's *Taksi-bliuz* (1990), V. Abdrashitov's *Vremia tantsora* (1997), A. Rogozhkin's *Kukushka* (2002), V. Todorovskii's *Liubovnik* (2002), and A. Muradov's *Pravda o shchelpakh* (2003). I also dedicate the final chapter to a consideration of several notable exceptions to the standard male buddy film: V.

Todorovskii's *Strana glukhikh* (1998), S. Bodrov Jr.'s *Sestry* (2001), F. Popov's *Kavkazkaia ruletka* (2002), and M. Liubakova's *Zhestokost'* (2007) in which two women substitute for the typical male pair.

I draw on the work of Althusserian film genre theorist Rick Altman, who seeks out the source of genre components in social practice. Altman insists on acknowledging the historicism and subjectivity in the study of genre. Relying on such considerations of genre, my dissertation treats the buddy film from several perspectives: it looks at the genre's antecedents from the Stalinist and Thaw periods, it tracks changes in the genre as cultural and ideological imperatives shift over the past seventy years, and it considers how gender representations adapt to these cultural and ideological transformations.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE UNDERACHIEVING MAN

Gender-based studies that focus on representations of masculinity in popular genre cinema often present the idealized male hero as a metonymy of a patriarch. For example, Susan Jeffords's monograph on the dominant look of Hollywood's male heroes during the 1980s—*Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*—argues that “the films U.S. moviegoing audiences chose to see in large numbers during this period were largely and consistently concerned with portrayals of white male action heroes” (12). Jeffords identifies a parallel between, on the one hand, the role Ronald Reagan plays as “president, as national spokesperson, as military commander-in-chief, as father-figure, as hero, [and] as emblem of a ‘national fantasy’” and, on the other hand, the “action-adventure Hollywood films that portrayed many of the same narratives of heroism, success, achievement, toughness, strength, and ‘good old Americanness’” (15). This correspondence leads Jeffords to the conclusion that “the question of masculine identity [...] circumscribes the relationship between Hollywood films and U.S. popular culture during the 1980s” (12).

A correspondence between iconic male figures on the screen and those at the head of the state also exists in Soviet and post-Soviet Russian cinema. In fact, in the Russo-Soviet context a relationship between what's on the screen and who's in political office is hardly avoidable. Unlike Hollywood's capitalist system run by independent studios, the Soviet film industry was run by the state, which oversaw all aspects of filmmaking. As Birgit Beumers summarizes it: “State-run film studios would produce the film, employ directors, actors, and technical personnel, provide all facilities for shooting and edition, and take charge of the distribution to state-owned cinemas” (“Cinemarket” 871). Within this controlled industry, often used both

directly and indirectly as a mouthpiece for political propaganda, the cults of personality constructed around the Soviet Union's leaders—most notably the cults erected to Vladimir Lenin and Iosef Stalin—functioned as symbolic shorthand to communicate those masculine traits valued at distinct historical moments. For these reasons, it is hardly surprising that in his book *New Soviet man: Gender and masculinity in Stalinist Soviet cinema* John Haynes finds that the “attributes of a particular Soviet masculinity of the Stain era” were discursively structured in the cinema “over which the State had an almost complete monopoly” (15); it could hardly be any other way. Similar to Jeffords’ assertion of a relationship between Reagan—the patriarch—and the rugged male hero typical of the popular Hollywood action movie, Haynes draws specific attention to the consonance between the Stalinist popular hero and the State—or patriarchy. He writes: “the portrayal of a properly ‘party-minded’ positive hero, who acts for the good of the State” in the popular musical comedies of Grigorii Aleksandrov and Ivan Pyr'ev “implicitly raise[s] the question of the twin narratives of masculinity and statehood” (26).<sup>1</sup>

Lynne Attwood presents a more recent set of films in her article “Men, Machine Guns, and the Mafia: Post-Soviet Cinema as a Discourse on Gender,” in which she argues that the post-Soviet cinematic fascination with the mafia functions to “celebrate traditional conceptions of masculinity” (513). Attwood, citing Natal'ia Sirivlia (1993), notes that unlike in American culture where the mafia “confines itself to ‘alternative’ forms of business such as drugs, pornography, and gun-running, in the CIS, it has permeated everyday life [...] and is completely enmeshed with the official organs of power” (514). In the absence of a strong, stable state, then, the pervasive presence of the mafia infiltrates the post-Soviet landscape and acquires the status of a substitute patriarch. This criminal society provides a model for the tough-guy hero that

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<sup>1</sup> Haynes borrows here from Katerina Clark’s work on the Soviet novel and, specifically, her thesis that Stalinist-era positive heroes function as the symbolic sons of Father Stalin.

lends itself, according to Attwood, to an on-screen resurgence of machismo and male power.<sup>2</sup> As socialism fades and gives way to the rise of a lawless market economy, Attwood contends that a new set of masculine values emerge linked to the increasingly powerful criminal state—to the mafia—and its capitalist spirit (513). Attwood identifies these newfound traits to be “entrepreneurship, independence, courage, and willingness to take risks” and explains them to be a “resurrection” of precisely the attributes “oppressed and suppressed by state socialism” (520).<sup>3</sup> This reconfiguration of masculinity in imitation of the violent mafia, which fills the vacuum left following the dismantling of the Soviet empire, can also be read as a representation of hegemonic masculinity modeled on a patriarchy—though, here, the mafia exists as a kind of rogue patriarchy. Attwood concludes: “[p]ower in this new world rests exclusively with men, backed up by a range of firearms, with their obvious Freudian connotation” (520).

This dissertation also maintains a focus on genre cinema and masculinity. However, it does not treat one of contemporary Russian cinema’s most popular macho genres (e.g., the war or mafia film) and it does not seek to link the genre’s protagonists with dominant, and domineering, male icons of virility and strength. Instead, I have chosen to investigate a less prominent genre—the Russian buddy film—in order to present an alternative to hegemonic representations of masculinity typically treated in film genre studies. Most simply put, a buddy film employs a characterological dyad or triad as the dominant constructive principle on which the film’s visual and narrative systems depend. The Russian buddy film has received minimal

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<sup>2</sup> Attwood refers specifically to Oleg Boretskii and Aleksandr Negebra’s *The Day Before...* (*Za den' do...* 1991); Rashid Nugmanov’s *The Wild East* (*Dikii vostok* 1993); and Viktor Sergeev’s *The Assassin* (*Palach* 1990).

<sup>3</sup> It has been argued that the Soviet state “feminized” men and minimized their hegemonic authority in everyday culture by robbing them of their traditional roles as economic provider and protector. See Afanaseva and Tolstaya.

scholarly attention, but proves to be rich for analysis because its opposing characters, who are typically male, dramatize the disintegration of the Soviet empire and the subsequent confusion around questions of gender identity, and especially masculinity in post-Soviet Russia.

It cannot be reasonably claimed that the buddy film stands out as a dominant or even especially popular genre in post-Soviet cinema.<sup>4</sup> However, from the points of view of both genre studies and masculinity studies, it demands attention. Whereas the mafia-themed films considered by Attwood mask the masculine crisis prevalent in late-Soviet and early post-Soviet Russian society by reasserting a dominant macho hero, the buddy film's somewhat peripheral existence within the industry concentrates on male characters who are correspondingly peripheral. The more popular genres fulfill male audience members' desire to identify with powerful, virile, macho, and active characters. The buddy film's average middle-aged characters struggle with identity crises: they recognize their inability to attain heroic proportions. Rather than pump bullets, these men secrete anxiety as tears flow from their eyes and palpably suffer a profound sense of alienation. The Russian buddy film uses its characters to put the fractured ego on display; this shattered identity must be read in the context of the Soviet Union's own fragmentation and dissolution.

Thus, this dissertation presents an analysis of dejected and crushed masculinity as a constitutive feature of the contemporary Russian buddy film. The emergence of this genre in the post-Soviet film industry suggests a growing interest in micro- as opposed to macro- politics in definitions of identity, and, therefore, further differentiates it from the types of masculinity described in the scholarship cited above that seek to link authoritarian and nationally recognized male icons (i.e., Reagan, Stalin, mafia bosses) and cinematic portrayals of masculine heroes.

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<sup>4</sup> Audience surveys conducted in 1994 show that “comedies and adventures rank above any other genre in the popularity of both cinema and video preferences” (Beumers “Cinemarket” 884)

The buddy film reveals an explicit concern with the personal and private politics of everyday life and tends not to concentrate on grand political issues or renowned characters. This is not to say that politics is absent in these films; the political nature of the personal remains significant around issues of identity and gender. As family and community life become more fragmented in the post-Soviet landscape, the male characters of the contemporary buddy film express frustration with the shaky ground they stand on. In the absence of a strong patriarchy, without a viable economy (socialist, capitalist, or other), and without succumbing to the fantasy of macho-infused mafia, the men of this genre acknowledge the grim reality of a social landscape within which they serve little purpose. In order to weave together the myriad of issues implicit in these films, this study situates itself at the intersection of several fields: Soviet and post-Soviet cultural studies, film genre theory, and masculinity studies.

### 1.1 METHODOLOGY

For centuries, genre referred to one of three forms—tragedy, comedy, and epic. In *Poetics* Aristotle describes these genre forms as modes of imitation (mimesis), considers the purposes for which each form should be used, and explains the emotional affect that each form should inspire. Aristotle's identification of the genres and articulation of their dominant features granted them stability and permanence. Neoclassical critics, with minimal innovations or deviations, adopted Aristotle's hierarchical delineation of genres and similarly forbade their mixing. Such a regimented division of literary genres dominated literary theory until the rise of the Romantic Movement at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Romanticism, which Viktor Hugo famously defined as “liberalism in literature,” reacted against the Neoclassical period’s orthodox and hierarchical delineation of genres. It is during this literary period that strict genre categories

begin to fracture, and the tendency to mix genres, allowing one to contaminate the other, became increasing acceptable.<sup>5</sup>

Recognition of such cross-pollination led genre theory of the twentieth century down two conflicting paths. On the one hand, structuralist endeavors sought to make sense of genre amalgams, by creating taxonomies and systems by which to categorize and differentiate separate genres. Most notably, Vladimir Propp's pioneering *Morphology of the Folktale* (*Morfologija skazki*), first published in 1928, dissects the magical fairy tale in order to define this folklore genre according to its "component parts and the relationship of these components to each other and to the whole" (18). The scientific rigor of his analysis leads Propp to describe fairy tales as a series of constants and variables—which, correspond to functions and dramatis personae in the tales. On the other hand, this type of scientific approach to literature was repudiated as incompatible with art. Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce stands out as a vitriolic opponent of such genre studies. His condemnation stems from a distaste for genre analyses that foreground logic, rules, and formulae, all of which, in his opinion, negatively overshadow the aesthetic experience. For Croce any attempt to establish literary rules or laws ruins or mutes the expressive ability of a reader's or viewer's engagement with a piece of literature or art.<sup>6</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, literary scholars allayed the argument regarding the legitimacy of genre, but as they did so a new two-sided debate emerged. On one side of the argument are René Wellek and Austin Warren, who, in 1942, published "Mode of Existence of the Literary Work" first in *Southern Review* and then incorporated it into their seminal work

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<sup>5</sup> August Wilhelm Schlegel defines Romanticism as the combination of forms. He writes: "the romantic delights in indissoluble mixtures; all contrarieties: nature and art, poetry and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, terrestrial and celestial, life and death, are by it blended together in the most intimate combination" (58).

<sup>6</sup> See Croce's *Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistic* (39-43).

*Theory of Literature* (1949), though, there, re-titled “The Analysis of the Literary Work of Art.”

In this essay, Wellek and Warren disagree with the rigidity of a morphological or taxonomic approach like Propp’s and the intimation implicit in Croce’s condemnation of genre rules that art *is* the experience of the reader or viewer. Wellek and Warren contest that “a work of art is neither an empirical fact, in the sense of being a state of mind of any given individual or of any group of individuals, nor is it an ideal changeless object such as a triangle (155). They reject the concept of art as timeless and argue, instead, that it is embedded into ongoing history and, therefore dynamic: “[the work of art] changes throughout the process of history while passing through the minds of its readers, critics, and fellow artists” (156). Thus, the “special ontological status” of the work of art is its existence as “a system of norms of ideal concepts which are intersubjective. They must be assumed to exist in collective ideology, changing with it, accessible only through individual mental experiences based on the sound-structure of its sentences” (156). This definition conveys an integrative approach to the study of literature that calls for the simultaneous appreciation of historiography, layers of aesthetic structures (e.g., sound, style, rhythm, imagery etc.), and the experience of reception. Wellek and Warren stress the vitality of a work of literary art, which over time constantly changes due to the ever-changing quality of language, as well as factors extrinsic to the literary work such as history, dominant ideologies, etc.

On the other side of the argument is Northrop Frye, who likewise implicitly responds to the contradictory points of view articulated by Propp and Croce in his four essays that constitute *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Frye, who was associated with Myth Criticism, also complicates the notion of clearly demarcated genre categories and seeks to explain the potential use of genre criticism, but arrives at a conclusion opposite to Wellek and Warren’s. In one of the work’s

essays—“Theory of Genres”—Frye declares: “the purpose of criticism by genre is not so much to classify as to clarify [...] traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them” (247-8). For Frye, context derives from “the radical of presentation,” which is determined by how a text is communicated to its audience (read aloud, sung, acted, etc.). His concerns are “the conditions between the poet and his public” (246), the work’s dominant rhythm, and the use of continuous forms (e.g., novel, romance, anatomy, and confession). Though this may seem to resonate more or less with Wellek and Warren’s interest in a work of art’s life, the fundamental difference between the two arguments is that whereas Wellek and Warren privilege history, acknowledge a relationship between the work of art and the world in which it circulates, and believe the changing world to impinge ever new meaning on art, Frye extracts literature from its surroundings arguing that “pure literature, like pure mathematics, contains its own meaning” (351). Specifically, Frye conceives of literature as having an autonomous existence and identifies genres as organizing individual works of art according to the eternal myths and archetypal forms that they exhibit. Although Wellek and Warren and Frye did not directly polemicize with each other, their opposing points of view on the literature come to a head in film genre scholarship.

Frye’s interest in genres as broad categories that exhibit eternal themes, what he calls myths, resonates with certain of Andrei Bazin’s writing on cinema. In his groundbreaking article on film genre, “The Western: Or the American Film Par Excellence,” Bazin argues that the western cannot be reduced to a particular narrative form comprised of conventional components. He states: “Those formal attributes [e.g., galloping horses, fights, strong and brave men in a wildly austere landscape] by which one normally recognizes the western are simply signs or

symbols of its profound reality, namely the myth” (142). For Bazin, the dominant myths of the western—e.g., the myth of the damsel in distress and the myth of the horse—are the essential principles that define the western: “each [of these myths] particularize, by way of an already specific dramatic plot, the great epic Manicheism which sets the forces of evil over against the knights of the true cause” (145).

In his essay “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” first published in 1984, Rick Altman describes the landscape of film genre study at the time. As the article opens Altman finds fault with myth criticism’s tendency to bypass history and preference for synchronic analysis. He contends that the by “[t]reating genres as neutral constructs, semioticians [...] blinded us to the discursive power of generic formations” (8).<sup>7</sup> Dissatisfied with an ahistorical notion of genre, Altman goes on to describe two more contradictory approaches to film genre: the ritual and the ideological approaches. Altman links the ritual approach to myth criticism when he describes this group as having “dwelled on the mythical qualities of Hollywood genres and thus on the audience’s ritual relationship to genre film” (8-9). The ritual group of theorists contends that audiences controlled the film industry by patronizing those films with which they had strong ritual connections, resulting in Hollywood making more films following the same genre patterns, which further reinforces ritual patterns. Although Altman judges the ahistorical and synchronic approach of Propp and Frye harshly, Altman finds certain merit in the ritual approach’s ability to make sense of “the intensity of identification typical of American genre film audiences” and to encourage “the placing of genre film narratives

<sup>7</sup> Dudley Andrew makes an identical point when he criticizes Bazin and his followers in *Concepts in Film Theory*, which, perhaps not coincidentally, was published, like Altman’s article in 1984. Andrew maintains that these ritual critics take on a humanistic orientation and create “essentialist” genre theory, which has “led scholars to work under the supposition that a genre ought to be a static construct” with eternal significance (109).

into an appropriately wider context of narrative analysis” (9). If the ritual approach gives agency to the audience, the other camp—the ideological school of film genre theory—interprets genre to manipulate audiences by taking “advantage of spectator energy and psychic investment in order to lure the audience into Hollywood’s own positions” (9). In other words, it interprets genre to be a path via which “Hollywood’s rhetoric flows” (9).

In this 1984 article Altman advocates for a new mode of film genre scholarship—his semantic/syntactic approach—which borrows from both of these camps and thus reconciles their opposite stances. He acknowledges that the semantics of a genre—“its common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, set, and the like”—are precisely the touchstone elements that make genre immediately identifiable (10). However, in order not to make the same mistake as those “genre theoreticians [who] have followed the semiotic model and steered clear of historical considerations” (12), Altman balances his by incorporating syntactic considerations that pay attention to the discursive structures into which the semantic elements are embedded.

By 1999, when Altman publishes his monograph *Film/Genre*, his position within the contested film genre argument becomes clearer and somewhat less conciliatory. He continues to take the ritual school to task arguing that the “tendency to figure genres transhistorically simply extends Aristotle’s intention to note the *essential* quality of each poetic kind” (20, emphasis in the original). As he rejects the synchronic approach used by Frye, Bazin, and Propp, he increasingly embraces and reveals himself to derive intellectually from Wellek and Warren’s historiographical approach when he writes that genre is “the byproduct of an ongoing process” (54, emphasis in original), revealed in part by the renaming of genres (from substantive to the adjectival labels) over time. “Genres are not just post facto categories, [...] but part of the constant category-splitting/category-creating dialectic that constitutes the history of types and

terminology” (65). Moreover, Altman acknowledges that genre does not reside totally within the filmic text; it is not completely determined by its semiotics—from its formulaic narratives, representative settings, or stock characters. Aspects external to the film text—distribution, exhibition venues, trends in critical theory, and even production plans set by the industry also weigh on genre identification (210). This diversified and multi-faceted consideration of genre is presented in Altman’s revision of his 1984 article, newly titled “A semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach to genre,” which serves as a conclusion to *Film/Genre*.

Although Altman does not pronounce himself to be a follower of the ideological school, his book does position him further on that side of the proverbial fence. Rather than link conventional components of any given genre to an individual myth, the ideological critics seek out the source of particular genre components in social practice. This branch of genre theory proves to be better suited for a discussion of film genre because cinema exists as a social institution that cannot be disentangled from economic practices, signifying processes, and the ability to produce meaning. Altman points to his addition of pragmatics as “assum[ing] a constant (if sometimes extremely slow) cross-fertilization process whereby the interests of one group may appear in the actions of another” (211). Another of the ideological school theorists, Steven Neale, echoes this point when he describes genres as “systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text, and subject” (19). Neale finds that genre can be identified as a governing aesthetic form dictated by use of body, voice, music, camera movement, and editing (23). However, he insists that these aesthetic components be understood as “variations of the interplay of codes, discursive structures, and drives involved in the whole of mainstream cinema” (48).

My work benefits from such considerations of genre. This dissertation treats the buddy film from several perspectives: it looks at the constellation of historical and cultural factors that leads to its emergence, it tracks changes in the genre as cultural and ideological imperatives shift, and it considers how gender representations adapt to these cultural and ideological transformations. Given that the definitions and descriptions of the buddy film are by and large limited to examples taken from Hollywood cinema (e.g., Stanley Kramer's *The Defiant Ones* 1958; John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* 1969; Walter Hill's *48 Hrs.* 1982; and Richard Donner's four *Lethal Weapon* movies 1987, 1989, 1992, 1998), my work broadens the context within which the genre is considered.

The Russian buddy film, like its American counterpart, employs juxtaposed male characters, whose conflicting personalities dramatize competing notions of contemporary masculinity. However, the American and Russian iterations of the genre are distinct from one another. Whereas American examples of the genre tend to mollify initially clashing personalities, this consideration of the genre demonstrates that the juxtaposed and competing male characters of the Russian version rarely reconcile their differences. Rather than solve the problem of multiple, competing masculinities, these buddy films supply a visual and narrative structure within which the masculine crisis—a topic widely written about by Russian sociologists and gender scholars—becomes visible. Not only does this distinguish the genre from its American permutation, but it also makes the genre unique within early post-Soviet Russian cinema. More often than not, this masculine crisis is masked in other genres (e.g., war films, gangster films, historical epics) by compensatory, hyper-macho images. The buddy film, by contrast, exhibits a type of masculinity rarely glimpsed on screen; these characters are the disillusioned, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised men of late- and post-Soviet society.

My presentation of the Russian buddy film sets out to widen the scope through which Russian film scholarship looks at genre and, therefore, the dissertation treats the buddy film from several perspectives. Chapter 1, “What Does *Zhanr* Mean in Russian” explores the shifting status and connotations of genre film throughout Russo-Soviet cinema history. The second chapter, “A Historical Investigation of The Russian Buddy Film,” considers antecedents to the post-Soviet buddy film from the Stalinist, Thaw, and Glasnost eras in order to track changes in the genre as cultural, ideological, and industry imperatives shift. Chapter Three—“Antagonistic Friends: Competing Masculinities, Competing Ideologies”—provides an in-depth analysis of the genre’s standard features. It refers primarily to Pavel Lungin’s *Taxi Blues* (*Taksi-bliuz* 1990), Aleksandr Rogozhkin’s *Cuckoo* (*Kukushka* 2002), and Valerii Todorovskii’s *The Lover* (*Liubovnik* 2003) in order to make the case for genre affiliation among these narratively distinct films. However, the goal of this chapter, as it is for the entire dissertation, is not simply to establish yet another film genre. The chapter demonstrates that the forging of and focus on genre affiliation reveals a common set of questions. To put it in other words, genre affiliation portrays a common problem in a precise way; namely, the films all depict men struggling with the difficulty of asserting themselves in a cultural space where dominant Soviet myths, which previously guided their behavior, have lost their previous significance. Because the conflicts at the heart of these buddy films all raise the issue of what it means to be a Soviet or post-Soviet man, Chapter Four, “Veteran Men and the End of Machismo” offers a detailed analysis of the representation of masculinity in the genre. The primary films treated in this chapter are Andrei Smirnov’s *Belorussian Station* (*Belorusskii vokzal* 1970)—an anachronistic, but relevant example of the contemporary buddy film—Vadim Abdrashitov’s *Time of the Dancer* (*Vremia tantsora* 1997), and Aleksei Muradov’s *The Truth of the Shchelps* (*Pravda o shchelpakh* 2003).

The intimate collectives of characters at the center of these buddy films suffer from a sense of uncertainty and emasculation as they fail to find ways to assert themselves in their changing cultural milieus.

The final chapter of the dissertation, “Bosom Buddies: The Female Buddy Film,” looks at three notable exceptions to the standard male buddy film: Valerii Todorovskii’s *Land of the Deaf* (*Strana glukhikh* 1998), Sergei Bodrov Jr.’s *Sisters* (*Sestry* 2001), and Feodor Popov’s *Caucasian Roulette* (*Kavkazkaia ruletka* 2002), in which two women substitute for the typical male dyad. These exceptions raise several questions: Is the buddy film necessarily a male-based genre? Does the gendered switch of the protagonists suggest a certain amount of flexibility within the genre’s composition? Is the masculine dominant of the genre either weakened or strengthened by the variant of a female buddy film?

Russian film scholarship, generally disinterested in questions of film genre, does not actively acknowledge the buddy film; American and British scholars of Soviet cinema, however, have. In *The New Soviet Man* John Haynes suggests that the classic socialist-realist film *Chapaev* (Vasil'ev Brothers, 1934) adheres to the buddy film genre (163). Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky title a subchapter of their book *The Zero Hour* “The Chernukha Buddy Film: *Taxi Blues*,” in which they compare a Russian example of the genre to the American model (166-168), a context that Laura Olson repeats in her (unpublished) article “Masculinity in Pavel Lungin’s *Taxi Blues*. ” While these passing mentions and short chapters affirm the recognition of the genre in Russian cinema, none of them develops a framework within which to understand the genre across the history of Soviet and post-Soviet cinema or engages in an analysis of the genre’s theoretical import. My project fills this scholarly lacuna.

Tom Ryall describes the three typical ways genre tends to be used in film scholarship: to assess the “generic system” by evaluating the relation of individual genres to each other and to production values in general; to define the standard features of a genre; and to interpret individual films by placing them into the context of genre. This dissertation aims to scrutinize the Russian buddy film from each of these perspectives and do more. The goal is not to create just another category under which film titles can be listed. Rather, it is to investigate genre in order to reveal that representations of a faltering Russo-Soviet masculinity are embedded into a specific communication system within contemporary Russian cinema. Recognition of the Russian buddy film offers the opportunity to reach conclusions about trends in culture, in general, and in cinema, in particular.

## 2.0 CHAPTER 1: WHAT DOES *ZHANR* MEANS IN RUSSIAN?

Genre cinema has a historically bad reputation among Russo-Soviet filmmakers. The Russian filmmaking tradition situates genre movies—*zhanrovoe kino*—in opposition to *auteur* cinema—*avtorskoe kino*. The supposed distinction between the two types of filmmaking lies in their respective relationship to Art. Most simply stated, genre films are perceived to be products of low culture that appeal to the masses, whereas *auteur* cinema circulates as high culture and is appreciated by aficionados, amateur and professional film critics, and other arbitrators of art (e.g., museum and film festival curators). The tendency is to dismiss genre cinema as a form of mass entertainment and to assess the value of *auteur* cinema according to criteria derived from a Romantic theory of art based on originality, personal creativity, and the artist-genius.

The distinguishing of genre in opposition to *auteur* filmmaking is not a uniquely Russian phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> American producers, directors, critics, and audiences of Hollywood cinema maintain the same genre/*auteur* division. Differing production practices result in these two types of cinema. The dominant characteristics of genre cinema include cutting-edge production value, recognizable stars, and large-scale advertising campaigns, all of which require epic-sized budgets. These films are made as potential blockbusters. Many will not achieve that status, but those that do cover the cost of their own enormous budgets as well as the budgets of other, less successful, studio products. The *auteur* film, by contrast, is (only) ostensibly free from industry and market constraints, and is, therefore, referred to as an independent film. Typically made on a

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Altman attributes this distinction between art and genre to Benedetto Croce in Western scholarship (*Film/Genre* 7).

smaller budget, the independent films emphasize less expensive artistry: exceptional acting, poetic cinematography, and innovative screenwriting. Although these categories assist in marketing schemes, the attempt to divide these two types of filmmaking is quickly revealed to be overstated, if not simply fallacious. The larger studio empires that are primarily associated with genre films tend to own the smaller studios that focus their attention on the production of independent films. The enormous profits of blockbuster hits help to fund smaller, more risky, and less profitable projects. Moreover, independent films, just like the big-budget movies, retain genre conventions and are made with imagined potential audiences and a cine-market in mind.

Despite a persistent desire to differentiate movies (i.e., product of low culture) from films (i.e., crafted art of high culture), American scholarship on the topic no longer privileges *auteur* cinema as a field of study that is necessarily intellectually superior to genre cinema. Dudley Andrew dates the shift toward an interest in genre study and away from auteurism as following the events 1968, when ideas percolated by student revolts across Europe reverberated into the intellectual world and led theorists to replace an interest in “creativity and art” with an analysis of “ideology and the system” (107). Andrew explains that film genre became an appealing category because it allowed for attention to be drawn to the relationship between “art and system, experience and knowledge” (108). While this theoretical awakening was taking place in France on the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* and then catching the attention of American film critics, the Soviet Union was “advocating” genre cinema in a different, and significantly more brutal fashion. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Brezhnev’s Stagnation culture systematically silenced such *auteur* directors as Aleksandr Askol'dov, Kira Muratova, and Sergei Paradzhanov, and reinstated a policy of “movies for the masses,” which depended on a genre-based production model. The liberal intelligentsia’s fury and frustration with these repressive measures led them

to resent the state-sponsored genre cinema and conceive of it as the antithesis of art. The discrepancy in the perceived intellectual value of genre cinema can be acutely sensed in the paralleling discrepancy between American and Russian genre cinema scholarship. Simply put, whereas American cinema theory treats genre seriously, Russian cinema scholarship is more reluctant to do so.

The following two quotations, taken from American film genre theorist Thomas Schatz and Russian film scholar Semen Freilikh, respectively, are both overstated, but their hyperbolic pronouncements underscore the divergent focus within the American and Russian traditions of film genre scholarship. In *Genius of the System: Hollywood Film Making in the Studio Era* Schatz voices his annoyance with film scholarship's myopic focus on *auteur* cinema. He writes: "Autuerism itself would not be worth bothering with if it hadn't been so influential, effectively stalling film history and criticism in a prolonged state of adolescent romanticism" (5). What Schatz dubs "adolescent romanticism" has long been the dominant focus of Russo-Soviet film scholarship. Freilikh's monograph, *Theory of cinema from Eisenstein to Tarkovskii (Teoriia kino ot Eizenshtaina do Tarkovskogo)*, announces the author's preoccupation with Soviet *auteur* directors by reference to two of the Soviet Union's greatest in its title. Confession of a general disinterest in the question of cinematic genres comes a bit later, when Freilikh admits that

[a]lthough there has been periodic interest in the problem of genres, it has never been at the center of film scholars' attention and has remained, in the best of cases, on the periphery of their interests. The bibliography bespeaks [this situation]: there is still not yet a single book on film genre written either here or

abroad. The fingers of one hand are sufficient to count the number of articles that deal with genre theory. (41)<sup>2</sup>

Freilikh's observation exaggerates the paucity of a bibliography on film genre when he writes that one neither exists here (i.e., in Russia) or abroad. Even so, the recognition that genre cinema has never dominated Russian film scholars' intellectual attention is accurate.

One common justification for the persistent rejection of or disinterest in genre cinema derives from associations that align genre cinema with the bourgeois West. For example, in an explanation of the disproportionately few comedies in early Soviet cinema of the 1920s, Denise Youngblood cites a distrust of genre cinema as a dominant factor; genre cinema was considered to be the product of an antithetical cultural system. She writes:

Young directors [...] tended to oppose entertainment films as "bourgeois," promoting their own work by way of contrast as somehow truly "revolutionary." The press was controlled by critics who likewise believed that Soviet cinema had to distinguish itself from its commercial counterparts in the West. Given this climate of opinion, it should not be surprising that most established cinematic genres presented daunting challenges to Soviet filmmakers throughout the first decade of Soviet movie production. Genre films were, after all, profoundly "bourgeois" products of commercial filmmaking—that is, there was nothing intrinsically Marxist or Soviet about them. ("We don't know" 37)

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<sup>2</sup> Как бы периодически ни обострялся интерес к проблеме жанров, она никогда не была в центре внимания киноведения, оказываясь в лучшем случае на периферии наших интересов. Об этом говорит библиография: по теории киножанров ни у нас, ни за рубежом до сих пор не написано ни одной книги. ... Что касается статей по общей теории жанров, то, чтобы перечислить их, хватит буквально пальцев одной руки.

It is easy to sense that the judgment of genre cinema as something quintessentially bourgeois stems directly from ideological Soviet rhetoric. However, this way of thinking persists into the post-Soviet period. A similar logic as the one outlined by Youngblood can be sensed in comments made by post-Soviet director Aleksei Balabanov in the early 2000s. Balabanov's sequential hits *Brother* (*Brat* 1997) and *Brother 2* (*Brat 2* 2000), about a lone vigilante warrior-gangster, were sensations both in the theaters and at film festivals across Russia.<sup>3</sup> When he was congratulated for having successfully made the first gangster film in Russian cinema, the praise did not fall on deaf ears, but on insulted ones. In his typical acerbic tone Balabanov responded: "If I had wanted to make a genre movie, I would have shot the film in English" (qtd. in Komm 95).<sup>4</sup> This incriminating use of "in English" suggests Balabanov's negative perception of genre cinema as Hollywood's product and the desire to view his supposedly quintessentially Russian films as free from genre conventions. While less concerned with upholding a Marxist or revolutionary politic than his cinematic forefathers had been, Balabanov's contempt for genre cinema similarly stems from associations that align it with bourgeois or commercial production practices and distinguish it from art.

The Russo-Soviet film industry's *auteur* directors have rebuffed commercial success as opportunistic and repulsively bourgeois. They prefer to think of filmmaking as an intellectual, political, and artistic, rather than mercenary endeavor. George Faraday, writing on the

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<sup>3</sup> At the 1997 Kinotavr Film Festival held annually in Sochi, Russia, *Brother* won the Best Film award and Sergei Bodrov Jr., the film's lead star, won Best Actor. Made on a modest budget of less than \$100,000 (Balabanov 552), it grossed more "than any other Russian movie, and it led all movies, domestic and foreign, in video rental receipts for the year" (Anemone 127). *Brother 2* similarly swept the box office, earning \$1,000,000 within the first three months of its release (Dondurei 68). Film scholar Evgenii Margolit identifies it to be the first post-Soviet commercial hit (2004).

<sup>4</sup> "Если бы я хотел сделать жанр, я бы снимал фильм на английском языке!"

relationship between Russian intellectual and artistic production, notes that a constellation of negative attributes—including “narrow-minded self-interest, careerism, grasping materialism, and lack of cultural taste”—constitute the antithesis to the intelligentsia’s ideal of art (30). Faraday’s appraisal of the relationship of the ideal artist to Russian filmmaking practices helps to illuminate the context in which Balabanov so disparagingly dismissed genre filmmaking as Hollywood’s domain. Moreover, by the criteria Faraday outlines, the genre film fails as art, which leads to the following two assumptions: to admit to creating genre cinema is to relinquish the status of artist; and to describe a director’s work in terms of genre is to offend.

If the two examples taken from Youngblood’s appraisal of 1920s Soviet silent cinema and Balabanov’s post-Soviet perspective suggest a certain historical continuity within the argument against genre cinema, it must be admitted that such an implication is misleading. Ideologically-infused language employs “the West” as shorthand to indicate bourgeois, capitalist production values. It therefore often seems that the sustained dismissal of and articulated disdain for genre cinema exists as a simple ideological rejection of Hollywood. However, to conclude that this is a battle between east and west, socialist and capitalist, Russia and America would be incorrect. First, it is necessary to recognize Russia’s own role as “the West”: initial battles against the production and proliferation of bourgeois cinema were aimed just as much—and perhaps even more—at the pre-Revolutionary Russian film industry as it was at Hollywood or other filmmaking centers located in an actual geographical West. And second, despite the ongoing tendency to incriminate genre cinema, it periodically dominated Soviet screens, particularly, and perhaps ironically, during moments of severe cultural repression. In summary, the stance summarized by Youngblood and implied by Balabanov that Hollywood produces

genre cinema while the Soviet and post-Soviet film industries craft unique pieces of cinematic art is specious in two significant and interrelated ways and must now be considered in detail.

Early Soviet campaigns to reject decadent and bourgeois cinema were aimed just as much at prerevolutionary and NEP-era Russian studios as they were at films imported from the West.

In *Russian Popular Culture*, Richard Stites describes the Soviet regime's active role "to 'liquidate' what it saw as the trashy, decadent, and obscene movies of the prerevolutionary studios, with their motifs of light comedy, melodrama, affluent society life, and sordid crime and sex" (54). Stites continues: "after a complicated and turbulent coexistence with the private studios—who were churning out films on Rasputin, erotic and satanic mysticism, nineteenth-century revolutionaries, and anti-Bolshevism along with some fine melodramas—the regime nationalized the industry" (55). It is hardly surprising that prerevolutionary and NEP-era studios would be similarly implicated in the Soviet's campaign to distance the filmmaking industry from bourgeois cultural production. As entrepreneurs latched onto the cinema's mass appeal, they developed a financially viable, even lucrative industry, complete with a star system playing in "a rich array of genres" that included costume dramas, literary adaptations, comedies, adventure films, and, most popular of all, melodramas (Stites 30-2).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Mezhrabpom, the dominant studio of the NEP-era that made, among many other films, Iakov Protazanov's science-fiction classic *Aelita* (1924) and his comedy *Three Millions Trial (Protsess o trekh millionakh* 1926), as well as Konstantin Eggert and Vladimir Gardin's melodramatic horror box office hit *The Bear's Wedding (Medvezh'ia svad'ba* 1926), was financed by foreign capital filtered through the Workers' International Relief organization, which initially entered Russia to aid the young Soviet government to overcome the devastating famine of 1921-22. Mezhrabpom's financial

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<sup>5</sup> For additional scholarship on the melodrama at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Cassiday, Lin, McReynolds, and Zorkaia (1976).

profitability, as well as the entire Soviet film industry's booming success in the early 1920s was by and large, thanks to foreign capital.<sup>6</sup>

At least as the Soviet cultural administrators of the 1920s conceived of it, the process of building a new socialist world required that artists become part of the political process, break away from bourgeois notions of art for art's sake or aesthetic gratification, and imbue their work with a revolutionary spirit. By the 1920s, party officials demanded that the primary function and goal of cinema be the dissemination of Soviet ideology and propaganda. For example, as early as 1919 Anatoli Lunacharsky, the Soviet Commissar of Enlightenment, describes cinema as "a new branch of art and education" and underscores the need for it to be "tendentious" (47). A forced shift away from genre-driven entertainment films to an ideologically infused cinema industry comes in 1926 and 1928 when party activists conducted surveys in Moscow film theaters. The surveys, unsurprisingly, revealed people's desire to watch entertaining, genre movies without "excessive proletarian ideology" (Kenez "The Cultural Revolution" 416). The party members "dealt with this uncomfortable reality by denying it" (416). Of greater importance to the revolutionary cause was cinema's ability to (re-)educate the masses according to proletarian ideology. Therefore, they falsified the survey's results and "insisted that the workers demanded films with 'proletarian ideology' and that the workers and peasants disapproved of foreign films and films that were meant only to entertain" (416). Moreover, the assault on "entertaining" films was coupled with a resolution passed in 1926 by political education organizations (*Politprosvet*) that "called for the reduction of the share of foreign films in the market, deplored excessive concern with profit, and recommended that scarce resources be used for making agitational films" (417). And, thus, a connection is forged that links together

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of Mezhrabpom's foreign investments, see Kepley.

the necessity to reject foreign films and commercial success while privileging distinctly Soviet goals.

If party doctrine was capable of articulating these goals in theory, the directors were charged with the elusive goal of putting the theory into practice. Certainly, such world famous Soviet *auteurs* as Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Vsevolod Pudovkin, and Dziga Vertov believed that their experimental forays into cinema answered the revolutionary call. However, the montage of attractions, the filming of life caught unawares, the use of representative social types rather than positive heroes led, as is well known, to accusations of formalism.<sup>7</sup> Revolutionary or not, the experimental nature of these directors' world-renowned films, was not, according to the party, sensible to the proletariat audiences.<sup>8</sup> As the cinema industry became increasingly repressive, stylistic innovation was curtailed and genre cinema—the purported evil product of the capitalist West—paradoxically began to develop. As Kenez succinctly puts it in his article “The Cultural Revolution in Cinema”:

The heterogeneity, the creative spirit, and the artistic experimentation of the 1920s were no more. [...] The movies became conventional, often vulgar, and utterly predictable. The petit bourgeois spirit, against which the avant-garde of the 1920s had struggled with vehemence, enjoyed an ironic triumph.” (433)

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<sup>7</sup> In a resolution published by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (of Bol'sheviks) in 1925, the formalist movement is blamed for retarding cinema's development: “the former, then popular, formalist trends not only hampered the growth of individual talented artists [...], but also prevented the advancement of cinema in total” (“Но бывшие тогда в моде формалистические течения не только тормозили рост отдельных талантливых художников [...], но и препятствовали развитию кинематографии в целом” (qtd. in Freilikh “Po puti” 110). See also Kenez (1992, 91-113).

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed explanation of Soviet cinema industry's rejection of montage and avant-garde in cinema see Taylor (1991, 201-207).

This leads to the second interrelated point regarding why it is not enough simply to characterize the Russo-Soviet tendency to regard genre cinema as a rejection of bourgeois culture, whether that culture be pre-revolutionary, NEP, or Western (e.g. Balabanov). The production of Soviet cinema, both at its inception and in its fully developed form, operated according to genre. Yuri Bogomolov explains that, “Soviet film production begins with an overarching genre and thematic plan that establishes a quota system. [...] The genre and thematic plan has been the linchpin upon which all other choices, from officials to artists and technical workers, depends” (39-40). As straightforward as Bogomolov’s statements seem to be, in order fully to tease out the effects that Soviet genre cinema itself has had on perpetuating the intelligentsia’s disdain for it, it is necessary that the historical context of these thematic plans be taken into consideration. In other words, to understand more completely the negative connotation attached to genre cinema it is imperative to consider how the Soviet cinema industry is implicated in late Soviet and post-Soviet filmmakers’ rejection of genre filmmaking.

It is common to characterize Soviet cultural history as a series of freezes and thaws that correspond, respectively, to alternating periods of artistic repression and relative freedoms. It seems possible to locate a parallel between the eras of strict control and the rise of genre cinema, on the one hand, and the periods of relaxed censorship and rise of *auteur* cinema on the other. Let it be said at the outset that this postulation both helps and hinders this argument. From a historical point of view, it must be admitted that such divisions can be used as convenient shorthand, but are overly simplified. The era under Nikita Khrushchev’s rule known as the Thaw, is, for example, far from a protracted period of cultural or political freedom; it is punctuated with “freezes” of political authoritarianism and oppression.<sup>9</sup> Also, from the point of

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<sup>9</sup> Woll provides a useful summary of Thaw-era freezes in *Real Images* (64-5).

view of film genre, this hypothesis obscures the fact that genre structures rarely totally disappear from film; even the most experimental, director-driven masterpieces tend to be inflected by genre. In other words, although it is typical to distinguish genre from *auteur* cinema as two dominant modes of production, is it artificial to treat *auteur* cinema as autonomous and unrelated to genre. Case in point: the French New Wave critics, who developed an *auteur*-based theory of cinema studies (e.g., Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut), identified, among others, Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford as quintessential *auteur* directors, and admired these directors. But, it would be ludicrous to deny these directors' significance to the psychological thriller or western, respectively. Nonetheless, use of this neat dichotomy (period of strict control is to genre cinema as period of relaxed control is to *auteur* cinema) as a heuristic model will help to clarify further the negative associations of genre cinema held by Russia's filmmaking intelligentsia. In order not to reproduce the shortsightedness of the intelligentsia, which prefers to view *auteur* cinema as operating outside of genre, however, this neat division will have to be problematized later on. For now, though, it will be useful to push on ahead, keeping this caveat in mind for later.

## 2.1 REPRESSIVE STATE CONTROL AND THE RISE OF CINEMATIC GENRES

It is difficult, erroneous even, to separate Soviet cinema from a developed system of genre filmmaking because the centralized and state-controlled film industry operated according to a production plan that relied specifically on genre distinctions. In the article "The 1930s and 1940s: Cinema in Context," distinguished Russian film critic Maya Turovskaya argues that a heterogeneous cultural landscape existed up until approximately 1930, at which point there was a "change in paradigm" (37). This change shifted away from plurality and diversity toward a culture with "a universal character" that was "accompanied by a shift towards totalitarian

structures” (37). The implementation of socialist realism provided a unitary artistic methodology used to construct a “stabilised type of consciousness” (42). These conditions set the stage for a film industry dominated by programmatic narratives, which become the basis for socialist-realist genre cinema.

Turovskaya located an anonymous report from 1927 in “the uncatalogued Sovkino files held at the Central State Archive of the October Revolution” that clearly asserts the cinema’s production protocol, which is worthwhile to reproduce here.

The slogan of Soviet cinema enterprises is: “Our films must be 100 per cent ideologically correct and 100 per cent commercially viable.” Soviet film must be highly profitable. It can only be an instrument of Communist enlightenment if it is accepted by the audience with pleasure. We therefore declare that the “commercially profitable film” and the “ideologically correct film” are not mutually exclusive categories but rather complementary to one another.

The principle place in the repertoire must be occupied by heroic pictures. The aim of these films is to mobilize the masses. The second place must go to pictures on the problems of everyday life in the transitional epoch. In third place—less significant but more numerous—should be entertainment pictures, the aim of which should be to attract the masses to cinema to fight against the more harmful leisure activities of the population such as drunkenness, hooliganism and so on. (qtd. in Turovskaya 43)

These three categories—heroic pictures, pictures of everyday life, and entertainment films—can be read as a broad framework, or, to put it in other words, as an organizing principle that

supported the revival of certain genres and led to the development of others that helped to fulfill the historically specific propagandistic goals of early Stalinist culture.

If in 1927 the notion of an industry based on genre cinema was suggested, but lacked a formal spokesman, then by 1934 Boris Shumiatskii, who from 1930-1937 headed Soiuzkino, the centralized Soviet film organization, was poised to articulate such a plan clearly.<sup>10</sup> Shumiatskii called for “genres that are infused with optimism, mobilizing emotions, cheerfulness, joie-de-vivre, and laughter” in his “Tasks of the 1934 Thematic Plan” (“*Zadachi templaia 1934 goda*”) (1).<sup>11</sup> In particular, he stressed the need for drama, comedy, and fairy tales. In the introductory paragraph Shumiatskii draws a connection between the Thematic Plan and the second Five Year Plan (1933-37)—the economic policies and production aims set by the state for heavy industry.<sup>12</sup> The treatment of film production as yet another industry key for the construction of socialism serves as a reminder to read Shumiatskii’s demand for optimism with a certain amount of skepticism. The call for genre films filled with cheerfulness and laughter was not an attempt to fulfill audience desires for lighthearted entertainment as much as it was an attempt to construct an optimistic representation of Soviet life in the fictionalized, black-and-white screen images that served to mask a horrific reality happening in the light of day outside of the movie theater.

Historical retrospection provides a clear demonstration of the propagandistic use of genre cinema under Stalin. Citing the Vasil'ev Brothers’ *Chapaev* (1934) by way of example, Turovskaya notes that what the anonymous party proclamation describes as “heroic pictures” became the “historical-Revolutionary film,” which “not only represented a permanent category

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<sup>10</sup> Soiuzkino was formerly Sovkino.

<sup>11</sup> “Нам нужный жанры, пронизанные оптимизмом, мобилизующими эмоциями: бодростью, жизнерадостностью, смехом” (1).

<sup>12</sup> See Danilov for a history of the Soviet Five-Year Plans. See Millar for analysis.

in the thematic plan but was also a genre in the fullest sense” (47).<sup>13</sup> In “Singing on the Steppes for Stalin,” Soviet film scholar Richard Taylor provides an in-depth analysis of another dominant genre of the period: the musical comedy of the 1930s and 1940s. With reference to Ivan Pyr’ev’s *The Wealthy Bride* (*Bogataia nevesta* 1938), *The Tractor Drivers* (*Traktoristy* 1939), *The Swineherdess and the Shepherd* (*Svinarka i pastukh* 1941), and *The Kuban Cossacks* (*Kubanskie kazaki* 1949) and Grigorii Aleksandrov’s *The Happy Guys* (*Veselye rebiata* 1934), *Circus* (*Tsirk* 1936), *Volga-Volga* (1938), and *The Radiant Path* (*Svetlyi put’* 1940), Taylor convincingly demonstrates not only the crystallization of the Soviet musical’s genre conventions, but also its key socialist-realist, ideological function to “varnish reality” and present life “in its revolutionary development” (145-6).<sup>14</sup> The musical genre provided the precise and limited set of conventions necessary to a repressive government demanding that cinema be used toward ideological ends.

It might seem that the flourishing of genre cinema under Stalin contradicts the initial premise of this argument—namely, that genre cinema was rejected as bourgeois. In part, it is this paradox that complicates any attempt easily to sum up the connotative meaning of genre cinema. The official rhetoric, the semantics of Stalinism, highlights this inconsistency: even as the production of genre cinema was being officially advocated in the in-house thematic plans of the 1930s, specific genres labels could not be used because they were essentially villainized as antithetical to Soviet ideological goals. Taylor grants that “[a]lthough the term *musical* was not

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<sup>13</sup> Additional examples of historical-Revolutionary films include Boris Barnet’s *Outskirts* (*Okraina* 1933), Aleksandr Dovzhenko’s *Aerograd* (1935), Efim Dzigan’s *We are from Kronstadt* (*My iz Kronshtadta* 1936), and Aleksandr Zarkhi and Iosif Kheifits’s *The Baltic Deputy* (*Deputat Baltiki* 1936).

<sup>14</sup> For more on the Stalinist musical, see Evgenii Dobrenko’s “Muzyka vmesto sumbura”; Rimgaila Salys’s *The Strange Afterlife of Stalinist Musical Films*; Taylor’s articles “But Eastward, Look, the Land is Brighter,” “A ‘Cinema for the Millions,’” and “Singing on the Steppes for Stalin”; and Turkovskaya’s “The Tastes of Soviet Moviegoers.”

used at the time, because it was deemed to be redolent of ‘bourgeois’ Hollywood, and the terms *comedy* or *musical comedy* prevailed, it can safely be applied to a number of key films of the period” (146 emphasis in the original). Nina Dymshits makes a similar reference to this type of renaming in her short monograph *Soviet Film Melodrama Yesterday and Today* (*Sovetskaia kinomelodrama vchera i segodnia*). She points out that in the 1930s the word “melodrama” does not appear on posters or in the titles of films. More absurdly, the category “melodrama” “gradually disappears from film reference books even in reference to those films of the 1920s, which were consciously constructed in this genre and were openly called melodramas by their authors” (21).<sup>15</sup> However, as with street, city, and even peoples’ names at this time, the melodrama was masked simply with a more Soviet, or, at least, a less obviously bourgeois sounding designation. Dymshits writes that, “[b]eginning in the 1930s through the mid-1970s melodrama lives under other names: the musical comedy, the film story, the film drama, and sometimes even tragedy” (21).<sup>16</sup>

If considered from the point of view of Russo-Soviet filmmakers, the seeming paradox—the rise of genre under Stalinism and the persistent negative connotation of genre cinema—is, perhaps, not a paradox at all. The politicized use and rejection of genre categories underscores Rick Altman’s assertion that genres “are not inert categories shared by all [...], but discursive claims made by real speakers for particular purposes in specific situations” (*Film/Genre* 101). While this analysis has only made brief mention of two discrete genres of the Stalinist period (i.e., the historical-Revolutionary film and the musical comedy), and, therefore, provides only a

<sup>15</sup> “Исчезнет он постепенно и из справочных киноизданий даже применительно к тем фильмам 20-х годов, которые сознательно создавались в этом жанре и открыто назывались авторами мелодрамами” (21).

<sup>16</sup> “Начиная с 30-х годов вплоть до середины 70-х мелодрама живет под чужим именем: музыкальной комедии, киноповести, кинодрамы, а иногда даже трагедии” (21). See also, Bagrov.

partial picture of genre cinema of the time, the goal here is not to characterize Stalinist genre cinema fully.<sup>17</sup> Of significance to this argument is the acknowledgement of the existence of consciously developed discrete genres and the strategic use of genres within a highly politicized cultural landscape.

That Stalinist culture limited artistic expression comes as no surprise. Whether we focus on the glorification of the positive hero in the historical-Revolutionary film or the varnished representation of kolkhoz life in musical comedies, the conventional narratives articulated via a socialist-realist framework functioned as a type of censorship: tell the story one way or don't tell it at all. The difficulty of making films that sufficiently conformed to the goals laid out in the thematic plans functioned—whether purposefully or inadvertently—to curtail artistic freedom nad one of a set of factors that resulted in barely fledging film output through the mid-1930s. While the thematic plans of 1935 dictated that 130 films be made and the 1936 plan aimed for 165 films, in actuality those years saw only 45 and 46 films, respectively (Taylor “Ideology as mass entertainment” 215).<sup>18</sup> However, thinking of genre cinema within this historical context helps to understand that the narrative limitations intrinsic to Soviet genre cinema within the totalitarian regime functioned as a mechanism of artistic and political suppression. Socialist-realist genre cinema, the only type of filmmaking permitted during these repressive years, played a part in making genre cinema something to loathe. Unsurprisingly though, because of the censorious and repressive atmosphere of Stalinist culture, critical reactions to this period by

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<sup>17</sup> Scholarship on other common genres of the Stalinist period used for proletarian enlightenment includes Margolit (2002) on the reeducation film (*perevospitatel'nyi fil'm*) and Budiak (248-52) on the historico-biographical film (*istoriko-biograficheskii fil'm*).

<sup>18</sup> According to Taylor, other reasons for the film industry's underperforming include “financial, technical and political difficulties” within the cinema industry that prohibited Shumiatskii from constructing his dreamt-of Soviet Hollywood and Shumiatskii’s subsequent fall from Stalin’s grace (215-6).

either filmmakers or film critics are rarely found in the pages of cinema journals, which, like the movies covered in them, were state-run.

While film criticism written during Stalinism does not reveal filmmakers' negative reactions to genre cinema's varnished representations of reality, the drastic change in cinematic aesthetics following the totalitarian leader's death in March 1953, suggest filmmakers' desire to be free from censorious constraints. As the Stalinist freeze melted into the Thaw era and Stalin's cult of personality began to be deconstructed at the beginning of Khrushchev's reign, the strict, formulaic cinematic styles were retaliated against—both in official Soviet rhetoric and by the filmmakers themselves. Taylor contends that because the musical comedies of the 1930s and 1940s so perfectly visually articulated Stalinist-era ideological slogan, "Life has become happier, comrades, life has become more joyous," when the cult of personality around Stalin was beginning to be dismantled, Pyr'ev's films were referred to obliquely as an example of the type of filmmaking and mode of cultural production that needed to end ("Singing on the Steppes" 143-4). Citing Khrushchev's Secret Speech delivered at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, the event that many cultural historians cite as the onset of the Thaw, Taylor points out that Khrushchev denounced cinematic representations of a "varnished reality" of life in the countryside and at agricultural farms (143). In other words, Thaw-era politics align the Soviet musical with repressive Stalinist policies.

Genre cinema did not disappear under Khrushchev, nor did thematic and production plans, which were used to revitalize the industry after it had hit its nadir following World War Two.<sup>19</sup> Despite the continued hierarchical and bureaucratic production practices used throughout

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<sup>19</sup> From 1945-1950, approximately 19 films were made annually. In 1951 production hit an all time low; only 9 films were completed (Zemlianukhin and Segida *Domashniaia* 6).

the 1950s and up until the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Soviet cinema scholar Josephine Woll, in her characterization of post-Stalinist cinema, asserts that

[a]fter years of imposed aesthetic homogeneity, film-makers were able to explore a spectrum of artistic approaches. Instead of one way to depict objects and individuals on screen, they could choose a variety of ways; instead of a single, predictable and judgmental authorial stance, they could offer multiple perspectives. (*Real Images* 12)

Echoing the same sentiment, the encyclopedia *History of Russian Cinema (Istoriia otechestvennogo kino)* notes that although art production remained under a watchful censoring eye, the “relative liberalization woke up the *creative intelligentsia*’s initiative and energy unseen since, very likely, the 1920s” (Budiak 360; emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> The encyclopedia’s singling out the “creative intelligentsia” as having been resurrected during the Thaw and silenced under Stalin suggests that distinct groups of Soviet filmmakers flourished at distinct historical moments. Specifically, Budiak argues that the filmmaking intelligentsia was underrepresented, if not simply silenced under Stalin.

The broadened creative space occupied by this filmmaking intelligentsia, though short-lived, propelled Soviet cinema onto the international scene as early as 1958, when Mikhail Kalatozov’s *The Cranes are Flying* (*Letiat zhuravli* 1957), captivated audiences and critics across the Soviet Union and all the way to Cannes, where it won the grand prize, the Golden Palm.<sup>21</sup> It is also during this Thaw-era period that Soviet *auteur extraordinaire*, Andrei

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<sup>20</sup> “Однако даже весьма относительная либерализация разбудила невиданную, пожалуй, со временем 20-х годов инициативу и энергию творческой интеллигенции” (360).

<sup>21</sup> For an account of the significance of *Cranes* as a key moment in the negotiation of this “broadened creative space” see Condee, “Veronica Fuses Out.” See Woll (2003) for a summary of the events leading

Tarkovskii, made his first full-length feature film, *My Name is Ivan* (*Ivanovo detstvo* 1962). Spurred by what seemed to be increased freedoms, many other famous Soviet *auteurs* debuted in the mid-1960s. For example, Kira Muratova completed her first independent film, *Brief Encounters* (*Korotokie vstrechi*), and Aleksandr Askol'dov made his single feature film, *Commissar* (*Komissar*) in 1967. However, Muratova's film did not have much of an audience until 1987 and Askol'dov's film had none until 1988, when the two films were finally released after decades on the censor's shelf. If these films suggest a shift toward artistic leeway and the rise of the *auteur*, it is important to point out that the rise of the "creative intelligentsia"—to return to the encyclopedia's definition of filmmakers of this era—was far from permanent. The pendulum quickly swung far in the other direction and these narratively- and cinematically-complex films were put "on the shelf"—the euphemism used to describe the act of censoring a film by taking it out of circulation.

As Soviet culture entered into Brezhnev's Stagnation era, "the film world," as Woll puts it, "suffered depredations [...] that were largely invisible to the public" (*Real Images* 201). Woll offers a story about Sergei Paradzhanov's difficult fate as a filmmaker by way of example. Although the Kiev studio supported his 1965 script for what could only loosely be called a "war film" entitled *Kiev Frescos* (*Kievskie freski*), "Paradzhanov's 'self-indulgence' elicited accusations of formalism" (205). Woll continues: "[p]recisely what others admired—Paradzhanov's unique stamp, his patent 'authorship'—infuriated the authorities. They blocked *Kiev Frescos* [...], confiscated Paradzhanov's footage and destroyed all but some twenty minutes

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to the awarding of the Golden Palm to *Cranes are Flying* and for the film's reception domestically and abroad (1; 65-79).

of fragments” (205-6).<sup>22</sup> The increasingly repressive atmosphere beginning in the mid-1960s forced *auteurs* and the so-called creative intelligentsia into relative silence. Once again filmmakers were forced to privilege the state’s political goals over their individual artistic or aesthetic aspirations and to return to cinematic conventions that the Western scholar might associate with genre-driven cinema.

Thus, another peak in the active production of genre cinema occurs during the repressive cultural freeze that takes place during the two decades of Leonid Brezhnev’s rule known as the Stagnation era (1964-1985). Not wholly dissimilar from the Stalinist cinema, the nationalized industry under Brezhnev reinstated rigorous, authoritarian policies while simultaneously encouraging commercially successful popular culture.<sup>23</sup> Following these mandates, the cinema industry, overseen by Lev Kulidzhanov and Filip Ermash, the heads of the Filmmakers’ Union and Goskino respectively, repressed complex *auteur* films and demanded a return to a “movies for the masses” mentality. But the 1960s and 1970s were not the 1930s or 1940s. The repressive atmosphere of Stagnation was not as uniform as it had been three decades earlier.

The encyclopedia *History of Russian Cinema* describes the 1970s as a time when “Genres became, one might say, a no man’s land, towards which cinematographers willingly rushed and where they found great creative freedom” (Budiak 447).<sup>24</sup> While filmmakers during this period may have consciously oriented themselves toward genre, the encyclopedia is careful not to

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<sup>22</sup> For more on Paradzhanov’s continuous struggle with Soviet authorities and eventual imprisonment, see Katanian.

<sup>23</sup> Joshua First writes on the rise of film sociology during the early 1970s and its use to assess how Soviet audiences would receive particular types of films. He writes: “genre became a deciding factor in determining how films were targeted to specific audience groups” (337).

<sup>24</sup> “Жанры становились, так сказать, ‘ничейной’ территорией, куда охотно устремились кинематографисты, обретая здесь большую творческую свободу” (427).

comment too broadly. It notes that, “there were, of course, those who apologized for genre (although they apologized already less frequently)”; “[o]thers, [who] ran from genre, and worked in opposition to it”; and a “third group [that] calculatingly used genre elements in poly-genre structures” (447).<sup>25</sup> Genre filmmaking offered safe, predictable territory, within which directors were required to guess less at what was expected of them and, therefore, risk fewer wraths from the censors.

In October 1976 a group of film scholars gathered at the conference “The Problems of Genre at the Contemporary Moment of Soviet Cinema Development” organized by the Research Institute of Cinema Studies and History (NIIK) and the Screenwriting Editorial Board of Goskino.<sup>26</sup> The papers presented at this conference were published subsequently in 1979 under the title *Genres of Cinema (Zhanry kino)*. This resulting anthology, edited by Valerii Fomin, demands our attention insofar as it is the single Soviet publication that provides a sustained focus on film genre, even as the individual articles offer an array of points of view. The authors of these articles are self-consciously aware of the paradoxical call for a return to a type of filmmaking deprecated by the intelligentsia. In his introduction to the collection, Boris Pavlenok, who held the deputy director post of Goskino and in 1971 was responsible for shelving Aleksei German’s film *Trial on the Road (Proverka na dorogakh* 1971, rel. 1985), writes: “Of course, it is simple to label any popular film with the almost abusive epithet ‘commercial’ film” (9).<sup>27</sup> He goes on, though, to suggest that success must be measured not by box office figures,

<sup>25</sup> “Были, конечно, и те, кто извинялся за жанр (хотя извинялись уже реже). Другие бежали от жанра, творили в оппозиции к нему [...]. Третьяи расчетливо использовали жанровые элементы в полижанровых структурах” (447).

<sup>26</sup> “Проблемы жанров на современном этапе развития советского киноискусства.”

<sup>27</sup> “Конечно, проще всего обозвать любой популярный фильм почти ругательной кличкой: “коммерческое,” дескать, кино” (9).

but by the ability of films to teach audiences. He explains that “the task of film scholarship is the study of the nature of audiences’ attention to the most various films in order to hull the rational kernel, to prompt artists along the shortest and most sure path to the audience’s heart and mind” (9).<sup>28</sup> These studies will, he proposes, will help to lead the film industry in the right direction.

Dal' Orlov, who at the time was the editor of *Soviet Screen (Sovetskii ekran)* and a party member, echoes Pavlenok, but speaks more straightforwardly, without seed-hulling metaphors. He describes the necessity to understand the cinematographic process fully in order that all members of the cinema industry are able to participate in “an ideological battle on an international screen, but in general to accomplish those tasks that the party has placed before filmmakers as before energetic helpers in her ideological, moral, and aesthetic education of the people” (108).<sup>29</sup> Later in his article, Orlov, like Shumiatskii four decades earlier, explains that the “thematic perspectives that will be taking shape in Soviet cinema in the upcoming years are well known. They are directly related to the historical decisions and plans which were articulated at the 25<sup>th</sup> Congress of our party” (119).<sup>30</sup> Thus to be a Soviet filmmaker in the 1970s translates to serving the party in its goal to educate the masses.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Но задача киноведения—изучить природу внимания зрителей к самым разным фильмам, чтобы вылущить рациональное зерно, подсказать художникам кратчайший и наиболее верный путь к сердцу и разуму зрителя” (9).

<sup>29</sup> “[...] и более активное участие в идеологической борьбе на международном экране, а в целом— достойное выполнение тех задач, которые ставит партия перед кинематографистами как перед деятельными помощниками её в деле идейного, нравственного и эстетического воспитания народа” (108).

<sup>30</sup> “Тематические перспективы, которые намечаются в советской кинематографии на ближайшие годы, хорошо известны. Они непосредственно увязаны с теми историческими решениями и планами, которые были намечены на XXV съезде нашей партии” (119).

<sup>31</sup> For more on the pedagogical function of genre cinema during the 1970s, see Budiak (442-5).

The difficulty of fulfilling this ideological role comes through in Valentin Chernykh's contribution to the conference's papers. Chernykh, a scenarist, wrote about the "production film" as a new genre of the era. In his article, the main focus is on the positive hero, who should impart "social optimism" (278). In the middle of his contribution to the conference, buried quietly among the acceptable and expected political catch phrases of the day is a brief interlude that hints at the difficulty, even the potential danger, associated with producing genres for the state. Chernykh attempts to define Soviet cinema as *auteur* driven. He writes: "As it is generally known, our cinema is, on the whole, a directorial cinema" (271).<sup>32</sup> This statement, if understood as distinguishing Soviet cinema as directorial as opposed to genre-driven, would be, as has already been made clear, inaccurate: the production of Soviet cinema has in many historical instances been dictated by genre. However, because of what follows, Chernykh's comment might be better understood in another context. Chernykh continues to describe the difficulty—indeed, the danger—of making directorial, or *auteur*, cinema. In a bleak description of the director's artistic process, he explains that, "[a] director makes one film in three years in the best of situations. Our directors are therefore very afraid of making mistakes. To make a mistake is certainly for them really terrible: every failure is a trauma that lasts for several years"  
(271).<sup>33</sup> Although couched in the language of the artist's responsibility to his own craft, this admission of the fear experienced by directors hints at the repressive nature of filmmaking under Brezhnev. Thus, another way to read Chernykh's claim that Soviet cinema is directorial is to understand that the blame for ideological impurity is targeted at the director, making deviation

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<sup>32</sup> "Как известно, наш кинематограф—в основном режиссерский кинематограф" (271).

<sup>33</sup> "Режиссер ставит одну картину в три года, это в лучшем случае. Наши режиссеры поэтому очень боятся ошибиться. Ошибиться, наверное, им действительно страшно: каждая неудача—это травма на несолько лет" (271).

from acceptable narratives (wittingly or not) a potentially political and dangerous act. Moreover, to conclude, this fear, in part, results in the rush of directors back to genre filmmaking described above.

In *The Illustrated History of Soviet Cinema*, prominent Soviet film scholar Neya Zorkaya describes “a process of unofficial stratification [that] took place” as a result of these policies that demanded that filmmakers serve the state and limit their artistic experimentations. She explains:

One group [of directors] willingly abided by the law of Goskino, made “commissioned” films their superiors were sure to like, and thus earned “most favored nation [sic] treatment” as far as film shooting, funds, interesting trips, bonuses, awards, and other privileges were concerned. Alas, not only hacks but also some of [the] really gifted filmmakers who had begun successfully in the fifties and the sixties made their fatal choice. By doing so they gradually gave up their artistic positions. (269-70)

The so-called “commissioned” films adhere to the type of stylistic and narrative constraints associated with the conventions of genre cinema. In the eyes of the intelligentsia, among whom Zorkaya ranked highly, the Stagnation-era directors who succumbed to state pressure, were fearful (as Chernykh describes) and made conventional genre films relinquished their status as artist. As Zorkaya describes the other set of directors who steered clear of producing “hack” work for the state, her prejudice against the former and preference for the latter intensifies. She continues:

I will be concerned only with the opposite group—[those] searching and genuine artists who never betrayed their ideals and principles and who created immortal masterpieces [...]. Even in the seventies their names were known to many true

viewers, and they shine especially brightly now when the fresh winds of change have swept away the restrictions and bans. (270)

Zorkaya's point of view demonstrates a kind of solidarity with *auteur* directors, who because of their intellectual and poetic cinematic renderings were censored in various ways. Whereas Chernykh admits fear, Zorkaya admires the fearless. Methods used to assert control over filmmakers ranged in severity. On one end of the spectrum, directors were discouraged from making unconventional films simply by being marginalized, while their more compliant colleagues received greater remuneration and various bonuses, like the vacations mentioned by Zorkaya. On the grimmer, more repressive end of the spectrum, directors who strayed from the acceptable path of aesthetic simplicity and had their films pulled out of distribution and put on the proverbial shelf were often times themselves forced out of the filmmaking industry (e.g., Askol'dov) and, in the worst instances, even imprisoned (e.g., Paradzhanov).<sup>34</sup>

While one hardly wants to diminish or contradict the outrage that comes through in Zorkaya's decision to ignore the directors who sold-out, so to speak, and raise the martyrs onto a pedestal, it is unfair—and unproductive to this argument—to discredit all of Stagnation-era genre cinema as the work of government lackeys and hacks. Cinema as a mass art had a resurgence during Stagnation. While the high numbers of films made annually—approximately 150 films per year from 1965-1985—assured a sufficient supply of average-at-best films, there were also an incredible number of popular blockbusters.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, certain of the most popular, genre-

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<sup>34</sup> A collection of texts—documents, memoir accounts, and commentary—on film censorship can be found in *The Shelf (Polka)* edited by Fomin. See Condee (2009) for an analysis of Muratova's cinematography; see Taubman for a biographical overview of Muratova's career. A collection of letters written to Paradzhanov while he was imprisoned—*Sergei Paradzhanov: Letters to Prison (Sergei Paradzhanov: Pis'ma v zony)* provides an interesting memoir of this period of the director's life.

<sup>35</sup> Statistics on annual film production can be found in Zemlianukhin and Segida (*Domashniaia 6*).

driven blockbusters of Stagnation bore a distinct authorial stamp, thus making it difficult to maintain the dichotomy set forth at the beginning of this chapter (to reiterate: period of strict control is to genre cinema as period of relaxed control is to *auteur* cinema) or to accept Zorkaya's polar distinction of the two types of Stagnation directors.

Of particular importance to the era were comedies of Leonid Gaidai and El'dar Riazanov, whose films regularly broke box-office highs and were often the most watched films during the years of their release. For example, Gaidai's *Operation Y and Other Adventures of Shurik* (*Operatsiya Y i drugie prikliucheniia Shurika*), seen by over 70 million was the most popular film of 1965. Its sequel—*The Captive of the Caucasus or the New Adventures of Shurik* (*Kavkazskaia plennitsa ili novye prikliucheniia Shurika*)—had even greater viewership, 77 million according to Zemlianukhin and Segida, thus making it the most popular film of 1966 (186). Riazanov hit his stride in the mid-1970s with his New Year's comedy *Irony of Fate* (*Ironiia sud'by* 1975), which similarly garnered the most popular film title for 1976 and was seen by approximately 70 million Soviets (181). Aleksandr Prokhorov, in an article dedicated to these two kings of Stagnation comedy, explains that their peaks in popularity occur ten years apart because of the two directors' distinct and varied use of the comedy genre. He explains that "the neoconservative atmosphere of the Brezhnev era, with its emphasis on narrative genre cinema patterned on Stalinist models, was more productive for Riazanov, who made his two biggest blockbusters during the 1970s" ("Cinema of Attractions" 472). Gaidai's "comedy of attractions," as Prokhorov calls the director's predilection for slapstick gags, "disrupted the narrative flow [...] and undermined Soviet cinema's narrative tradition" (472), which he was able to do in the mid-1960s, but when "[i]n the 1970s [...] Soviet cinema abandoned both aesthetic and economic experimentation and returned to its neo-Stalinist narrative models,

Gaidai,” Prokhorov concludes, “had a difficult time adjusting to the new cultural values, while Riazanov became the prime comedy filmmaker of the [S]tagnation era” (472). Even in this summary of Prokhorov’s analysis of Gaidai’s and Riazanov’s comic techniques, it becomes clear that while genre cinema garnered great popularity, films produced within particular genre conventions also bore a distinct authorial stamp: Gaidai’s comedies are distinct from Riazanov’s. In fact, Riazanov is primarily identified with the genre that he raised, nurtured, and developed—the “sad comedy.”<sup>36</sup>

There are more films and more directors relevant here. For example, the prominent and immensely popular Stagnation author and director, Vasilii Shukshin, further complicates attempts to divide popular, genre-driven cinema and *auteur* cinema. Shukshin’s *Snowball Berry Red* (*Kalina krasnaia* 1973) is a melodramatic tale of Egor Prokudin (played by Shukshin), who returns to village life after serving his prison sentence, and struggles to reform himself into a good Soviet citizen. John Givens opens his article “Vasilii Shukshin and the ‘Audience of Millions’: *Kalina krasnaia* and the Power of Popular Cinema” with the following quotation taken from Vladimir Solov’ev: “A typical melodrama, a mass-market movie, a tear-jerker, a middle-class smash hit; that’s what’s behind the extraordinary popularity of *Kalina krasnaia* with the ‘average viewer’” (qtd. in Givens 268). This “typical melodrama” and “mass-market movie,” however, is not denigrated for its genre affiliations by Zorkaya, but rather lauded: in fact, Shukshin is among the directors that falls into the group she distinguishes as “searching and genuine artists” and *Snowball Berry Red* is one of two films she singles out as “the best film of the seventies” (the other is Tarkovskii’s *Mirror* [*Zerkalo* 1975]) (277). Thus, by the 1970s attempts to formulate clear distinctions between genre and *auteur* become increasingly muddled.

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<sup>36</sup> For an analysis of Riazanov’s “sad comedy,” see MacFadyen (2003).

Although genre cinema did indeed flourish during Stagnation, there can be no doubt that countless films were left unrealized precisely because it was primarily genre cinema—and no other—that was able to be made within this censorious atmosphere. At the cusp of the Stagnation and Glasnost eras in the mid-1980s, film directors—like much of the rest of Soviet society—sought to break free from the ideological freeze and cultural strictures that characterized Leonid Brezhnev’s rule in late Soviet history. The frustration with a repressive, fear-inducing cinema industry that forced directors to adhere to genre conventions—even if some of these genres films were made by *auteurs* and ranked among the most popular films of the era—came to a head at the Fifth Congress of the Russian Filmmakers (May 1986), held just three months after Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed his policy of Glasnost.<sup>37</sup> This Congress—referred to in the title of Faraday’s monograph as a *Revolt of the Filmmakers*—turned the tables on state control. The Filmmakers’ Union unseated the head of its organization, First Secretary Lev Kulidzhanov, a once respected Thaw-era director, who regressed into a typical party bureaucrat in order to satisfy state demands at the expense of directorial freedom, and elected Elem Klimov, a more sympathetic figure whose own film *Agony (Agoniia)* 1974; released 1985) had been censored under Kulidzhanov’s administration. This so-called revolution also took power away from the State Committee on Cinema, Goskino. Not only did Aleksandr Kamshalov replace Ermash in August 1986, but Goskino’s former authority was diminished as the Filmmakers’ Union asserted its autonomy (Christie 62).

Within the cinema industry, this “filmmakers’ revolt” marks the end of the Stagnation era and the onset of Perestroika, or rebuilding. Among the first orders of business following this restructuring of the industry was the establishment of a Conflict Commission, which worked to

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<sup>37</sup> Gorbachev announces the policy of Perestroika and initiates the Glasnost period at the 27<sup>th</sup> Party Congress held in February 1985.

release the hundreds of films that had been censored—or, put on the shelf—and also to curb the repressive censorship that had prohibited artistically experimental or critical films during Stagnation. This delayed release of hitherto confiscated films helped to resurrect *auteur* directors whose careers were initiated, but cut short, during the mid-1960s. For approximately a decade following this 1985 revolt, *auteur* cinema began to flourish and slowly overtake genre film as the dominant mode of production. Now again, as in the Thaw, the cultural liberation experienced during Glasnost prompted the movement away from genre and back to *auteur*. On the one hand, this late Soviet cultural thaw renewed Russian cinema's presence on the foreign festival circuit. However, on the other hand, economic hardship, inflation, decrepit theaters, out-of-date technology, and visually and narratively challenging films conspired to bring audience attendance to all time lows (Condee *Imperial Trace* 49-84). By 1996, approximately a decade after the industry's Glasnost-era reorganization, film production hit its nadir: only thirty-four full-length feature films were made (Zemlianukhin *Fil'my Rossii* 245).

## 2.2 POLITICAL FREEDOM, ECONOMIC TROUBLE, AND THE GENRE FILM

Since 2004, there has been an upsurge in film production, the construction of new multiplex theaters outfitted with Dolby sound and stadium seating. In an effort to fill these theaters, the post-Soviet Russian cinema industry—which includes the new profession of film producers alongside directors, actors, screenwriters, and critics—has begun to think about genre again. In its entry on post-Soviet film, the *History of Russian Cinema* acknowledges that “[g]enre cinema is returning at last.” It goes on to note that “[t]he skeptical attitude toward ‘low’ genres is gradually being replaced by the understanding of a simple truth: without some sort of base layer, national cinema—as an industry and as an art—may end up in reserves, which

will put it on the edge of disappearance” (Budiak 510).<sup>38</sup> Susan Larsen similarly characterizes the early 2000s when she describes it as “a decade punctuated by repeated calls—from critics, distributors, industry bureaucrats, and film directors themselves—to renounce auteurism in favor of entertainment” (“National Identity” 492). In short, the revitalization of the post-Soviet film industry depends on genre cinema.

However, now that the film industry is learning that genre cinema will help it to compete against the flooding of Russian movie theaters with American films, and although annual film production has doubled—increasing from an yearly average of fifty films per year from 1994-2003, to approximately a hundred films per year from 2004-2009—genre cinema continues to be ignored by the vanguard of the intelligentsia within the industry: that is to say, film critics continue to scorn genre cinema as insignificant and undeserving of their attention.

At the 2001 roundtable, “Director versus Producer” (*“Direktor protiv prodiusera”*), dedicated to an investigation of this relatively new industry relationship, film scholar Elena Stishova made the following scathing remarks of her colleagues:

The critics endlessly moan about how we need genre cinema capable of competing with and battling against the dominance of American cinema on our screens, etc. Voila! Finally, genre cinema, about which we’ve dreamt for so long, has appeared. [...] However, last summer at the Open Russian Festival in Sochi, the studio NTV-Profit showed seven new films. For the first time in the last decade it became clear: in our native land they have come up with, devised,

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<sup>38</sup> “Жанровое кино возвращается наконец [...]. Скептическое отношение к ‘низким’ жанрам постепенно сменяется пониманием простой истины: без подобного базового слоя отечественное кино—и как индустрия, и как искусство—может отказаться в резервации, что и поставит его на грань исчезновения” (510).

made, and offered the audience good or bad [*kakoi-nikakoi*], but a totally professional genre cinema. And what kind of the reaction came from the critics? By and large a negative one! (174)<sup>39</sup>

This attitude held by Russian film scholars has kept serious study of genre cinema to a minimum. Although the pages of scholarly journals dedicated to cinema are punctuated with genre labels—thus acknowledging that films conform to certain genre conventions—there are virtually no sustained studies of individual genres written by Russian scholars of post-Soviet cinema.<sup>40</sup>

Perhaps the greatest obstacle blocking the Russian intelligentsia's path to genre scholarship is their insistence on separating genre from *auteur*. The *History of Russian Cinema* wisely states on its final pages that “it has become clear that no uncrossable divide exists between *auteur* and entertainment projects; to the contrary, their interaction often leads to the appearance of great cinema, in which every viewer can find his interest” (Budiak 510).<sup>41</sup> It is precisely such a dividing line that the following study of the Russian buddy film intends to erase.

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<sup>39</sup> “Критика постоянно стенаёт, как нам нужен жанровый кинематограф, конкурентоспособный, который мог бы бороться с засильем американского кино на наших экранах и т.п. И вот появляется наконец то, о чем мы долго мечтали, — жанровое кино. [...] Тем не менее прошлым летом на Открытом Российском фестивале в Сочи студия «НТВ-ПРОФИТ» показала семь новых картин. Впервые за последнее десятилетие стало очевидно: в нашем отечестве придумали, изобрели, поставили и предложили зрителю какой-никакой, но вполне профессиональный жанровый кинематограф. Ну, и какова же реакция нашей критики? В основном негативная!” (174).

<sup>40</sup> It may be that the tide is just now changing. Sergei Lavrent'ev recently published a book on the western in Russian cinema—*Red Western* (*Krasnyi vestern* 2009)—suggests that an interest in discrete genres may be emerging.

<sup>41</sup> “Кроме того, становится очевидным, что между авторскими и зрительскими проектами не существует непереходимой границы, напротив, их взаимодействие нередко приводит к появлению большого кино, в котором каждый зритель может найти свой интерес” (510).

### 3.0 CHAPTER 2: A HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE RUSSIAN BUDDY FILM

Where does the post-Soviet Russian buddy film come from? Is there a first film that initiates this genre? Are there historical precedents, extra-filmic institutions, or political explanations that provide reason for its proliferation in the late 1990s and early 2000s? The genre's name suggests that it may be derivative of the American buddy film, which in its most typical examples pairs two male characters. What relationship might exist between the Hollywood buddy films and post-Soviet examples? These are the questions that will guide an examination of the Russian buddy film's history.

Much of the scholarship dedicated to the history of specific Hollywood film genres presents them as developing along a single teleological trajectory from nascent to mature. In his overview of scholarship on this topic, Rick Altman identifies two commonly used metaphors: one presents film genres as mimicking the human life cycle (i.e., going through periods of infancy, adulthood, death); the other metaphor, similarly anthropomorphic, compares a genre's changes over time to evolutionary progress (*Film/Genre* 21-22). Citing a litany of well-known genre critics, Altman convincingly demonstrates the critical propensity to describe Hollywood genres as though they were living entities. For example, he cites Thomas Schatz, who determines the historical moments in which the musical and the melodrama "come to age" in his monograph *Hollywood Genres* (189, 223; qtd. in Altman 21). Altman also references John Cawelti; in "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," Cawelti writes:

[o]ne can almost make out a life cycle characteristic of genres as they move from an initial period of articulation and discovery, through a phase of conscious self-

awareness on the part of both creators and audiences, to a time when the generic patterns have become so well-known that people become tired of their predictability. (200; qtd. in Altman 21)

Next, Altman quotes Jane Feuer; she, too, uses this anthropomorphic metaphor: “film genres, especially long-lived ones such as the Western and the musical, follow a predictable life cycle” (*Hollywood Musical* 88; qtd Altman 21). In this excerpt, Feuer is merely paraphrasing Thomas Schatz’s *Hollywood Genres* (which she indicates in a footnote); nonetheless Altman’s isolation of this line is fair insofar as Feuer follows the metaphor of maturation in her charting of the musical’s three dominant stages.<sup>1</sup>

In his cleverly titled article, “Shoot-Out at the Genre Corral: Problems in the ‘Evolution’ of the Western,” Tag Gallagher takes to task these genre critics who perpetrate this notion of life cycles and genre maturation. Focusing specifically on historical accounts of the westerns, Gallagher contends that “[e]very argument that evolution exists at all comes down not to evidence mustered through representative sampling but either to bald assertions or to invidious comparison between a couple of titles [...] selected specifically to illustrate the assertion” (203-4). In addition to claims of prejudiced evidence choices, Gallagher also criticizes life-cycle arguments for lacking sufficient acknowledgement of production and industry influences. Whereas Cawelti, Schatz, and the other critics under Gallagher’s scrutiny interpret genre evolution as the result of audience demand for innovation within conventions, Gallagher demands that genre historians turn their attention to everything from trade press to the effect a

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<sup>1</sup> Feuer asserts that “the backstage musical provides a textbook illustration of a genre’s *development* from a period of experimentation in which the conventions are established (1929-33) to a classical period during which a balance reigns (1933-53) to a period of reflexivity dominated by parody, contestation and even deconstruction of a genre’s native tongue” (90, my emphasis).

particular news event or fashion trend may have had not only on the western, but on all popular genres of the time (205-6). In summary, Gallagher concludes that “nothing suggests the western changed separately from film production as a whole” (208).

Altman similarly takes issue and finds fault with such teleological renderings of film genres explaining that

this tendency to subordinate history to continuity by restricting change to prescribed limits helps us to understand the sleight of hand whereby genre history can regularly be written without contradicting genre’s transhistorical nature. [...] Always contained, generic types are forever separated by the isolating action of a historical logic according to which genres can only unfold, but never mate or select. Genre history so eschews change that it resembles no other modern form of history. (22)

Echoing René Wellek and Austin Warren, who stress the evolving historicity of literary genres owing to the ever-changing quality of language, Altman acknowledges that as history, dominant ideologies, the cinema industry—any number of factors—change, a particular film’s genre categorization likely will change also. He describes the shifting landscape of genre categories in the following way:

[A]t any given time we find an unselfconscious mixture of terminology. With no way to distinguish among the terms, we regularly intermingle current and former genres, either in an adjectival or a substantival state. Lumped in the same sentence are films made under a genre-film regime and films subsequently assimilated to that genre; genres that once existed, that now exist, and that have not yet fully begun to exist; genre recently substantified and others still adjectival

in nature. [...] The usual response to such a dilemma is to walk quietly away.

(54)

Rather than avoid the treacherous terrain of genre, it will be more exciting to march boldly into it, all the while keeping in mind Altman's suggestion to consider film genre not as "the permanent *product* of a singular origin, but the temporary *byproduct* of an ongoing *process*" (54, emphasis in the original).

Responding to Gallagher's and Altman's calls to seek broader explanations for a film genre's transformation over time, this diachronic analysis of the Russian buddy film does not trace the genre's development from embryonic to fully-formed, nor does it seek to present an impenetrable taxonomy of the films relevant to this genre. Instead, it presents a mixture of diegetic and non-diegetic factors to contemplate why certain films, which are influential to the buddy film, are not equivalent to the buddy film, and why still others come closer to approximating the genre. This exploration into the Russian buddy film will highlight cultural politics and industry trends in order to make sense of the intermittent appearance of the buddy film in Soviet film history and its increased popularity beginning in the 1990s. Three historical periods will be isolated as particularly influential to the contemporary Russian buddy film. The first section concentrates on two Stalin-era films—the Vasil'ev Brothers' *Chapaev* (1934) and Leonid Lukov's *Two Warriors* (*Dva boitsa* 1943)—both of which feature military characters and the backdrop of war, but accentuate, albeit to varying degrees, the relationship of the two juxtaposed male characters.

A second set of films relevant to this historical overview hits the screens in the 1960s and features clusters of three young male protagonists. This group includes Aleksei Sakharov's *Colleagues* (*Kollegi* 1962), Aleksandr Zarkhi's *My Younger Brother* (*Moi mladshii brat* 1962),

Georgii Daneliia's *I Walk around Moscow* (*Ia shagaiu po Moskve* 1963), Mikhail Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys!* (*Do svidaniia, mal'chiki* 1964), and Marlen Khutsiev's *I am Twenty/ Lenin's Guard* (*Mne dvadtsat' let/ Zastava Il'icha* 1964/1988). The intimate collectives of young characters featured in these Thaw-era films struggle with the stringent demands and heroic legacy of the older, war-era generation. In their efforts to assert their independence and initiate their adult lives, the characters bond together. This focus on male friendship and frustration with one's contemporary milieu in these Thaw-era films is sustained as a dominant theme in later examples of the genre such as Andrei Smirnov's *Belorussian Station* (*Belorusskii vokzal* 1970), Vadim Abdrashitov's *Time of the Dancer* (*Vremia tantsora* 1997), Bakhtier Khudoinazarov's *The Suit* (*Shik* 2003), Aleskei Muradov's *Truth of the Shchelk* (*Pravda o shchelkakh* 2003), and Aleksandr Veledinskii's *Alive* (*Zhivoi* 2005).

Finally, the third set of influential films is the genre's namesake: the American buddy film. The boom of the American interracial cop buddy film in the 1980s coincides with two events relevant to this investigation of the buddy film's Russian roots. First: the rise of a video industry that provided the necessary technology to screen the influx of films on VHS imported from Western Europe and Hollywood into the Soviet Union. Bootleg tapes were so ubiquitous that the popular periodical *Soviet Screen* (*Sovetskii ekran*) began running a regular column dedicated to reviewing foreign films circulating in the Russian video café circuit. And, second: director Andrei Konchalovskii's temporary emigration to the United States, where, among other films, he made three buddy films—*Runaway Train* (1985), *Tango and Cash* (1989), and *Homer and Eddie* (1989). These two events intersect on the pages of *Soviet Screen*. Published reviews reveal that American buddy films were well-known to the mid-1980s Russian video audience

and suggest that Konchalovskii's specific success with the genre on the international festival scene gave the buddy film a certain cachet that helped it to acquire transnational status.

The following does not profess to be a detailed account of every cinematic example from the Soviet period that might qualify as a buddy film. As Feuer reminds her reader in her work on genre and television, “a genre is ultimately an abstract conception rather than something that exists empirically in the world” (1992 144). A point that Christine Gledhill affirms when she stresses that there are no “rigid rules of inclusion and exclusion” (60) for genres, which “are not discrete systems, consisting of a fixed number of listable items” (64). In as much as comprehensive inventory eludes us, it would be insufficient to presume that the contemporary buddy film appears all of the sudden fully formed. It does not. Without charting a developmental life history of the genre, this historical consideration of antecedents investigates three discrete influences.

### 3.1 FROM MENTORS TO BUDDIES

It is useful to take two Stalin-era Soviet war films—Georgii Vasil'ev and Sergei Vasil'ev's *Chapaev* and Leonid Lukov's *Two Warriors*—hostage. It will be revealing to interrogate whether these are genre turncoats; to cross-examine their allegiance to the war film; to assess whether they have crossed genre boundaries into buddy-film territory owing to their use of the masculine dyad; and to question whether it is possible for them to straddle innocuously between the two genre categories. Investigation of these films enlightens how neither the backdrop of war necessarily makes a film a war film, nor the use of two male protagonists automatically inducts a movie into the buddy-film genre. Of these films, only *Chapaev* has been described in scholarship as reminiscent of the buddy film owing to its use of the genre's standard

semantic feature—the male dyad.<sup>2</sup> This claim will be tested below. Although Lukov's *Two Warriors* has not been written about as a clear example of the genre, a thorough inquiry reveals that Mark Bernes and Boris Andreev's partnered lead role as frontline friends comes much closer to qualifying as Soviet antecedents to the post-Soviet buddy film.

At the ideological center of the Vasil'ev Brothers' Soviet classic *Chapaev* are two binaries.<sup>3</sup> First, as a film about the Civil War, *Chapaev* pits the Red Army against the White Army. Second, the film presents the relationship between the Red Army peasant commander, Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev (Boris Babochkin), and Red Army Commissar Furmanov (Boris Blinov) as a relationship between opposite character types. Furmanov tutors Chapaev via a series of lessons in an effort to replace his primitive, unreflective war strategies with a politically-minded approach. The pairing of these two men, distinguished from one another by their class origins and knowledge of Party politics, leads John Haynes in his monograph *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema*, to write that *Chapaev* “does contain certain elements of the classic ‘buddy’ movie” (163). He follows this statement with the qualification that the two lead male characters’ relationship is completely determined by “the consciousness/spontaneity dialectic,” thus marking it as a prototypical Stalinist socialist realist film (163).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Haynes, 163.

<sup>3</sup> The co-directors, Georgii Vasil'ev and Sergei Vasil'ev, worked together from 1928 through 1943 and adopted the pseudonym Vasil'ev Brothers (*Brat'ia Vasil'evy*), although they were not brothers, but simply shared the same last name.

<sup>4</sup> Katerina Clark defines the spontaneity/consciousness dialectic in her book *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* as the dominant structuring force of the socialist-realist master plot. The dialectic, as it functions in socialist-realist texts, symbolically renders the hero’s departure from a egocentric orientation (when his actions are not completely guided by political awareness) and shift towards a selfless, community-

Appearing on the big screen in 1934, the same year that socialist realism was formally pronounced to be the only Party-approved method of artistic production, *Chapaev*'s use of two juxtaposed characters is indeed couched in the tendentious mentor/disciple relationship that seeks to resolve the consciousness/spontaneity dialectic.<sup>5</sup> Furmanov, the mentor, functions in the film as a stabilizing agent to the disciple Chapaev, and leads him from a state of spontaneity to one of party consciousness. Acknowledgement of the characters' symbolic roles in this socialist-realist dialectic reveals very little about *Chapaev*'s relevance to the buddy film. Their juxtaposition fits into a larger context of Manichean binaries used in socialist realist narratives to delineate good from bad as clearly and as rudimentarily as possible. As Rostislav Iurenev argues in his exceptionally laudatory article written on the occasion of the film's thirtieth anniversary, the entire film is structured as a set of conflicts: “[a]t times these are antagonistic, irreconcilable conflicts that mark the principle line of the conflict between Reds and Whites, between the revolution and the counter-revolution. At times these conflicts are between friends, [they are] a

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minded, and politically conscious state, in which all actions are controlled and are directed toward the development of socialist society (15-22).

<sup>5</sup> Within a discussion of *Chapaev* Mikhail Iampolskii defines socialist realist cinema as “*simple* and *truthful*, insofar as it conformed to a specific version of reality that was deeply antimodernist. Socialist realism was a movement away from utopian, non-mimetic, antiplatonic modernism and toward the habitual and the traditional, toward the realistic (read: mimetic)” (emphasis in the original). (“Новое кино социалистического реализма, ассоциировавшееся с Чапаевым, было простым и правдивым, поскольку соответствовало определенному видению действительности, которая была глубоко антимодернисткой. Социалистический реализм был движением от утопического, немиметического, антиплатоновского модернизма к привычному и традиционному, ‘реалистическому’ (читай: миметическому).”

struggle for one another, a clash on the common path to a common goal” (13).<sup>6</sup> For this reason, it would be artificial to privilege Chapaev and Furmanov’s relationship above all other ideological binary relationships.

Another obstacle is a syntactic inequity: the buddy film places its characters on a horizontal axis in order to suggest a kind of equality between the characters; the socialist realist reeducation narrative—which is the context for Chapaev and Furmanov’s relationship—positions its characters on a vertical axis in order to highlight the positive hero’s transformation from a position of inferior spontaneity to one of superior political consciousness. Chapaev excels in battle and attains legendary status for leading his troops to victory, but he does so without fully understanding for whom and for what he is fighting. His actions are spontaneous, not informed. His failure to apprehend consciously the political ideology of the Red Army and the Bolshevik cause place him in a subordinate position to Furmanov, whose grasp of Party politics requires that over the course of the film he reeducate Chapaev according to Soviet doctrine and thus raise him up to the higher echelons of consciousness. Conversely, the characters of the buddy film do not develop. Positioned symbolically side by side, the characters’ mismatched sensibilities provide two competing perceptions of the world or two different representations of masculinity, which stand on equal footing and clash.

A third consideration that further complicates *Chapaev*’s association with the buddy film is the characters’ onscreen relationship: even if Haynes’ could argue that Furmanov and Chapaev’s relationship occupies the ideological center of the film, it does not occupy the visual regime to the same degree. Furmanov and Chapaev share the screen nine times, and in virtually

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<sup>6</sup> “Порой это конфликты антагонистические, непримиримые—как основная линия борьбы между красными и белыми, между революцией и контрреволюцией. Порой это конфликты между друзьями, борьба друг за друга, столкновения на общем пути к общей цели.”

every instance their proximity enables Furmanov to teach Chapaev another lesson.

Approximately 65 minutes into this ninety-minute film, the task at hand is accomplished: Chapaev has “graduated” into consciousness and Furmanov leaves. In other words, Furmanov’s role is effectively limited to one function—to reeducate Chapaev. When not engaged in this endeavor, Furmanov barely appears on screen, thus minimizing the potential to read these characters as true buddies, who, according to expectations set up by the genre, tend to share the screen.<sup>7</sup>

The film’s historical setting during the Civil War as well as its visual focus on battle present two additional stumbling blocks. Even if the syntactical configuration of the characters along a vertical axis or their minimal onscreen time together could be overlooked or historicized, it would remain necessary to polemicize with Russian film historians’ conventional wisdom that categorizes *Chapaev* as a historico-revolutionary film, and that proves to be a hard argument to win. The film begins *in media res* as Chapaev first pushes back White Army advances and then disciplines his troops. These establishing battle and battalion scenes characterize Chapaev as a valiant and authoritative leader. In *Russian War Films: Cinema on the Front 1914-2005*, Denise Youngblood labels *Chapaev* as the Soviet Union’s first combat film, a categorization that the film’s visual plan reinforces. Youngblood points out that the final thirty minutes (which is equivalent to the final third) of the film shifts to “long shots in longer takes that impart the *action* of open battle [...] very effectively” (Youngblood 41-2). The use of combat scenes as a framing device to open and conclude the film underscores the Vasil’ev Brothers’ visual commitment to the war film genre.

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<sup>7</sup> Neya Zorkaya notes that “Furmanov’s paternalism [is] somewhat overstressed by the plot” (1989, 132).

Moving from a description of the film's visual and narrative allegiance to the aesthetics of the war film to extra-diegetic considerations—specifically, to the cultural use of the film—the primary categorization of *Chapaev* as a war film only becomes clearer. The film was first released on 7 November 1934, the seventeenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Approximately two months later on 11 January 1935 the fifteen-year anniversary of Soviet cinema was celebrated. According to Nikolai Lebedev, Stalin wrote a speech to the workers of the cinema industry delivered at that event. In it Lebedev quotes Stalin as having written, “Soviet power waits for new successes from you; for new films that glorify, as *Chapaev* does, the greatness of historical action, the Soviet Union’s workers’ and peasants’ struggle for power” (qtd. in Lebedev 14).<sup>8</sup> Thus, Stalin presents the film as representative of battle and struggle (and not as a film about the relationship between two characters). An article appearing in *Pravda* the following day emphasizes this same focus: “We want to see dozens of *Chapaevs*—those about past battles, and those about today’s battles for socialism” (qtd. in Lebedev 14).<sup>9</sup> *Chapaev* as a film and as a symbolic cultural object acquires an excess meaning: not only does the cinematic narrative celebrate the Red Army’s victory in the Civil War, but the film itself is an iconic cultural object associated with the annual celebration of that victory and, furthermore, serves within propagandistic rhetoric to symbolize the ongoing revolution necessary to build socialism.

In contrast to *Chapaev*’s epic status as a historical and symbolic war narrative, Lukov’s *Two Warriors* about two Red Army soldiers stationed in Leningrad during the Blockade (9 September 1941 – 18 January 1943) concentrates on the characters’ intimate friendship. Like

<sup>8</sup> “Советская власть ждёт от вас новых успехов,—писал товарищ Сталин в приветствии работникам кино,—новых фильмов, прославляющих подобно Чапаеву величие исторических дел борьбы за власть рабочих и крестьян Советского Союза.”

<sup>9</sup> “Мы хотим видеть десятки Чапаевых—и о прошлых битвах, и о сегодняшних боях за социализм.”

*Chapaev*, *Two Warriors* was an instant success. However, in press about the film it is not Stalin's voice that bellows, but, instead, quieter testimonies of the film's significance. The twice-decorated "pilot-cosmonaut," G. Beregovoi, is featured in a column titled "Cinema in My Life" ("Kino v moi zhizni") that ran in *Soviet Screen*. In the column the pilot recollects how he loved the songs from *Two Warriors* a film he describes as being "about exactly those simple guys, just like those who surrounded me in the regiment" (7).<sup>10</sup> In another first-hand account published in the same edition of *Soviet Screen*, the actor Iurii Nikulin reminisces on the significance of film's songs. Nikulin describes that before his troop had seen the film, one guy, while in St. Petersburg, sat in the *Molodozhnii* theater and watched the film repeatedly in order to write down all the words to the songs. That soldier then returned to the front and as Nikulin puts it, "a few days later our unit was singing "Dark Night" and "Flatboats" (17).<sup>11</sup> He goes on to effuse: "For me, *Two Warriors* was the best film of all that I saw at the front" (17).<sup>12</sup>

Petr Cherniaev, who wrote the entry on Lukov's *Two Warriors* in the Russian film encyclopedia *The First Century of Our Cinema* (*Pervyi vek nashego kino*), labels it the film of the year (*film goda*) for 1943. He summarizes its attributes in the following passage:

[t]his film-ballad about soldiery friendship supported the warriors on the front [and] gave people in the rear hope for a victory. The good-natured *bogatyr'* Sasha from "Uralmash" and the lively Arkasha Dziubin [...] remained in the viewers memory not as film heroes, but as good friends. The film *Two Warriors* became a memorial to a gloomy time. [Moreover,] the people still sing the [film's] songs

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<sup>10</sup> "Два бойца [...] о таких же простых ребятах, как те, что окружали меня в полку."

<sup>11</sup> "Через несколько дней вся наша батарея пела 'Темную ночь' и 'Шаланды, полные кефали.'"

<sup>12</sup> "Для меня *Два бойца* были лучшим фильмом из тех, что я видел на фронте."

by Nikita Bogoslovskii—“Dark Night” and “Flat Boats”—sixty years after the film’s release. (330)<sup>13</sup>

Not only did the film’s songs remain popular for decades after its original release, but, also like *Chapaev*, the film was restored in 1963, suggesting its sustained relevance and favored status among viewers. Although the film is about two frontline soldiers, although it was watched at the front, although it was inspirational to the audiences, *Two Warriors* unlike *Chapaev* was not celebrated as war movie. Lukov’s *Two Soldiers*, though eminently popular, was repeatedly criticized for failing to portray the war realistically and to fulfill the articulated propagandistic function of the war genre at this time.

On 22 June 1941, without prior declaration of war, German troops poured across the Soviet frontier. The sudden onset of full-scale war was devastating: by September 9<sup>th</sup> of the same year Leningrad was encircled and under siege. Ten days later on 19 September 1941 Kiev fell to the German occupation. Despite these devastating losses, the Stalinist regime managed to mobilize the society and economy for the purposes of war. The film industry was a small but not insignificant part of this total mobilization. In addition to the more than 3.5 million meters of documentary newsreel made during the war years (Kenez 1995 163), Soviet filmmakers, who had been relocated to Central Asia, made seventy films between 1942 and 1945 (166).<sup>14</sup> Peter

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<sup>13</sup> “Эта кинобаллада о солдатской дружбе поддерживала бойцов на фронте, давала людям в тылу надежду на победу. Добродушный богатырь Саша с ‘Уралмаша’ и заводной Аркаша Дзюбин [...] остались в памяти зрителей не как киногерои, а как хорошие знакомые. А фильм ‘Два бойца’ стал памятником суровому времени. [Более того,] песни Никиты Богословского ‘Темная ночь’ и ‘Шаланды, полные кефали’ народ поет и через 60 лет после выхода фильма.”

<sup>14</sup> The impossibility of making films in the war-torn cities of Leningrad and Moscow necessitated the studios move to Central Asia. In his book *Cinema and Soviet Society: 1917-1953*, Peter Kenez writes: “The Central Asian cities of Tashkent, Ashkhabad, Stalinabad, and especially Alma-Ata, which became

Kenez writes that of those seventy feature-length films, “forty-nine films took place in the present” moment of the war, and “all of these were made with the explicit purpose of shoring up morale, and therefore can be considered propaganda films” (166).

Lukov’s *Two Warriors* is among the films highly criticized for being “undistinguished, ineffective, [...] and for failing to show the face of the battle and the scale of the struggle” (Kenez 1992 196). Even the celebrated director Vsevolod Pudovkin, who, according to Youngblood, “was commissioned to write a glowing review” (76), expressed doubt (within an otherwise laudatory article) regarding Lukov’s adherence to the aesthetics of the war film. In a review published in *Pravda* in October, 1943, Pudovkin wrote: “There are certain shortcomings in the film. The authors shoot the battle scenes somewhat naively. The Germans, for example, attack in the film as a dense mass and fall as entire units after the first round of a Soviet machine gun” (4).<sup>15</sup>

Lukov’s film replaces militaristic bravado and demonizing portrayals of the enemy typically expected of a war movie with the tender friendship between its two lead characters. The film does not construct a strong sense of the “us” (read: heroes) versus “them” (read: villains) binary typical of the war film, nor does it situate its two central characters into the mentor-disciple relationship. Rather, it attends to solidarity within the Soviet troops thanks to its atypical focus on the two protagonists, a seaman from Odessa, Ukraine and a blacksmith from the Russian Ural Mountains, who overcome ethnic differences in their shared fight for the Soviet Union. Youngblood explains that “[b]y mid-1943, after the Soviet victories at Stalingrad and

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the headquarters of Mosfil'm and Lenfil'm, became filmmaking centers, and the studios in the Caucasus, Tbilisi, Baku, and Erevan acquired new importance” (192).

<sup>15</sup> “В картине имеются отдельные недостатки — боевые эпизоды сняты авторами несколько наивно. Немцы, например, наступают в фильме густой толпой и покорно падают всем подразделением от первой очереди советского пулемёта.”

Kursk, the cinematic focus shifted [...] to Red Army [...] soldier-centered combat films [that] closely conformed to the Hollywood style” (75). She goes on to write that *Two Warriors* is “important as the paradigm for the comrades type of combat film, focusing on the bonding that occurs between frontline soldiers” (75). Youngblood identifies this “comrades type of combat film” as a unique variety of the Soviet war film. Anatolii Volkov, who wrote the entry on the film in the encyclopedic collection of articles, dedicated to the masterpieces of Russian cinema—*Russian Illusion* (*Rossiiskii illuzion*)—shares this opinion. He expresses a certain amount of surprise that the film did not accurately fit into any of the established genre categories of the time. Volkov writes: “It is curious that the film did not receive from film historians a precise genre definition. Probably, the film can be called a ballad about soldierly friendship” (222-3).<sup>16</sup>

Whether the film *Two Warriors* is labeled “a ballad about soldierly friendship” as Volkov and Cherniaev do, or a “comrade type of combat film” as Youngblood does, or a “buddy film” as I contend, is insignificant. The actual words used to label the film as belonging to a particular category or genre type are inconsequential: you say ballad about soldierly friendship; I say buddy film; we’re saying the same thing. There exists implicit consensus that *Two Warriors* does not fulfill the expectations of a 1940s Soviet war film. It fails to fulfill the propagandistic function of the war film in 1941, by attends to a different ideological demand: the portrayal of the Soviet Union as a “multi-national” empire bound by friendships among people with various ethnic heritages.

As Peter Kenez explains in *Cinema and Soviet Society: 1917-1953*,

The USSR was a multinational empire, and this fact presented dangers and difficulties to the propagandists. The Nazis indeed attempted to take advantage of the existing national

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<sup>16</sup> “Любопытно, что фильм так и не получил у историков кино четкого жанрового определения. Скорее всего, его можно назвать балладой о солдатской дружбе.”

hostilities and jealousies. It was the task of the Soviet opinion makers, therefore, to parry the danger. A part of this effort was the studios turning out products about the “friendship of peoples.” (200)

This is precisely what *Two Warriors* accomplishes. The friends, Arkasha the Odessa seaman and Sasha the Russian blacksmith, suggest Lukov’s recognition of shifting propagandistic demands and the imperative to portray changing social habits and institutions of Soviet life. The Ukrainian and Russian come together in the film, depend on each other, and fight, it seems, to save each other just as much as to defend their shared Soviet homeland. Significantly, though, Lukov does not limit the juxtaposition of his characters to a depiction of two men from two different ethnic heritages. He also highlights the two characters’ contrasting physiques and personalities, thus enhancing precisely the type of dichotomy typical of the buddy film’s male dyad. Film historian and critic Mark Zak acknowledges this characterological opposition in his contribution to the *History of Soviet Film* encyclopedia (*Istoriia sovetskogo kino*). Zak describes the actors and their roles in the following way: “B. Andreev and M. Bernes played the lead roles. The heroes of the film were dissimilar: the enormous, relatively patient, and in appearance good-natured ‘Sasha from Uralmash’ and the temperamental, irascible chatterbox and wisecracker Arkadii Dziubin” (63).<sup>17</sup>

This description, based on the difference inherent in the lead male roles’ characterization, can be taken even further. Arkadi, played by renowned actor and *estrada* singer Bernes, appears as a slick, handsome, extroverted crooner, who wanders among the wounded soldiers of

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<sup>17</sup> “В главных ролях снимались Б. Андреев и М. Бернес. Герои фильма были несхожи—огромный, терпеливый до поры до времени, с виду добродушный ‘Саша с Уралмаша’ и темпераментный, вспыльчивый, говорун и острослов Аркадий Дзюбин.”

his troop singing consoling songs.<sup>18</sup> He represents the typical Odessite. As the local entertainer, Arkadi swaps his machine-gun for a guitar, but as a Soviet military man, he just as easily exchanges the musical instrument for his weapon. Sasha, Arkadi's broad-shouldered and round-faced Russian counterpart, is far less savvy. Though also a skillful fighter, Sasha appears as a bumbling clod. While his stocky physique suggests his military skill, his personality is marked by boyish innocence: he sadly sits down to write a letter home to his "mama"; he awkwardly fumbles in front of Tasia, the girl he likes; and he stubbornly pouts when he incorrectly assumes that Arkadi is trying to "steal" Tasia from him. Like all characterological dyads in the buddy film, Lukov structures his by means of contrast: whereas Arkadi is a thin, handsome man, Sasha is chubby and brutish; and whereas Arkadi's personality is marked by his quick wit, Sasha's cognitive capabilities are dull.

Furthermore, it is not simply these characterological differences, but also Lukov's consistent effort to structure the film to emphasize both this opposition and the vital connection between the two men. For example, the characters' names in their respective diminutive forms, which are used throughout the film, suggest their bond: Sasha from Uralmash and Arkasha.<sup>19</sup> The rhyming effect—as in Tweedledum Tweedledee or Dobchinskii Bobchinskii, the brothers of Nikolai Gogol's *Inspector General* (*Revizor* 1836)—aurally demands that the characters be considered as a pair. Furthermore, Sasha and Arkasha constantly share the screen (See Figures

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<sup>18</sup> The Ukrainian Mark Bernes was first and foremost an *estrada* singer, who later became a celebrated Soviet actor in adventure and military films. He made his film debut in the movie *Convicts* (*Zakliuchennye*, 1936) and later appeared in, among others, the 1939 picture *Fighter Pilots* (*Istrebiteli*), which became the most popular movie of 1940 (MacFadyen 2002 172), and in the postwar movie *Far From Moscow* (*Daleko ot Moskvy*, 1950), for which he received the Stalin Prize (175).

<sup>19</sup> This rhyming effect is even greater in the original Russian because the Uralmash becomes *Uralmasha*, with a concluding "a," because of the genitive ending required in this construction.

1-2). Even when the two soldiers go off to fight in different battalions, the film continues to forge their connection, by showing each thinking and speaking of the other.



Figure 1: Sasha and Arkasha in *Two Warriors*



Figure 2: Tasia sits between Sasha and Arkasha in *Two Warriors*

Finally, in its Russian instantiation, the buddy film employs average male characters, not legendary heroes. These ordinary men are used to voice concern, frustration, or apathy with their contemporary milieu, rather than to celebrate or herald a historical achievement. *Chapaev* works as a panegyric to the Civil War commandeer: if the historical figure, Chapaev, was already a hero, then Furmanov's novel and the immensely popular film turned him into a legend. *Two Warriors'* depiction of Sasha and Arkasha does not concentrate on their heroism, though the film is also not without mention of it. Of particular distinction in the film are comments that question why and for what they fight. For example, Sasha asks "For whom is war for?"<sup>20</sup> Film critic Oleg Kovalov, speaking to a Russian audience on Radio Svoboda, explains that this comment is particularly unexpected in a film made during the war and points out that from 1941 to 1943, up until the Battle of Stalingrad, there was a short "Thaw" period within the Stalinist era.

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<sup>20</sup> "Для кого война?"

The concept of the “Thaw” entered solidly into the consciousness of people who study the history of Soviet culture. Everyone knows: the “Thaw” is the Khrushchev epoch, the time when the de-Stalinization of culture, science, and art happened; a time of hope, a time of changes. However, few know that in our country’s life there was one other “Thaw,” which was a less famous phenomenon, and a less studied one, but no less interesting. This Thaw happened in our society from 1941 to 1943. [...] During the beginning period of the war from 1941-43, amazing films were made, but the majority of them were shelved. Later, when the Battle of Stalingrad began and the turning point of the war was clearly marked, control over cinema was severely strengthened and the development of art went down a different channel. The film *Two Warriors* by Leonid Lukov appeared during the significant year of 1943. It was a film that was a natural phenomenon, a phenomenon of this war-era Thaw.<sup>21</sup>

Richard Stites, though without directly referencing the Thaw, similarly presents the wartime experience as a brief liberal period during which political culture “reached an according

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<sup>21</sup> “В сознание людей, которые занимаются историей советской культуры, прочно вошло понятие ‘оттепель.’ Каждый знает: ‘оттепель’ – это эпоха Хрущева, это время, когда произошла десталинизация культуры, науки, общества искусства, это время надежд, время перемен. Однако мало кто знает, что в жизни нашей страны была еще одна ‘оттепель,’ куда менее известное явление, куда менее изученное, но не менее интересное—это оттепель, которая произошла в нашем обществе с 41-го по 43-й годы. [...] В начальный период войны с 41-го по 43-й год были созданы удивительнейшие картины, большинство из которых были положены на полку. Позже, когда наступила Сталинградская битва, и перелом в войне был четко обозначен, контроль за кинематографией был жестко усилен, и развитие искусства пошло уже по иному идеиному. Фильм "Два бойца" Леонида Лукова, он появился в знаменательном 43-м году. Это был фильм—явление закономерное, явление военной оттепели.”

with the Orthodox church”; the “land—its rivers, steppes, meadows, birch trees, and endless forests—was woven into wartime culture by means of nature symbolism”; and public culture saw the reemergence of “personal life, intimate feelings, a deep emotional authenticity, and even quasi-religiosity that had been absent from [...] the ‘optimistic’ thirties” (100). Stites’s mention of emotive landscapes, authenticity, and personal life resonates with standard descriptions of the Soviet Union’s Thaw-era.

Kovalov and Stites thus encourage a nuanced historical consideration of Stalinism that recognizes shifting cultural politics during the war. By doing so, once again we are forced to acknowledge factors external to the film in order to make sense of it and its possible genre affiliations. That Kovalov characterizes this brief two-year period, as a short, foreshadowing of the Thaw that begins full-force in the post-Stalinist era, helps us to make sense of Lukov’s somewhat anachronistic and anomalous *Two Warriors* as a precursor of the buddy film. Unlike other well-known films of 1943 (e.g., Fridrikh Ermler’s *She Defends the Motherland [Ona zashchishaet rodinu]*, Boris Ivanov and Aleksandr Stolper’s *Wait For Me [Zhdi menia]*, and Mark Donskoi’s *Rainbow [Raduga]*), *Two Warriors* deviates from the standard use of hyperbole (whether in its depiction of heroes or villains), preferring, instead, to focus on average characters stuck in the boring, monotonous, and lonely space of the battlefield. By categorizing this film as reflecting Thaw-era aesthetics, rather than reigning Stalinist aesthetics, it makes sense that Arkasha and Sasha are aligned on a horizontal axis, in order to emphasize their equality (rather than the vertical axis typical of Stalinist socialist realist films obsessed with *stremlenie*—or striving—to reach new heights), particularly because this type of horizontal relationship will be stressed both in Thaw-era buddy films (e.g., *Colleagues*, *My Younger Brother*, and *Goodbye, Boys!*) and in post-Soviet examples (e.g., *Cuckoo*, *Lover*, and *The Suit*).

Whether or not it is appropriate to label *Two Warriors* the first Soviet buddy film raises a host of problems and questions. The first, and most obvious, is the difficulty to be certain that some other earlier film might not be similarly relevant. It is not advantageous to deny this possibility. The second problem derives from the complicated tautological notion of genre. Many scholars, Andrew Tudor among them, have noted the conundrum that results from attempts to isolate all the films belonging to an individual genre; Tudor writes:

To take a genre such as a western, analyze it, and list its principal characteristics [...] we must first isolate the body of films that are westerns. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the ‘principal characteristics,’ which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. That is, we are caught in a circle that first requires that the films be isolated, for which purpose a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films. (5)<sup>22</sup>

In his article “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach,” Altman concedes that genres may arise in any number of ways and it is quite possible for a “genre’s characteristic semantic configuration [to be] identifiable long before a syntactic pattern has become stabilized” (1984 34). Insofar as Lukov’s film stands out as a historical anomaly that emerged during a brief period of cultural liberalization, previous attempts to assign it to a genre try to make sense of it from the point of view of the standard Stalinist war film. By acknowledging its divergence from the war film, and thanks to a retrospective glance aware of the buddy film, Lukov’s film can be made sense of anew. It does display the buddy film’s standard semantic configuration, to reiterate Altman, despite the fact that these patterns only become stabilized in the 1960s.

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<sup>22</sup> Other scholars to point out this quandary of genre identification include Wellek and Warren (260) and Buscombe (13).

Films often absorb more than one genre tradition. Perhaps they all do.<sup>23</sup> The particular combination of the buddy and war films in the Russo-Soviet context provides for a unique visual space where unlikely allegiances form between the central characters. In the post-Soviet period this narrative strategy proliferates in such contemporary buddy films from the mid-1990s and early 2000s as Sergei Bodrov Sr.'s *Prisoner of the Caucuses* (*Kavkazskii plennik* 1996), Aleksei Balabanov's *War* (*Voina* 2002), Aleksandr Rogozhkin's *Cuckoo* (*Kukushka* 2002), and Dmitrii Meshkiev's *Our Own* (*Svoi* 2004). As in *Two Warriors*, these films test the patriotic myths associated with war—most notably, the vainglory associated with military service and one-sided heroic justifications for war.

### 3.2 THAW-ERA BUDDIES: YOUNG, DIVERSE, AND MOBILE

Almost immediately following Stalin's death (5 March 1953) literary figures began to chip away at the varnished, conflict-free representations of Soviet history and the one-dimensional, uber-positive heroes typical in the literature of Zhdanov-era high Stalinism. Two exemplary texts to signal this thematic and representational shift are Vladimir Pomerantsev's essay "On Sincerity in Literature" ("Ob iskrennosti v literature") published just months after Stalin's death in the December 1953 issue of *New World* (*Novyi mir*) and Il'ia Erenburg's novel *The Thaw* (*Ottepel'* 1954), after which the post-Stalinist decade is named. When, at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956, Khrushchev delivered his famous "secret speech"

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<sup>23</sup> See Janet Staiger for a convincing argument that any notion of a pure genre is fallacious. Looking back at the Fordian era of Hollywood film production, Staiger traces the theoretical arguments and difficulties that have muddled attempts to create complete and unchallenged categories of films.

deriding Stalin's cult of personality and acknowledging the horrific crimes committed under his reign, the process of de-Stalinization officially began.

Stites, writing on popular culture responses to these events, describes a “euphoria that gripped the younger generation,” whose desire for personal expression led them to reject the collective-ethos of their parents’ generation (123). While literature responded to the new cultural climate almost immediately, cinema, owing to the cost and collective nature of its production, reacted more slowly. Only five to ten films were being made annually in the early 1950s, and those remained distant and unrelated to contemporary issues (Stites 139). By the mid- and late 1950s, when films that have become emblematic of the period (e.g., Mikhail Kalatozov’s *The Cranes are Flying* [*Letiat zhuravli* 1957], Grigorii Chukrai’s *Ballad of a Soldier* [*Ballada o soldate* 1959]) began circulating not only throughout the Soviet Union, but internationally as well, cinema caught up with the new aesthetics of the Thaw. Stites describes the Thaw cinema as “demonumentalized” and explains that it, like literature, shifted away from the grand historical narratives typical of High Stalinism to stories told on an intimate and human scale (139). In his article “The Adolescent and The Child in the Cinema of the Thaw,” Alexander Prokhorov similarly identifies “anti-monumentalism” to be “the most important visual manifestation of de-Stalinization” and points to the new focus on adolescent characters, who replace Stalinist larger-than-life heroes, as evidence of this shift in Thaw-era cinema (115).

Prokhorov describes this new hero’s role in various genres, among them the family melodrama, which he considers the key genre of the period. Responding to Katerina Clark’s analysis of the myth of the great family in Stalinist culture, Prokhorov explains that the Thaw “reinvented the nuclear family as the community of the rejuvenated Soviet culture that opposed the monumental ‘great family’ of Stalinist culture” (116). However, he qualifies the notion of

“nuclear” when he writes: “the family melodrama usually favoured communities larger than just the nuclear family, but smaller than the great Soviet family” (116). The two texts isolated to provide evidence of this claim—Lev Kulidzhanov and Iakov Segel’s film *The House I Live in* (*Dom, v kotorom ia zhivu* 1957) and Vasili Aksenov’s novel *A Ticket to the Stars* (*Zvezdnyi billet* 1961)—do indeed portray small intimate communities, but, because the central group of characters are not families, certain questions arise in relationship to genre. In particular, how well does Aksenov’s novel qualify as a family melodrama and, moreover, when director Aleksandr Zarkhi converts the novel for the screen (an adaptation that Prokhorov oddly does not consider in his article dedicated to Thaw-era cinema) does a focus on family relationships remain central?

Prokhorov identifies the two brothers of Aksenov’s novel—Dimka and Viktor—as its heroes in order to demonstrate that although the Thaw’s use of the nuclear family may initially present characters as fraternally bonded, and, therefore, organized along a horizontal axis (suggesting their ideological parity), conclusions tend to position the heroes into a vertically oriented mentor-disciple relationship reminiscent of (though not synonymous with) earlier, Stalinist-era socialist realism (117). In short, Prokhorov argues that Aksenov’s novel, as well as Kulidzhanov and Segel’s film, continue to favor a positive hero, who, like all Soviet positive heroes, learns to follow the correct route toward the construction of communism. Prokhorov may be correct in reading Aksenov’s conclusion as returning to vertically structured ideological relationships. When the older brother, Viktor, dies in an experimental space program, the younger brother, Dimka, leaves behind his childish desires to reject responsibility and seeks to follow, if only metaphorically, his brother’s path upward to the stars.

However, Prokhorov overstates the range and prominence of the family melodrama in Thaw culture when he includes Aksenov's *novel* within his analysis of adolescents in *cinematic* genres. The problem is not solved if we simply substitute Prokhorov's analysis of the novel with Zarkhi's adaptation, because the bulk of the film text focuses not on the brothers, but instead highlights the varied and distinct personalities of Dimka and his two friends, Alik and Iurii, who flout conventions by refusing to enroll in some sort of university study or find jobs and leave Russia for a summer adventure in the Estonian capital of Tallinn. It is this narrative line that becomes dominant in Zarkhi's cinematic adaptation of the novel.<sup>24</sup> The film's visual regime focuses first and foremost on the collective of friends, and not, as Prokhorov states of the novel, on the brothers' relationship. Despite the revised title of Zarkhi's film—*My Younger Brother* (*Moi mladshii brat* 1961)—which suggests the foregrounding of the fraternal relationship, the title functions more as a reminder of this relationship, which, in fact, becomes secondary, if not tertiary. Whereas the novel employs the elder brother as the first-person narrating voice, both his voice and his image fade away in the film.

Dimka's older brother, Viktor, functions as a synecdoche for the entire older generation in the film, against which the young heroes rebel. At twenty-eight years old, Viktor follows a prescribed path to success. His traditionalism is visually manifest in his sartorial style—his nondescript suit symbolizes conservative values—and ideologically suggested by his desire to defend his dissertation and thus inscribe himself within a sanctioned intellectual community. Although the film establishes the contrast between Dimka and Viktor in its opening scenes, when the two brothers argue about Dimka's plans to set off on an adventure, Viktor, and by metaphorical extension the entire older generation, is given minimal on-screen time in the film's

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<sup>24</sup> Andrei Shemiakin also notes this shift away from a focus on the brothers and toward the relationship among the friends in Zarkhi's adaptation (159).

remaining hour-and-a-half. The visual brush off that Zarkhi gives to Viktor underscores the film's desire to portray the younger generation's rejection of their older role models. Rather than privilege the biological brothers, Zarkhi favors the friendship among the three young buddies to construct a relationship situated along a horizontal axis.

Representatives of the *stiliagi* generation, these young heroes dress casually, speak using slang and jargon, and seek pure experience. As Stites points out, Aksenov's portrayal of youth in *Ticket to the Stars* demonstrates that the "decent and loyal youngsters [were by this time] tired of *kvass* [sic] patriotism, official bombast, and village-style surveillance by the neighbors of their clothing, their morals, and their leisure habits" (127). The same emphasis is foregrounded in the film, which opens with the three adolescents gathered in the courtyard of their apartment complex. This public space setting brings the boys into contact with other, older inhabitants of the building, who criticize their lackadaisical habits. As is typical of the buddy film, the masculine triad at the center<sup>25</sup> of the film's narrative is comprised of diverse characters. Aleksandr Zbruev plays Dimka, a strikingly attractive tall, svelte, rather macho character, who wins Galia's attention and then breaks her heart several times over the course of the film. Alik Kramer (Oleg Dal'), the intellectual, hopes to become a screenwriter. His dark hair and complexion distinguish him from his blond Slavic friends, as do his scrawny body, glasses, and rather esoteric passion for the music of Johan Sebastian Bach and modern architecture. The famous Andrei Mironov plays the third character in this trio, Iurii, in one of his first cinematic roles.<sup>25</sup> Iurii stands out because of his childish, slightly chubby physique and rather shy and endearing personality. He, like Dimka, wins the affection of a young woman; but whereas Dimka easily replaces Galia with a local *kolkhoznitsa*, Iurii's fidelity to his Estonian girlfriend

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<sup>25</sup> Mironov had his debut in cinema a year earlier, in 1961. He played a secondary role in Iulii Raizman's film, *And if This is Love? (A esli eto liubov'?)*, about a young couple's prohibited romance.

reflects the two characters' distinct personalities. Significantly, Alik maintains his bachelor status throughout the film, thus exemplifying the characters' differences via their individual relationships to the opposite sex.

*My Younger Brother* is only one of many Thaw-era films to feature an adolescent characterological triad. Aksenov's earlier novel *Colleagues* (*Kollegi* 1959), which director Aleksei Sakharov adapted to film at Mosfil'm studios in the same year as Zarkhi made his adaptation, also portrays three young men, who, having just finished their educations, enter into their independent lives. Another three films made at Mosfil'm during this same period that contain these same stylistic and narrative features are Daneliia's *I Walk around Moscow*, Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys!*, and Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard/I am Twenty*.<sup>26</sup> Andrei Shemiakin, in specific reference to *Colleagues* and *My Younger Brother*, but within a larger argument about the new focus on youth in Thaw literature and cinema, comments that "comradeship was the buzzword of the age, of the time period when children of the war grew up, raised on the local, criminal laws of the street" (161).<sup>27</sup> In her monograph *Real Images: Soviet Cinema and the Thaw*, Josephine Woll describes the collectives of characters that represent this sense of "comradeship." She writes, they "feature the typical quartet of three boys and a girl. [...] Each trio of boys consists of one idealist, one 'cynic' and a cypher as the third, barely fleshed-out character" (155). Woll

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<sup>26</sup> *Lenin's Guard* was shot in 1961. However, the censors, who found fault with its lack of optimism and inability to teach either the film's heroes or its viewer how to live, prohibited its release. In 1964 a severely altered remnant of the film was released under the title *I am Twenty* (*Mne dvadtsat' let*). The restored full-length original was finally shown on screen at the 17<sup>th</sup> Moscow International Film Festival in 1987 during a special screening (Zorkaia 2005, 391), and was subsequently released the following year. For a detailed account of the film's tumultuous history see Khloplianina.

<sup>27</sup> "[T]оварищество было паролем эпохи, времени, когда выросли дети войны, воспитанные дворовыми, блатными законами улицы."

begins to address the heterogeneity of the characters when she notes the standard mishmash of personalities represented in these films, but she fails to note the visual differentiation of the protagonists, and, moreover, she overlooks the other films that feature the same typical character constellations. As in *My Younger Brother*, each of these Thaw-era buddy films features one dark-haired and two light-haired characters. Variation between stocky and skinny physiques, boyish and manly facial features, and informal and formal styles of dress visually mark the characters' individuated personalities. In short, diversity of appearance plays a role in the combination of the central characters in any buddy film and is a standard feature of the genre (see Figures 3-10).



Figure 3: The trio from *My Younger Brother*



Figure 4: The trio from *My Younger Brother*



Figure 5: The trio emerges from the water in *Goodbye, Boys!* Each strikes a unique pose.



Figure 6: The pals pick up smoking in *Goodbye, Boys!*



Figure 7: The guys meet at Moscow's GUM in *I Walk Around Moscow*



Figure 8: Shopping and flirting in *I Walk Around Moscow*



Figure 9: Three old friends reunite in *Lenin's Guard*



Figure 10: The guys walk through Moscow in *Lenin's Guard*

The characters' heterogeneity is also expressed by their primary ideological affiliations.

In *I Walk Around Moscow*, Kolia (Nikita Mikhalkov), who works night shifts building the metro, represents the proletariat. Volodia, a writer from Siberia, who comes to Moscow with aspirations to publish in the journal *Youth*, stands for the intelligentsia. And, the romantic Sasha, whose primary concern is getting married before serving in the military, resists affiliation with social categories, signifying the personal instead. A similar constellation is apparent in Khutsiev's *Lenin's Guard*. Neia Zorkaia describes the characterological triad in *Lenin's Guard*: "Sergei, Kol'ka Fokin, Slavka are three comrades, three childhood friends, three guys from our block" (2005 388).<sup>28</sup> Produced by the same studio and written by the same scenarist, Gennadii Shpalikov, who wrote *I Walk Around Moscow*, *Lenin's Guard* unsurprisingly bares certain narrative and character resemblances to Daneliia's film. Here, the intimate group of life-long friends similarly exhibits heterogeneity in their daily lives. Slavka (Stanislav Liubshin), like Sasha of Daneliia's film struggles with his personal life. He has trouble shouldering the responsibilities of being a husband and father. Kol'ka (Nikolai Gubenko) plays the lighthearted joker, whose brainy witticisms align him with the representative literati of *I Walk Around Moscow*, Volodia. Sergei (Valentin Popov), like Kolia's character in *I Walk Around Moscow*, works nights as a laborer and functions as the linchpin that keeps the trio together.

Although these male triads stand out as the most conspicuous feature to link these films together, it is not only the characterological trios that make these films relevant to the buddy film genre. It is also necessary to mention the characters' personal struggles with their maturation into adults and the ability for these intimate groups of characters to provide comfort and support. Film critic Pavel Kuznetsov assumes the voice of these films' standard characters in order to

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<sup>28</sup> "Сергей, Колька Фокин, Славка—три товарищи, три друга детства, ребята с нашего двора."

describe the nebulous and uncertain social space they negotiate. Kuznetsov ventriloquizes their dilemma: “The fact is we no longer know how to live; we’re thrust out into the infinity of this beautiful and poetic world, where there’s no God, no clear goal; where the only support is poetry and friends” (210).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the function of these small triads of young male characters is not simply to accentuate diversity (and, thereby, implicitly reject Stalinist-era conformism), but also to inscribe the characters into intimate communities, in which they are able to voice their individual frustrations and receive the support of friendship.

Furthermore, each of these films removes its characters from domestic settings and places the young men into the city. Their wanderings around public and outdoor settings function to make mobility a dominant theme in all of these movies. In Danelia’s *I Walk Around Moscow* three young men serendipitously meet, thanks to the hustle and bustle of the city. Volodia, having just arrived to Moscow from Siberia, befriends Kolia in the subway when asking for directions. Kolia then escorts Volodia to his destination. Later that same morning, Kolia accompanies his friend Sasha (Evgenii Steblov) to buy a suit. While at GUM, Moscow’s central shopping mall, they once again coincidentally bump into Volodia, and the characters come together as a trio. The film’s emphasis on mobility, expressed first in its title, is also buttressed by a consistent focus on various modes of public transportation—airplanes, the metro, cars, and, of course, feet. Not only does this constant movement provide for serendipitous meetings, but it also functions to embed the Thaw-era buddies into larger communities.

Kalik’s *Goodbye, Boys!* set in a Southern seaside city, follows three young men, two Russian and one Jewish, each approximately 18 years old, who spend their final summer together

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<sup>29</sup> “Мы в самом деле больше не знаем, как жить; мы выброшены в бесконечность этого прекрасного и столь поэтичного мира, где нет Бога и ясной цели, где единственной опорой являются стихи и друзья” (210).

trying to grow up before they leave for military training. Enticed by the complimentary and inspiring words of the party, the boys' revel in proud anticipation while also experiencing various rites of passage: drinking, getting a shave, dating, and smoking cigarettes. Verbal intertitles, written in the past tense reveal, however, that two of these three friends have died during the war, evoking a sense of doom into the visual portrayal of the boys' carefree days and making it clear that what seems to be the diegetic present, is, in fact, an extended flashback. The film opens with the boys swimming in the open sea. Often shot walking along the beach, a type of buffer zone between the city and the sea, the camera quite literally follows the boys' every step. The camera is positioned low to the ground so as to capture their bare feet walking along the beach, their legs dangling off a pier, and the image of their bare legs taken when the boys are at a physical exam. The film's persistent focus on their bare bodies and lanky legs in motion is juxtaposed with footage of marching Nazi soldiers—the boys' soon-to-be opponents. The conflict created by these opposing images visually reflects the boys' impending fate, which they will face in their actual transformation from children to soldiers, and the inevitable immobility that they'll face in their premature deaths.

Despite reconciliatory conclusions (the youthful rebellions are quelled as the characters come to appreciate the wisdom of their elders), with these Thaw-era movies the characterological structure the buddy film is established in Soviet cinema. The adaptations of Aksenov's prose are replete with the dominant visual and narrative markers of the buddy film: masculine triads; disillusioned characters; horizontal, fraternal bonds among characters; and the subordination of ethnic or political matters to personal ones. Significantly, Kalik, Khutsiev, and Daneliia picked up these trends quickly. It makes sense that the buddy film would gain popularity during the Thaw: the genre's typical grouping of differentiated male characters provides the heteroglossia

that contradicts the univocality typical in cultural products from the Stalinist era. Furthermore, the characters are not special in any way. These are not war-era heroes, but average guys. It is in this way that the Thaw-era buddy film moves toward antimonumentalist depictions of its protagonists.

This particular focus on youth and its discomfort with the older male generation reappears in several post-Soviet examples of the buddy film, for example Bakhtier Khudoinazarov's coming-of-age film *The Suit (Shik)* 2003 about three adolescents—Geka (Artur Smol'ianinov), Nemoi (Ivan Kokorin), and Styr' (Aleksandr Iatsenko). These teenage boys—like the Thaw-era antecedents—are primarily concerned with their mobility and exist in disgruntled relationships with their parents. They move back and forth across a gulf that separates the mountainous terrain where their families struggle to make ends meet in the corrupt mafia-driven post-Soviet market economy and a seaside landscape, filled with wealthy cruise ship travelers and foreign haute couture. Furthermore, other contemporary directors, who similarly return to narrative strategies of these Thaw-era films and readapt them for contemporary audiences, join Khudoinazarov. The ethnically Georgian director Rezo Gigineishvili revives the film *I Walk Around Moscow* in his 2006 film *Heat (Zhara)*. Also from 2006, Veledinskii's haunting portrayal of three Chechen war soldiers, who, though already dead return to roam among the living, repeats the haunting phantasmagoric quality of Kalik's *Goodbye, Boys!*

### 3.3 THE AMERICANS ARE COMING!!

A third influential group of antecedents relevant to the post-Soviet Russian buddy film is the American buddy film that came out in large numbers during the 1980s. Movies made in this genre at his time typically pair one African-American male actor together with a white male

actor.<sup>30</sup> For example, John Landis's *Trading Places* (1983) stars Dan Aykroyd and Eddie Murphy as the respective rich and poor foils of two millionaires' sociological bet. Perhaps the best-known variant of the genre casts the bi-racial pair as cops. *48 Hrs.* (Walter Hill, 1982) stars Nick Nolte and Murphy as odd couple cops. The four *Lethal Weapon* sequels (Richard Donner 1987, 1989, 1992, 1998) repeatedly rehearse the antics of trigger-happy Martin Riggs (Mel Gibson) and the cautious, but valiant Roger Murtaugh (Danny Glover). The three *Beverly Hills Cop* movies (Martin Brest, 1984; Tony Scott, 1987; John Landis, 1994) again turn to comedian Murphy, whose gruff L.A. demeanor clashes with his white colleagues in the millionaire enclave of Beverly Hills. *Downtown* (Richard Benjamin, 1990) continues this already familiar formula with the combination of Forrest Whitaker and Anthony Edwards. And the list goes on.

It is into this particular Hollywood landscape that Russian émigré director Andrei Konchalovskii enters. Konchalovskii, who takes his surname from his maternal line, is the elder son of Sergei Mikhalkov, the famous children's book author and lyricist of both the Soviet and post-Soviet anthems, and elder brother of internationally-acclaimed director Nikita Mikhalkov.<sup>31</sup> Although Konchalovskii initiated his film career with great success, his second film, *The Story of Asia Kliachina, Who Loved but Did Not Marry* (*Istoriia Asi Kliachinoi, kotoraiia liubila, da ne vyshla zamuzh* 1969), received harsh treatment from the censors and was not released until 1971, and then the version that appeared on screen was a cut-up remnant of the original, which was subsequently released in 1988.<sup>32</sup> After spending much of the next decade playing it safe and

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<sup>30</sup> Earlier examples of the genre from Hollywood cinema are less likely to use the biracial pair. For example two buddy films from 1969—John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy* and George Roy Hill's *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*—differentiate their central dyads by personality types and sexual prowess.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed biography of Nikita Mikhalkov's career, see Beumers.

<sup>32</sup> His first feature length film—*First Teacher* (*Pervyi uchitel'*)—won the an award from the magazine *Soviet Screen* at the All-Union Film Festival in 1966; Natal'ia Arinbasarova, won the best female actress

making cinematic adaptations of literary classics, Konchalovskii reasserted his unique style with the release of his grandiose four-and-a-half hour long epic, *Siberade* (*Sibiriada*), which proceeded to win a special-jury prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 1979.<sup>33</sup> This victory on the international cinema scene opened up the opportunity to move to Hollywood, which he did almost immediately in 1980.<sup>34</sup>

While living in Hollywood (1980–1990) Konchalovskii made seven feature films,<sup>35</sup> three of which—*Runaway Train*, *Homer and Eddie*, and *Tango & Cash*—employ conventions of the buddy film. The decision to work within this genre is hardly surprising if we consider the cine-market, into which Konchalovskii was desperately trying (and initially failing) to enter. Furthermore, these films stand out as the crowning achievements of the director's Hollywood period and, thus, it seems that Konchalovskii realized that success in this capitalist market depended on the formula: success begets success.

*Runaway Train*, based on an Akira Kurosawa screenplay, tells the story of two hardened criminals—Manny (John Voigt) and Buck (Eric Roberts), who escape from a high-security Alaskan prison and jump a train, which speeds along unmanned (its engineer has had a heart attack and fallen off). Following the genre convention that pits the men as opposites, as Manny and Buck hike through sub-zero temperatures, Manny perseveres while Buck whines. In the

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prize at Venice in 1966; and in 1967 Konchalovskii was recognized with a special jury prize at the International Festival of Young Filmmakers in Hyères, France.

<sup>33</sup> Following the harsh fate of *Asia Kliachina*, Konchalovskii directed *Nest of Gentry* (*Dvorianskoe gnezdo*, 1969) based on a novel by Ivan Turgenev. One year later, in 1970, he made a popular adaptation of Anton Chekhov's play *Uncle Vania* (*Diadia Vania*).

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed account of Konchalovskii's visits to and life in Hollywood, see Robinson (257-263).

<sup>35</sup> Konchalovskii's other films from his Hollywood period are the short *Split Cherry Tree* (1982) and the feature films *Maria's Lovers* (1984), *Duet for One* (1986), *Shy People* (1987), and the Soviet, Italian, and American co-production *Inner Circle* (1991).

various high-pressure circumstances typical of fugitive life Manny takes control, while Buck freaks out. As is typical of the 1980s buddy film, a beautiful woman (Rebecca DeMornay) attracts the attention of one of the two men and dissipates homoerotic tension generated between the hard bodied tough guys.

Despite the unlikely ease with which these two take flight and some schlocky dialogue, the acting was impressive enough to draw in an audience and secure Voight an award for “Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture” and Roberts a nomination for “Best Actor in a Supporting Role” at the 1985 Golden Globe Awards. At that year’s Academy Awards, both actors won (again, Voigt for best lead actor and Roberts for best supporting actor). These awards signal more than commendable performances. They also underscore the film’s dependence on its two male characters as Konchalovskii taps into American film traditions of escape convict buddy films such as *The Defiant Ones* (Stanley Kramer, 1958) starring Tony Curtis and Sidney Poitier (who coincidentally also both won Golden Globes for their performances). In addition to *Runaway Train*’s success on the film festival circuit, it pulled in respectable box-office earnings, grossing a domestic total of nearly 8 million dollars.<sup>36</sup> This, Konchalovskii’s second feature Hollywood film, remained his biggest success until *Tango & Cash*. In fact, two of the films appearing between these two buddy films—*Duet for One* and *Shy People*—fared particularly

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<sup>36</sup> The film’s third Academy Award nomination was for Best Film Editing (Henry Richardson). *Runaway Train* was also nominated for the Golden Palm at Cannes. In addition to the actors’ nomination and award at the Golden Globes, the film also received nominations for Best Motion Picture (Drama). Box office data supplied by the International Movie Database: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089941/business>.

poorly at the box office, making approximately 9,000 and 770,000 dollars, respectively.<sup>37</sup> It is no wonder he went back to genre conventions.

*Homer and Eddie* maintains this same focus on the characterological dyad with the unlikely pairing of Jim Belushi as Homer, a mentally deficient dishwasher and Whoopi Goldberg as Eddie (Edwina), a foul-mouthed homicidal escaped cancer patient. As tempting as it is to want to interpret the addition of a woman into the buddy film's typical focus on two men as an interesting innovation, the desire cannot be satisfied. Konchalovskii downplays gender difference by making the character of Eddie rather masculine, obvious already in her male name, and emasculating Homer, an intellectually-stunted middle-aged virgin. As Janet Maslin notes in her *New York Times* review of the film: "As for Homer and Eddie, at least they don't fall in love. Homer is too innocently vacant for that (and Mr. Belushi, thankfully not overplaying the naivete, makes him a lot more likable than he could have been). Eddie, for her part, has a sufficiently confused sexual identity to use the men's room in one scene and have Homer refer to her as 'he.'" The innovation here is the shift from hard-bodied violent buddies, to a sympathetic portrait of two loners. Produced a year before filming began on *Tango & Cash*, Konchalovskii continued to play with genre conventions, overlapping the buddy film format with the classic American road movie. As Homer and Eddie ride in her jalopy to visit both of their long-lost parents, the odd pair has moments of self-discovery. No box office figures are listed for this movie, suggesting that it fared perhaps even worse than *Duet for One*. However, this film went on miraculously to win a Golden Shell, the highest prize at the San Sebastian film festival in 1989. This victory points to the circulation of the buddy film within international cinema

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<sup>37</sup> The International Movie Database lists the statistics for *Duet for One* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092934/business>) and *Shy People* (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093964/business>).

circuits, and perhaps provides reason to explain why and how the film was finally released in New York City a couple of months later, in February 1990.

Although *Tango & Cash* was filmed over a year after *Homer and Eddie*, it was released earlier, on 22 December 1989. This third and most popular of Konchalovskii's buddy films stars Sylvester Stallone (Tango) and Kurt Russell (Cash) in the title roles and consciously adopts the genre conventions by casting the two actors as juxtaposed cops. As the film itself maintains: "It's Downtown clown vs. Beverly Hills wop." Here the homoerotic tension typical of this hyper-macho pair is emphasized by a continual focus on the characters' extremely muscular bodies, even providing the viewer the opportunity to glimpse them in a naked shower scene. The number of jokes dedicated to a "mine is bigger than yours" type of one-upsmanship grows loathsome and is dispensed with when the young bombshell—Teri Hatcher—enters the narrative as Tango's sister and Cash's romantic interest. Predictably, by film's end, the cops set the record straight, demonstrate that they were framed, unveil the drug lord's scheme, and reassert themselves as heroes ready to resume their careers.

Reviews of *Tango & Cash*, such as the one *Variety* printed on New Year's Day 1989, were dismal. *Variety*'s reads: "mindless buddy cop pic, loaded with nonstop action that's played mostly for laughs and delivers too few of them. Inane and formulaic." Maslin, of the *New York Times*, employs a similarly disgusted tone when she writes, "While the film hints at an easygoing rapport between these two, it buries any glimmer of fun beneath stupid jokes, schoolyard sarcasm and brutish, musclebound direction." These criticisms would come as no surprise to Konchalovskii, who in an interview with *Seans*'s Dmitrii Savel'ev, expresses artistic shame for having made *Tango & Cash*. He comments: "This picture was definitely made according to Hollywood rules; it is for people who aren't capable of reading. There's not a single idea in it."

The good guys successfully battle with evil and all's OK. I made this movie exclusively for commercial reasons” (10).<sup>38</sup> In fact, this period of Konchalovskii’s career has been one the filmmaker has been trying to get past for over a decade now. In the final two weeks of shooting, Konchalovskii quit in a dispute over the film’s ending and the project was handed over to Albert Magnoli. Nonetheless, the film remains Konchalovskii’s greatest American box office success—grossing \$6,628,918 its opening weekend and amassing a domestic total of \$63,408,614—and it, without question, stands out as a significant sign of the times. Although the box office power of this conventional buddy film may have upset Konchalovskii’s pretentious view of himself as true Russian—which is to say *auteur*—filmmaker, the popularity of *Tango & Cash*, in a way different but equally significant as *Homer and Eddie*, resonated within a transnational cinema and culture industry.<sup>39</sup>

During Konchalovskii’s temporary residence in Hollywood, unprecedented change was happening in the Soviet cinema industry. In May 1986, directors revolted during the Fifth Congress of the Union. Elem Klimov, a censored director replaced Kulidzhanov as head of the Filmmakers Union. Although films were being made (approximately 150 films annually throughout the 1980s),<sup>40</sup> audience numbers dwindled owing to the double lure of television

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<sup>38</sup> “Эта картина действительно сделана по голливудским законам — она для людей, которые не умеют читать. Там и одной мысли нет. Хорошие ребята, со злом борются успешно, все о’кей. Я снимал ее исключительно из коммерческих соображений.”

<sup>39</sup> In a scathing review of Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii’s 2007 film *Gloss* (*Gliantse*) published in *Seans*, Vadim Rutkovskii implies that the director’s ability to make such a terrible film derives from him being one of the few Russian directors who “thinks in terms of Hollywood” (“мыслит по-голливудски”). The suggestion, of course, is that Mikhalkov-Konchalovskii’s time in Hollywood has corrupted his Russian filmmaking.

<sup>40</sup> Zemlianukhin and Segida provide statistics of the number of feature films made annually in the Soviet Union. From 1980-1987 approximately 150 films were made annually. There was a small jump in 1988

(available to 93% of the population by 1986) and video-cafes, some of which were run by the State, but many of which operated on the black-market and provided curious, ticket-paying costumers the opportunity to watch voice-over dubbed, terrible-resolution versions of pirated Hollywood (and other smuggled-in western) genre flicks.

While a complete list of all the films shown in these video-cafes would be hard to come by, precisely because so many circulated on the black market, the magazine *Soviet Screen* (*Sovetskii ekran*) does provide some indication. Beginning in 1989, the magazine periodically included a column titled “Videokompass” that reviewed popular movies circulating on VHS and in video-cafes. The first “Videokompass” segment appeared in the 3<sup>rd</sup> issue of 1989 and included a short description of Landis’ buddy film, *Trading Places* (Kudriavtsev). In the 8<sup>th</sup> issue of *Sovetskii ekran* from 1989, an article under the rubric “Globus Videoparad” discusses the price of video tapes in the US and references another buddy film—*Beverly Hills Cop*—and does so so casually that one assumes the film already circulates within popular culture. They write: “The price of videocassettes in the United States is growing. If *Beverly Hills Cop* cost 30 dollars in 1985, then now, for the second installment of the film, you’ll have to pay almost three times as much—85 dollars” (Morozov 27).<sup>41</sup> Three pages later in the “Videokompass” segment of that same edition, another Eddie Murphy buddy film—*48 Hrs*—is listed. Described as “one of the most successful films, presented in the genre of a comedy about the police,” which one might appropriately define as a “comedic adventure film,” *Soviet Screen* struggles to pin down a

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when the industry released 171 films, and a small dip in 1989, when only 138. By 1990, the number of films doubled to 300 (11).

<sup>41</sup> “Видеокассеты в соединённых штатах дорожают. Если “Полицейский из Беверли Хиллс” в 1985-ом году стоил всего 30 долларов, то теперь за вторую часть этого фильма приходится платить почти втрое больше—85 долларов” (27).

genre designation already familiar to Hollywood studios and American audiences (Kudriavtsev 30).<sup>42</sup>

In the eighteenth issue of the magazine from 1989, another reference to the American buddy film appears, this time in the visual form of a large still taken from Konchalovskii's *Homer and Eddie*. Embedded into an article by Konsuelo Segura about the San Sebastian film festival, the bi-racial pair graces the page for Russian readers. In her article written for a Russian audience, Segura problematizes the film's national affiliation and seemingly wants to underscore the film's *Russian* origins. She writes: “‘Russian film,’ ‘a film by a Russian director,’ ‘the Soviet Andrei Konchalovskii’—it is specifically these types of expressions that were used when the film was spoken about in the lobbies and written about in newspaper reviews. And the only when the grand prize of the festival was announced from the lips of the festival’s star, Betty Davis, was it said: ‘The Golden Shell belongs to a film from the United States of America, *Homer and Eddie*.’”<sup>43</sup> Segura attempts to explain why people (and, it seems she, too) were so insistent on claiming *Homer and Eddie* as a Russian film. She opposes qualifying Konchalovskii's festival winner as an American product because the film's pathetic tone differentiates it from the American buddy film 1980s that depends on rippling muscles and testosterone-driven action. While this almost patriotic defense of *Homer and Eddie* published in *Soviet Screen* is not a significant enough cultural event to declare that this article, this film, or

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<sup>42</sup> “Один из наиболее удачных фильмов, рассказывающих в жанре комедии о полицейских [...] которого] можно определить как ‘комический боевик’” (30).

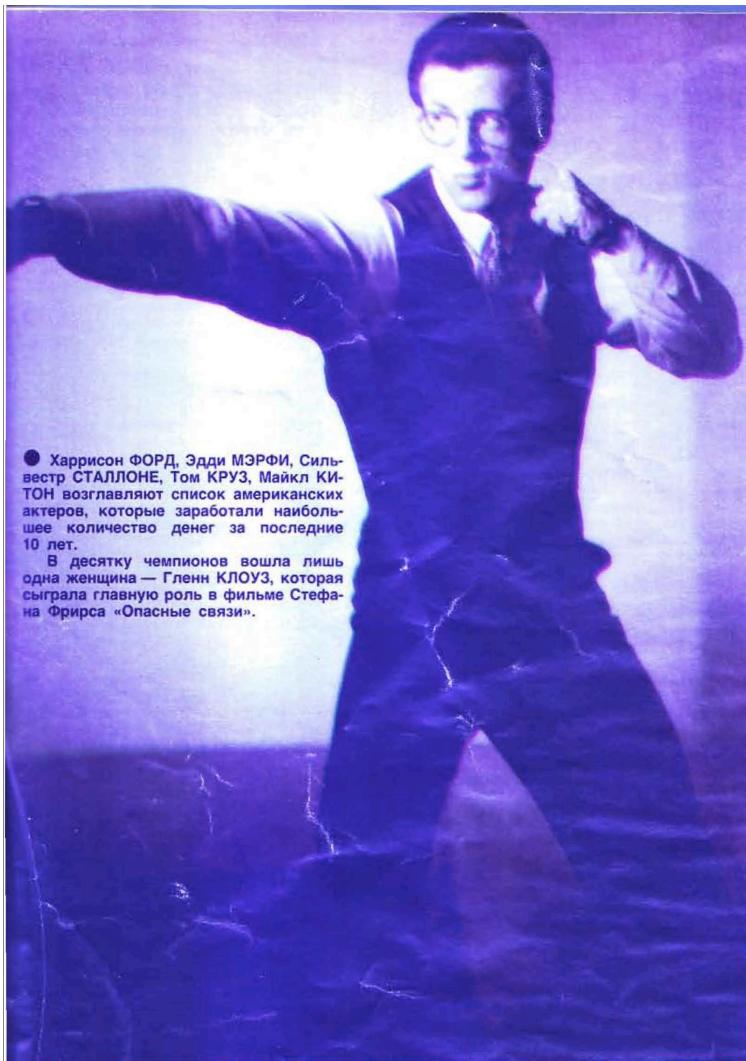
<sup>43</sup> Segura writes: “‘Русский фильм,’ ‘фильм русского режиссера,’ ‘советский Андрей Кончаловский’—именно в таких выражениях говорили о картине и ее авторе в кулуарах, писали в газетных рецензиях. И только раз из уст вручавшей главный приз звезды фестиваля Бетт Дэвис прозвучало: ‘Золотая раковина присуждается фильму Соединенных Штатов Америки *Гомер и Эдди*.’” (26).

even Konchalovskii was responsible for transforming the “buddy film” into a conscious category within the broad field of Russian filmmaking. However, it does offer evidence of acknowledgement and recognition of the genre. Less than a year later, the same publication alludes to the genre again.

In the thirteenth issue of *Soviet Screen* from 1990 another set of references to the buddy film appear, and this time there is unquestionable mention of distinct Russian and American examples of the genre. A page from this issue of the journal, reproduced below (Figure 11), visually links Sylvester Stallone, from his role in *Tango & Cash* (identifiable by his suit), and the two buddies from Walter Hill’s *48 Hrs*—Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte (21). Here, the three actors metonymically represent two blockbuster examples of the genre, one made by an American, one by a Russian living in Hollywood. Whether serendipitous or not, the color-glossy spread in an largely black-and-white magazine hints at the privileged status these actors have garnered thanks to their buddy roles and, moreover, underscores how widely the genre circulates among Russian audiences. Further evidence of the cultural relevancy of these American films—and specifically of *Tango & Cash*—comes from a Russian blogger, who remembers the film fondly in a comment posted in 2007. He writes, “*Tango & Cash* was one of the first action flicks to get past the Iron Curtain. At that time it was really interesting to watch. Yeah, I saw it on a Soviet video player. For the time, it wasn’t bad.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “Танго и кэш—один из первых боевиков проникших за железный занавес. В то время очень даже интересно было смотреть. Да, ещё на советском магнитофоне смотрел этот фильм... для того времени было не плохо.” Posted on 7 June 2007 on <<http://kino.a42.ru/?a=film&id=2694>>.



● Харрисон ФОРД, Эдди МЭРФИ, Сильвестр СТАЛЛОНЕ, Том КРУЗ, Майкл КИТОН возглавляют список американских актеров, которые заработали наибольшее количество денег за последние 10 лет.

В десятку чемпионов вошла лишь одна женщина — Гленн КЛОУЗ, которая сыграла главную роль в фильме Стефана Фириса «Опасные связи».



Итальянский зеппе Торн «Кинотеатр 34 года» з полнометра общее бл главную ро челло МАСТ

● Итальян фаня САИ сея в ё фильм «При собственное ное временно в картине и ра Маргарет вращение».



Жан-Люк ГО против акте понять. Они ща и невин и то же врем ные дети, ки ски и утеша от невозмо своим чувств они и стан (Из статьи Люка Домин жес / Синем



● Софи ЛОРЕН — женщина манящая, ее та притягательной силой, как новогодняя елка она еще более красива, чем была в молодости итальянский режиссер Лина Вертмюллер, у снимается в главной роли в фильме «Суббот дельник». Софи Лорен играет женщину, мать семейства самой обнаружившую, что все еще нравится м



Figure 11: A page from *Soviet Screen* featuring two buddy films: Sylvester Stallone in *Tango and Cash* and Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy in *48 Hrs.*

Even more significant are the two pages that precede Sylvester's, Eddie's, and Nick's cameo shots. Covering a two-page spread immediately before the photo gallery of American buddies is journalist's Teimuraz Ponarin's interview with film director Pavel Lungin, who just had had his directorial debut at the Cannes Film Festival, where he won the Best Director award for his French and Soviet co-production, *Taxi Blues* (*Taksi-bliuz* 1990).<sup>45</sup> The film temporarily unites its two central characters, a debauched Jewish musician and a bitter, tormented, anti-Semitic cabby, which led film scholars Andrew Horton and Michael Brashinsky to describe it as blending "heavy doses of Russian *chernukha* atmosphere with a genre framework that suggests American buddy films and urban crime flicks" and as existing "somewhere between Martin Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*) and Dostoevsky." Horton and Brashinsky conclude: "The attempt, therefore, is to search for a new language using Russian speech and American cinematic grammar" (166).

*Taxi Blues* will receive in depth treatment in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that while Lungin's film is admittedly quite different from the American examples of the genre, the film's international co-production makes *Taxi Blues* part of a transnational cinema industry and reflects the increased permeability of Russo-Soviet culture. The buddy film genre emerged within the culture of glasnost as the Soviet empire began to fracture. By the late 1980s, Soviet culture in general, and the Soviet cinema industry in particular had become porous to such a degree that cross-cultural flow brought the American buddy films to Russia on VHS and brought an early example of the contemporary Russian buddy film to international acclaim.

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<sup>45</sup> The film, co-produced by ASK Eurofilm, Centre National de la Cinematographie, La Sept Cinema, Lenfil'm Studios, MK2 Productions (a French company) and the Soviet Ministry of Culture, also won the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and was nominated for the Golden Palm.

### 3.4 CONCLUSION

This diachronic overview of the buddy film's antecedents does not present a developmental history. Rather the three different trajectories considered here suggest cinematic and extra-diegetic influences that influence and shape the contemporary Russian buddy film. Altman rightly condemns analyses that treat discrete genres as though "they spring full-blown from the head of Zeus" (*Film/Genre* 28). He argues that synchronic, ahistorical studies that seek to identify the unchanging eternal characteristics of a single genre (and whose analysis depends on the clear division of discrete genre categories) blind "us to the discursive power of generic formations" (28).

This consideration intends to foreground precisely such discursive forces. When Lukov breaks from the traditional framework of the war film in *Two Warriors*, he transforms visual utterances from one discursive context to another, and leaves his reviewers uncertain of how to qualify what, to them, appears to be a war film, but a faulty one lacking the proper accoutrement of a 1943 war film. Historical retrospection helps to solve this quandary. The fact of the matter is, for its historical context, *Two Warriors* does indeed fail as a war film. By rereading this film from our, not its contemporary perspective, by putting it into a context with other similarly constructed narratives about incongruous soldiers (like Balabanov's *War* or Rogozhkin's *Cuckoo*), reveals similarities between *Two Warriors* and more recent buddy films. However this retro-perspective does not simply illuminate Lukov's film, but also casts light on the contemporary examples by underscoring the presence of narrative traditions, that directors (wittingly or not) continue to mold and morph.

This historical review also overcomes a second shortcoming of synchronic analyses of genre by moving beyond the isolation and identification of semantic attributes. However, while

not sufficient on its own, there can be no doubt that the ability to distinguish one genre from any other relies, to a large part, on defining the semantic features present throughout all films of a genre, which is where we turn to next. Here, a consideration of genre's circulation both within and across cultures helps to draw unlikely, but relevant, links between the biracial American buddy film and, for example, Lungin's Cannes-winning *Taxi Blues*. It is now necessary to shift the focus of analysis from the extra-diegetic influence to the inner workings of the genre—its semantics—and examine precisely what the specific, and unique, Russian variant of the genre looks like.

## 4.0 CHAPTER 3: ANTAGONISTIC FRIENDSHIPS: COMPETING IDEOLOGIES, COMPETING MASCULINITIES

A side-by-side comparison of any two texts listed under the same genre category—be it a literary, cinematic, architectural, or other type of genre—reveals diversity. Just as there is no expectation for two detective novels to tell the same story, it would be unlikely that two buddy films would identically reproduce one and the same subject. Rather than dwell on various narrative thrusts, it is more useful to direct attention to the constitutive aspects that provide evidence of genre affiliation. Doing so helps to mute disparate subject matters and to amplify the genre’s primary concern. Each example of the Russian buddy film has its own unique narrative or plot; but each example of the Russian buddy film concentrates on male characters, who are debilitated by some aspect of their contemporary milieu that fundamentally challenges what they had hitherto believed. The characters struggle and collapse into almost existential midlife crises as they witness their system of values—what they had perceived to be a guiding truth—lose all meaning.

The portrayal of men in crisis that these films project is closely tethered to the monumental changes that occurred concomitant with the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet society. The landscape quickly changed as monuments of Lenin were toppled. The economic and political singularity of the USSR—the socialist and communist identity—that since the days of the Revolution had been championed in official rhetoric as the amalgam that would pave a path to a Soviet utopia and that was used not simply to differentiate the Soviet Union from the

West, but to exalt the Soviet workers for their participation in a great and just cause did not simply falter. It disappeared. When the many guarantees granted by Soviet socialist society—for example, guaranteed employment, housing, education, and health care—ceased to operate, the effects were staggering. Alena Ledeneva, a sociologist who writes on the everyday effects of the changing economy in Russia, writes: “the process of privatization in combination with the severe economic trends of the 1990s, such as the decline of industrial production, the investment crisis and the increase in mutual non-payments [...] weakened the social security system and welfare provision in organizations and launched a large-scale re-stratification of the population” (188). An effect of this re-stratification was massive unemployment, which as economists Louise Grogan and Gerard J. van den Berg put it “became legal in Russia in 1991” (550).<sup>1</sup> Many of those who were able to continue working, went unpaid (Grogan and van den Berg 550). The value of the ruble fell so precipitously and the market shelves were so bare that according to Alaina Lemon by 1992 Russians joked that they could wallpaper a room with their glut of rubles because ‘it would have cost less to decorate a room with thousands of ruble notes than to purchase wallpaper,’ which would have likely been impossible to find anyway (29). It is within this context that the contemporary Russian buddy film materialized.

Of course all citizens—male and female, young and old—felt the effects of this massive societal shift. Both men and women lost their life savings. Both men and women experienced hitherto unknown unemployment; according to statistical information, women more so than men (Grogan and van den Berg 554-6). However, the buddy film concentrates on men. Why should

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<sup>1</sup> Although official statistics show that the unemployment rate was lower in Russia during the early 1990s than in most Western European nations, economists generally consider these statistics unreliable noting that “many jobless do not bother to register” (Grogan and van den Berg 550). See also Standing.

men in particular be cast in cinematic representations of crisis brought by this social transformation?

That the buddy film depends almost exclusively on men to depict the shift of reigning ideologies, social trends, and dominant belief systems is hardly surprising. Men's hegemonic status within patriarchal culture—defined as broadly as possible—affords them the role of representative writ large. They can epitomize working class values just as easily as they can signify bourgeois tendencies; they can be cast as the mouth piece to articulate nationalist sentiments or, alternatively, as the perpetrator of traitorous acts; they can act as the agent of paternalistic domination, or as the infantilized and inferior recipient of it.

Furthermore, a conservative movement surged during the transitional 1990s that revitalized essentialist gender roles. Valerie Sperling notes that in Russia where “social attitudes toward women and women’s roles [...] are frequently essentialist in nature, and often openly sexist,” one dominant response to the chaotic perestroika and transitional years was to employ retrograde essentialist genre roles to reinstate patriarchal rule (73). Sperling calls it “an unofficial campaign [...] initiated to ‘facilitate women’s return to their natural predestination,’ a campaign which intensified as the transition toward a market began, and which reinforced the boundaries of Russian women’s limited socio-cultural status” (75). These attitudes were bolstered in the mainstream press, in a pair of encyclopedias—one for boys and one for girls—that delineated the two genders “proper” spheres, in politics, and in everyday life (75).<sup>2</sup> Sexual discrimination was particularly egregious in the workplace: “In 1993, then Labor Minister Gennadii Melikian was quoted as saying, ‘There is no point in creating jobs for women,

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<sup>2</sup> See Buckley and Liubimova for overviews on perestroika’s impact on women.

when there aren't enough jobs for men'" (74).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, classified ads directed at women "read more like personal ads" (74). They listed such qualifications as height and weight proportions, age, and lacking "hangups," which signifies "either sex work, or that the woman in question should be willing to up with sexual demands by bosses, clients, and so on—an institutionalized form of sexual harassment (74-5). Such discriminatory policies had real effects: data taken from 1992-6 shows that women's "unemployment incidence (i.e., the rate at which they become unemployed) is higher than the incidence for males" (Grogan and van den Berg 562). Women, whose access to labor was decreasing, were encouraged to "return to the kitchen" (Sperling 75).<sup>4</sup> Without intending to underplay the appalling sexist nature of such a conservative backlash against women, it is worthwhile to consider the effect this campaign had on men. What does it mean to be a man in this environment? Could men fulfill the essentialized roles expected of them? Just at the moment when the ruble is loosing its value, as apartments are becoming objects of exchange on a mafia-controlled market, as jobs are becoming scarce, and as the security and worldview they knew in the past is vanishing, men are being told, in effect, to take care of everything, to keep their wives in the kitchen and support the family. But they can't.

In order to analyze the buddy film's representation of male characters critically, it is necessary to consider the historical, cultural, and political aspects that impinge on male gender.

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<sup>3</sup> The original quote can be found in Posadskaia "Demokratia minus zhenshchina—ne demokratiia" (9).

<sup>4</sup> Whereas American feminism promotes equality in the workplace, Russian feminism responds to labor somewhat differently. Rhetoric of equality had been used since Revolution and Soviet women were in the workplace. However, women were "segregated in the labor force into the least-prestigious and lowest-paying jobs and industrial sectors (Sperling 17). Demands on their labor were also made at home: Soviet women by and large oversaw the domestic responsibilities. Thus, to the Russian woman, the American feminist goal for equality in the workplace sounds burdensome, not liberating. Even so, the economic situation of the 1990s was so dire, that statistics reveal that of the unemployed population equal percentages of women and men wanted to find jobs (Grogan and van den Berg 556).

That is to say, it is imperative to engage the theoretical texts of the field known as masculinity studies. In his introduction to an early collection of articles on masculinity studies, Michael Kimmel defines the relatively new scholarly field when he writes: “[m]en’s studies responds to the shifting social and intellectual contexts in the study of gender and attempts to treat masculinity not as the normative referent against which standards are assessed but as a problematic gender construct” (10). An outgrowth of feminist studies, scholarship dedicated to masculinity, or men’s studies, began to appear in Russia in the late 1990s.<sup>5</sup> Without denying the dominant position of the male subject within a patriarchal society, this branch of gender studies endeavors to move away from assumptions of masculinity as stable, essentialist, or normative in an effort to investigate the ideological specificities of historical time, geographic place, and economic class that impinge on specific renderings of masculinity.

The male subject in Soviet and post-Soviet culture provides a particularly rich figure for analysis. Long before feminist scholarship demonstrated gender to be a cultural construction used in patriarchal societies to solidify the male hegemonic position, the early Soviet propaganda machine unabashedly engineered the new Soviet person—*novyi sovetskii chelovek*—for precisely such a role. Although the Russian word “*chelovek*” translates most literally as the gender-neutral “person,” American and British scholars tend to emphasize the implicit male connotation embedded in the epithet *novyi sovetskii chelovek* when they deliberately render the phrase as “the new Soviet man.” Lynn Attwood reproduces this purposeful mistranslation in the title of her book, *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-Role Socialization in the USSR*. She justifies this interpretation of “*chelovek*” as “man” when she writes that she does not “attempt to rectify the male bias in the Russian language,” which she feels “would be totally misleading”

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<sup>5</sup> See Mesherkina (“Biografi ‘novykh russkikh,’” “New Russian Men: Masculinity Regained?”), Ushakin (“Vidimost’ muzhestvennosti”), and Sinelnikov (“Muzhskoe telo: vzgliad i zhelanie”).

(14). Perhaps following Attwood's lead, John Haynes also uses this fortuitous inaccuracy in the title of his book—*New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema*—and comments in the introduction that the mistranslation is “in fact rather appropriate” (15). Eliot Borenstein, writing on 1920s Soviet prose, provides the following explanation for the use of “man” in place of “person”: “The frequent translation of the phrase *novyi chelovek* (literally, ‘new person’) as ‘new man’ is no accident, for the new man must be manly in the extreme” (*Men without Women* 4).

These gendered renderings of *chelovek* are not simply an example of semantic jockeying by Western scholars inculcated with feminist teachings. When considered within the context of historicized political history, it becomes clear that such essentialist gender definitions have deep roots. In her introduction to the collection *Gender, State and Society in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, editor Sarah Ashwin fashions this same moment in Soviet history that created the notion of the *new Soviet man*, namely the 1920s, and weaves into it a politicized consideration of gender. Acknowledging that “[g]ender was always a key organizing principle of the Soviet system,” Ashwin notes the relative importance of the duties ascribed to men and women in order to demonstrate the uneven significance of the sexes to the early building of communism and, thus, embedded into the notion of the new Soviet “person” (1). She describes the woman’s role as “worker-mothers who had a duty to work, to produce future generations of workers, as well as to oversee the running of the household” (1). As women entered the work force, their obligation to serve a domineering patriarch did not diminish. Rather than be limited to the demands made in the private sphere of the home by husbands and/or fathers, women now shouldering the double burden of work and home became subject to yet another domineering patriarchal structure: the

new Soviet state.<sup>6</sup> They were expected to produce—to work in the growing industrial economy—and to reproduce for the benefit of the state.<sup>7</sup> Men, Ashwin goes on to explain, “had an at once more limited and higher-status role to play. They were to serve as leaders, managers, soldiers, workers—in effect, they were to manage and build the communist system” (1). Thus gender not only defines the socially prescribed roles of women and men, but, in this instance, also accrues political significance insofar as it determines the various forms of obligatory participation in the Soviet cause.

This politicized definition of the ideal Soviet citizen and gender roles did not erase or even minimize essentialist notions; it simply realigned these stereotypical demands to serve the state rather than private or bourgeois functions. Without denying or underplaying the male advantage—unquestionably, Soviet men earned higher salaries, enjoyed greater career mobility, and maintained increased possibility for achieving heroic status in both the labor and military spheres—many scholars also point out the complicated infantilized position of men within totalitarian regimes. In his article, “Fathers and patriarchs in communist and post-communist Russia,” Sergei Kukhterin convincingly demonstrates that while such decrees as the 1926 code of laws on marriage (*Kodeks zakonov o brak, sem'e i opeke*) limited certain aspects of a husband’s authority over his wife, these laws did not liberate women. Rather, concepts such as “joint child-rearing,” “jointly acquired property” and the equal division of such property between the spouses after divorce,” and the “payment of alimony for one year after divorce” resulted in “a further infringement of patriarchal authority—not for the benefit of women, but for

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<sup>6</sup> Natalia Baranskaia’s novella *A Week Like Any Other* (*Nedelia kak nedelia*, 1969) made the “double burden” shouldered by Soviet women, who held down careers while simultaneously maintaining primary responsibility for the family and home, well-known to Soviet and foreign readers.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of motherhood as social duty in Soviet society, see Issupova.

the benefit of the state” (74). The profound significance of the Bolshevik intervention into the private lives of citizens cannot be underestimated.

Scholars of Russian culture and cinema have recently become interested in masculinity studies. The anthology *On Masculinity* (*O muzhe[n]stvennosti*), edited by Sergei Ushakin, is dedicated to the topic and includes two articles on the representation of men and masculinity in post-Soviet cinema: Pavel Romanov’s “Like Brothers: Masculinity in Post-Soviet Cinema” (“Po-bratski: muzhestvennost' v postsovetskom kino”) and Susan Larsen’s “Melodrama, Masculinity and Nationality: The Stalinist Past on the Post-Soviet Screen” (“Melodrama, muzhestvenost' i natsional'nost': stalinskoe proshloie na postsovetskom ekrane”).<sup>8</sup> The following two chapters of the dissertation add to this small list of scholarship on masculinity studies by providing a close analysis of the contemporary Russian buddy film. The task at hand in this chapter is to engage in a detailed examination of the genre’s specific features, in order to demonstrate how and for what purposes the Russian buddy film from the late and post-Soviet period depends on images of distraught masculine identity. In other words, this is not simply an investigation of representations of a crisis of masculinity in the genre, but, rather, a demonstration of masculine crisis as a constituent element of the genre.

This examination of the buddy film follows Rick Altman’s model of genre identification. Altman essentially asks three questions: What building blocks constitute the genre? How are these components combined? And, why does the genre demand these arrangements? These questions correspond to his tripartite semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic framework. Three

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<sup>8</sup> Were the parenthetical “n” in the title of Ushakin’s collection *O muzhe(n)stvennosti* left out, it could be easily translated as *On Masculinity*. The “n”—which appears in Latin, not Cyrillic script—embeds a second word into the title: *zhenstvennost'*, or femininity. Therefore, the best translation produces an awkward parenthetical puzzle: On Mascul(Femin)inity.

contemporary Russian buddy films—*Taxi Blues* *The Cuckoo*, and *The Lover*—serve as apposite examples that allow, first, for the teasing out of these the genre’s semantic and syntactic elements, and second, to draw conclusions regarding the pragmatic function of the contemporary Russian buddy film.

#### 4.1 GENRE: DIVERSITY WITHIN COMMON STRUCTURES

The narratives of Pavel Lungin’s *Taxi Blues* (*Taksi-bliuz* 1990), Aleksandr Rogozhkin’s *The Cuckoo* (*Kukushka* 2002) and Todorovskii’s *The Lover* (*Liubovnik* 2002) each attend to distinct concerns: respectively, shifting notions of class-consciousness, renewed historiography of World War Two, and personal, emotional trauma set into motion by the death of a loved one. *Taxi Blues*, a noteworthy example of *chernukha* filmmaking, charts an unlikely relationship forged between the working-class Ivan Shlykov (Petr Zaichenko) and the bohemian, jazz musician Lesha Seliverstov (Petr Mamonov) and takes place as the Soviet empire begins to fracture.<sup>9</sup> *The Cuckoo*, set at the end of World War Two, brings together two ostensible enemies—a Red Army officer (Viktor Bychkov) and a Finnish sniper (Ville Haapasalo), who had been fighting for the German army—in the remote space of a Lapland home belonging to a young Sami woman, Anni (Anni-Christina Juuso). Without a common language and separated from the war, the characters get entangled in comic misunderstandings, which Rogozhkin

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<sup>9</sup> The neologism “*chernukha*” derived from the Russian for black—*chernyi*—refers to the stark representation of the grim realities of late-Soviet life (i.e., economic destitution, disintegration of the nuclear family, rampant debilitating drunkenness, ramshackle and overcrowded apartments) and is a distinguishing characteristics of late Soviet cinema. For analyses of *chernukha* in Russian cinema see Horton and Brashinsky (163-168), Lawton (200-207), and Graham (2000); for a discussion of *chernukha* in literature see Lipovetskii (2002).

employs to complicate the standard war-era binary that traditionally pits representatives of opposing armies against one another. *The Lover* begins *in media res* with Lena's death, leaving two previously unacquainted men—her husband (Oleg Iankovskii) and her lover (Sergei Garmash)—to mourn and remember their common beloved together. The men's melancholy is exacerbated by their jealousy of and obsession for one another.

Despite these disparate plots, comparison is not futile. Again, Altman's model of genre analysis with its tripartite focus on semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic aspects reveal the disparate texts' status as buddy films. Most notably, all three films employ the masculine dyad as the dominant constructive principle on which the film's visual and narrative systems depend. As the most significant semantic feature of the genre, the pairs of men linked by their mutually dependent, though always antagonistic friendship function to articulate the films' main ideas. Other semantic elements—"a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shots, locations, set, and the like" (Altman 219)—exhibited by each film include a linear narrative; a public, not private setting; and the use of medium shots, in order that characters share the screen and are, thus, visually juxtaposed.

The same list of features could be given for the American buddy film, to which the Russian relative unsurprisingly bears semantic resemblance. Both the American version of the genre, as well as recent Russian examples, bring together characters that reveal diversity (rather than homogeneity). American buddy films often pair characters from diverse racial backgrounds and, by film's end, to mute that difference. The classic Hollywood happy ending highlights integration, reconciliation, and the possibility of friendship despite initially problematic racial differences. Whereas this representation of diversity fits and, therefore, perpetuates the melting pot model of the American national myth, the protagonists of these contemporary Russian buddy

films, by contrast, are unable to reconcile their differences. The persistence of an antagonistic relationship and the inability for these melancholy Russian heroes to coexist peacefully reveals the lack, or, at the very least, the fracturing of a single dominant ideology to which both characters subscribe. The buddy film's characters, left without models to emulate or heroes to idealize, convey a sense of loss that derives from the lack of any stable notion of post-Soviet identity.

#### 4.1.1 THE WHAT AND THE HOW: A FOCUS ON SEMANTIC AND SYNTACTIC ELEMENTS

As the genre name itself suggests, the primary semantic feature of these films are the buddies. *Taxi Blues*, *The Cuckoo*, and *The Lover* all begin with the introduction of the characterological dyad, thereby alerting the audience of the specific *dominanta*, to borrow a term from Roman Jacobson, around which the narratives will unfold.<sup>10</sup> In *Masculinity in the Interracial Buddy Film*, Melvin Donalson, writing on the American version of the genre, observes that “[t]he initial personality clash between the characters serves as a staple in buddy films. This inherent tension between reluctant partners suggests the improbability of any friendship, thus making amelioration more dramatic” (51). Although the Russian buddy film does not provide the opportunity for a neat and clean happy ending, here too the men’s first encounter is fraught with conflict. This peculiarity of the semantic characterological pairing qualifies as a syntactic aspect of the genre, which pays attention to “the structures into which [the semantic elements] are arranged” (Altman 219). In this genre, the buddies’ meeting is somehow

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<sup>10</sup> Although Roman Jakobson was neither the first nor the only formalist theorist to use the term “*dominanta*,” he, perhaps more than anyone else, is associated with the term thanks to his article, “The Dominant” first published in 1935.

unforeseen, unanticipated, and therefore destabilizing to each of the characters' former lifestyles. The result of an unexpected meeting in some other film genre would likely have a different effect. In the melodrama, for example, it may spark romance; in the thriller, it would elicit suspicion. In short, this semantic element (two juxtaposed male characters) and its particular syntactic arrangement function (unexpected meeting results in upset and disrupting at least one character's hitherto steady life) as the identifiable visual grammar and structure unique to the Russian example of this cinematic genre.

As the contemporary Russian buddy film's two masculine characters' worlds collide, at least one man of the pair becomes unhinged and comes to discover how his fundamental way of understanding the world around him is, in fact, a misapprehension of that world. For example, Shlykov and Lesha's serendipitous meeting in Shlykov's cab in the opening episode of *Taxi Blues* begins the presentation of the characters' diametric opposition and initiates their inimical relationship, which over the course of the film fundamentally challenges Shlykov's perception of late-Soviet society. This rude awakening, which occurs in every Russian buddy film that depends on the masculine dyad, precipitates competition between the two male characters. Significantly, this competition is a battle between competing belief systems played out as a cockfight, during which one of the two buddies becomes emasculated, cuckolded, or humiliated. The character on whom this derision falls is unfailingly the one who initially articulates a patriarchal or Soviet point of view. Such a demonstration of outmoded ideology played out against the male psyche can appropriately be labeled the genre's pragmatic function, but we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let's begin with an analysis of the buddy film's building blocks—its semantic features—and their syntactic arrangement. Close analysis of the films will provide ample illustration.

Two main cinematic strategies are used to characterize the buddies' co-dependent, yet antagonistic relationship. The friction between the male protagonists is communicated first and foremost via the genre's standard use of medium shots (and sometimes the medium close-up) that place both men on the screen simultaneously. To be clear, this qualifies as a semantic feature. These shots place the rival men on the screen in close proximity to one another in order to encourage their visual comparison.



Figure 12: Shlykov and Lesha from *Taxi Blues*



Figure 13: Lesha pleading with Shylkov in *Taxi Blues*



Figure 14: Lesha and Shylkov from *Taxi Blues*



Figure 15: Dmitrii and Ivan from *The Lover*



Figure 16: Ivan and Dmitrii from *The Lover*

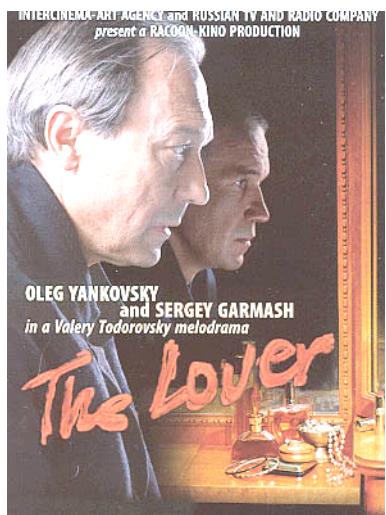


Figure 17: English-language poster for *The Lover*



Figure 18: *Cuckoo*



Figure 19: *Cuckoo*



Figure 20: *Cuckoo*

This use of the medium shot that frames the men's bodies from the waist up has several effects. First, rather than employ a shot-countershoot organization, another typical cinematic way to represent two characters, one which would suggest dialogue, the simultaneous side-by-side placement of both characters suggests two monologues. In other words, because the genre employs its characters to represent opposing points of view, it is reasonable to place the characters in such a way that symbolically underscores that they do not see eye-to-eye (See Figures 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 20). Second, the medium shot's inclusion of the men's bodies allows for a strong visual bond to be forged, while, at the same time, showing their body antagonistic body language (See Figures 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, and 20). Unlike warring armies that occupy separate spaces until the moment of a climatic meeting in battle, even the most acrimonious of pairs cannot be separated in the buddy film: the genre demands an almost continuous focus on characters' antagonistic affiliation. And third, the use of medium shots—as opposed to close-ups or long shots—visually parallels the characters' mediocrity.

Furthermore, this particular shot highlights each of the film's precise choice of actors, a decision paramount in this genre that depends on the contrast, juxtaposition, and opposition of its male characters. For example, Lungin's selection of Mamonov and Zaichenko to play Lesha and Shlykov, respectively, in *Taxi Blues* provides the film with two physically mismatched actors. Not only does the visual opposition of the thick-skinned, thick-necked, weathered Shlykov with the gaunt, scrawny, and withered Lesha function to differentiate the characters, but also the cultural baggage that Mamonov, in particular, lugs into the film magnifies the pair's dichotomy. Mamonov, the famous front man and founder of the rock and roll group Zvuki Mu, depends in part on his celebrity status and "cult of personality" formulated prior to the film and well known

to Russian audiences of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Following a U.S. concert, *New York Times* reviewer Jon Pareles describes Mamonov as “bizarre,” “amusing,” and unpredictable:

He sings in a low rasp as his face and body contort to seem lunatic, fearful, decrepit or cravenly obliging. [...] [W]hen his long legs start to jitter, he’s like a wind-up hoofer with a slipped cog. At one point he dropped his microphone, wandered around slack-jawed, then gracefully dived to where it lay and continued singing.

Commenting on his choice of Mamonov, Lungin explains:

[He] was a mythical figure in Moscow—he is the oldest Russian rock star—well-known for his wild lifestyle, his excesses. ... He was, in fact, the ideal image of my musician: completely sincere, both fragile and weak but also inscrutable, strong, and cold; someone whom one could kill, but not influence, who would not surrender, nor follow an official ideology. (qtd. Jaehne 50-51)

Viewer expectation and cultural knowledge thus plays into the significance of this particular masculine dyad.

In contrast to Lungin, Todorovskii relies on his actors’ similarity to encourage comparison. In *The Lover*, both Iankovskii, who plays Dmitrii, and Garmash, who plays Ivan, are seasoned actors with long filmographies as well as significant experience on the stage (at the Lenkom and Sovremennik theatres, respectively). Their superlative acting serves the film well—Iankovskii won numerous Best Male Actor awards for this role—but from the point of view of genre, it is their sameness that is so effective.<sup>11</sup> Although Iankovskii is approximately fifteen

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<sup>11</sup> The 2002 Constellation Film Festival and the 2002 Kinotavr Film Festival honored Iankovskii with Best Male Actor awards. The actor also received The Golden Aries (*Zolotoi oven*) and Nika prizes, respectively, by the National Academy of Cinematography (*Natsional'noi Akademiei*

years older than Garmash, the film constructs them as similarly middle-aged. They are more or less the same height, they share a similar broad-shouldered build, and both have slightly wrinkled, eminently masculine faces (see Figure 16). The series of shots that mark the men's first encounters are striking in their ability to suggest their commonality and, at the same time, their opposition. For example, when Lena's former lover, Ivan, enters Dmitrii's apartment for the first time, the men stand shoulder to shoulder, but face opposite directions along an axis diagonal to the camera (see Figure 15). In the subsequent scene, in which Dmitrii shows up at Ivan's apartment, the two sit side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder on a bench. Their image, a level shot taken at medium distance, fills the entire screen (see Figure 16). If in the first image, their placement—one facing forwards toward the camera, the other with his back to it—suggests their hostility, then the second image positions them as equals. In harmony with these opening scenes is the film's English-language poster (see Figure 17) that offers a static illustration of this visual phenomenon: the mirror reflects Dmitrii's foregrounded image as Ivan. Their profiles are aligned perfectly and their gazes seem to be focused on the same spot outside of the frame. Thus, on one hand, their images are presented as fundamentally linked—one the likeness of the other, one the visual double of the other. However, on the other hand, the dressing table complete with perfume and jewelry, which functions as a metonymic stand-in for Lena, divides their images and suggests the dead woman's figurative position between them. In order to illustrate the adversarial relationship to each other through the shared, but now-absent Lena, the

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*kinematograficheskikh iskusstv i nauk Rossii*) and Russian Academy of Cinema (*Rossiiskoi Akademiei kinematograficheskikh iskusstv*). In addition, Kinotavr also recognized *The Lover* with the Grand Prix and the Critics Award, while the 50th Annual San-Sebastian Film Festival gave prizes to screenwriter Gennadii Ostrovskii and cameraman Sergei Mikhal'chuk.

film simultaneously positions Dmitrii and Ivan in two contradictory ways: first, as doubles and, second, as rivals.

Rogozhkin presents a third variation of this strategy in *The Cuckoo* by returning to two actors—Bychkov and Haapasalo—who starred in his sequential blockbuster comedies of 1995 and 1998, *Peculiarities of the National Hunt* (*Osobennosti natsional'noi okhoty*) and *Peculiarites of National Fishing* (*Osobennosti natsional'noi rybalki*). Though *The Cuckoo* is not without humor, it comes nowhere near the slapstick absurdity of these earlier Rogozhkin films. Nonetheless, the actors assume personalities similar to those already familiar to Rogozhkin's audience. Haapasalo, who here plays the young Finnish soldier, Veiko, resembles his character in the comedy series: in both he is a somewhat naïve, earnest, well-educated young man who struggles to make sense of whacky Russian behavior, which Bychkov exemplifies. If in the *Peculiarities of the Russian Hunt* series Rogozhkin represents Russians as unquenchable drunks, then in *The Cuckoo* Bychkov's character, Ivan, an aging Russian soldier, expresses apathy toward the war while maintaining the requisite insatiable Soviet hatred toward Germans. Here the semantic construction of opposition is expressed in the characters' clothing. The film's initial construction of antagonism depends on military uniforms: when under Anni's care Ivan awakens from a groggy sleep to find Veiko dressed in a SS uniform, he identifies him as a German soldier. Over the course of the film, the men's uniforms are stripped off when they sit side-by-side in a sauna that Veiko builds (see Figure 19), and, by film's end, replaced with matching reindeer-fur winter gear made for them by Anni (see Figure 20). Although Ivan's hostility never completely disappears, the film visually deconstructs their alterity by replacing their uniforms with uniformity.

The second semantic tactic commonly used to construct visual comparison is repetitive patterns. For example the superb parallel montage sequence that Rogozhkin uses at the beginning of *The Cuckoo* to alternate between the film's protagonists. By cutting from one character to the other, and by repeating this back-and-forth presentation several times, parallel montage editing visually express a grammar that metaphorically reads, "on the one hand this, on the other hand that." The succession of seven such back-and-forth scenes simultaneously emphasizes, on the one hand, the characters' shared fates as condemned men and, on the other, their dissimilarity. At the same moment that German soldiers chain Veiko to a rock for failing to remain incognito in his role as a sniper, Soviet soldiers drive Ivan off to a tribunal where he is to be tried for his ostensibly anti-Soviet writing. Despite their comparable status as war criminals, differences abound. Whereas Ivan is middle-aged, Veiko is still young. While Ivan exudes apathy as he bounces along on the back of the jeep that drives him to his trial, Veiko struggles with relentless determination to break free from his chains. Their juxtaposed passive and active natures are highlighted in the final scene of this sequence when Ivan is discovered by Anni, who drags his barely alive body back to her homestead. Veiko, conversely, who watches through the viewfinder on his gun, saves himself and walks over to join Anni and the ailing Ivan.

In *The Lover* Todorovskii sets up a parallel structure between his characters by having Dmitrii repeat a set of actions first enacted by Ivan. Though not using the same technique of cutting between characters in alternating scenes as Rogozhkin does, Todorovskii similarly builds a parallel structure slowly over the film's first thirty minutes. Todorovskii's gradual build produces an excess of dramatic tension fraught with sadness, jealousy, and rage. Following a short introductory segment, during which Dmitrii responds to a calamitous sound in the kitchen, only to find his young wife, Lena, dead on the floor, the film cuts to the funeral where Dmitrii

spies a man standing in the cemetery, but far from the group gathered to mourn his recently passed wife. As he looks through the gray and rainy graveyard at this man, whom he does not yet know, Dmitrii ominously mutters: “there are ghosts wandering about.”<sup>12</sup> The film’s viewer can already identify this man in the shadows; thanks to film’s title, it is safe to assume that this man is, indeed, the eponymous lover.

Dmitrii’s discovery of his wife’s affair occurs shortly following the funeral, when frantically searching for a pipe, he accidentally happens upon a love letter penned by his wife to her lover. That letter initiates Dmitrii’s fixation on and obsession with the still unknown lover and leads him to question Lena’s best friend and then to direct his inquiry to a private detective, but to no avail. The next day, a knock, as unexpected as the letter, comes at the door. It is Ivan showing up with a request for that very letter and with an offer to share a bottle of vodka and drink to Lena’s eternal peace. Following the rules of the genre, this initial meeting is unanticipated, at least for Dmitrii, who responds to Ivan’s calm request virulently, wrestling his rival out of the apartment and down the elevator.

Later that evening, Pet’ka, Dmitrii’s son, tells his father that he recognized Ivan as the man who taught him to swim some ten years ago on vacation. As Dmitrii comes to realize the extent of his wife’s extra-marital affair (it began four months after she and Dmitrii married and continued over the fifteen-year period since), he becomes increasingly determined to find out the whole story. This drive leads him to Ivan’s apartment, where he arrives with his own request—to hear about Ivan and Lena’s relationship. The characters summarize this back-and-forth movement in the following laconic dialogue: Dmitrii: “Let’s go to your place.”/ Ivan: “What

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<sup>12</sup> “Призраки какие-то бродят.”

for?”/ Dmitrii: “You were at my place, now let’s go to yours.”/ Ivan: “Let’s go.”<sup>13</sup> After complying with Dmitrii’s request, Ivan asks Dmitrii to leave. When he does not, Ivan exits his own apartment, leaving Dmitrii there alone.

The same series of events is repeated in two sequential scenes: one man shows up at the other’s door; a request is made; the man at whose home the action takes place forces the meeting to end (although Dmitrii forcefully kicks Ivan out whereas Ivan leaves because Dmitrii will not, the result is the same). Via this narrative repetition that portrays first Ivan seeking out Dmitrii, then Dmitrii Ivan, Todorovskii establishes the vital connection between the rival protagonists emblematic of the initial stage of the buddy film.

Finally it is imperative to mention that the genre employs a straightforward linear narrative avoiding flashbacks and flash forwards to two purposes. This aspect of the genre’s narrative organization makes sense insofar as the films tend to lead the characters from their initial antagonistic meeting through a period of co-dependency and eventually on to the disintegration of that relationship, signifying the ultimate failure of a particular ideological framework. Beyond the basic narrative trajectory though, this forward-moving, present-tense orientation also represents the significance of history, and, the characters’ position within history. As history continues to advance, one of the two characters remains oriented toward the past, and therefore finds himself out-of-synch. This temporal lapse produced by the forward trajectory of history produces the discrepancy between a character’s values, oriented in the past, and the failure or invalidity of those values in the present; this discrepancy, in turn, fuels the onset of crisis. In an article titled “Back to the Future” (“Nazad v budyshchee”) Dmitrii Bykov perfectly articulates the question at the center of Todorovskii’s *The Lover*; Bykov writes: “the

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<sup>13</sup> Dmitrii: “Пошли к тебе.”/ Ivan: “Зачем?”/ Dmitrii: “Ты был у меня, теперь поидём к тебе.” / Ivan: “Поидём.”

director is bothered by what is actually a very significant problem—how is one to live in a world, where previous concepts have been collapsed.”<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.1.2 THE WHY: THE PRAGMATIC FUNCTION OF THE BUDDY FILM

A semantic and syntactic analysis of the contemporary Russian buddy film answers many preliminary questions regarding the genre’s general structure. Thus far formulaic *dominanta* have been highlighted in the discussion of the genre’s standard narrative building blocks and visual attributes. Also, the function of these *dominantae* has been taken into account and been covered at length: the buddies’ unanticipated meeting creates tension, the genre’s visual composition stresses juxtaposition of and opposition between the masculine dyad, and the characters’ antagonistic relationship remains unresolved, thus avoiding easy conclusions or happy endings. However, *why* these elements deserve to be singled out, *why* they qualify as the genre’s dominant features, beating out any number of other characteristics that could be accentuated, has not yet been sufficiently justified. Concentration on “why”—what Altman labels the pragmatic aspect of a film’s genre classification—will help to answer these questions. Once armed with this pragmatic consideration of the contemporary Russian buddy film, the necessary groundwork will be laid to explain why this genre so aptly portrays the fracturing of grand Soviet narratives and why the traumatic dissolution of these myths so routinely occurs reflected on the male psyche.

In 1999, with the publication of *Film/Genre*, Altman adds pragmatics to his hitherto bipartite method of film genre theory, which he originated in his 1984 article, “A

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<sup>14</sup> “Режиссера волнует в самом деле важная проблема—как жить в мире, где рухнули прежние представления.”

semantic/syntactic approach to film genre.” The monograph addresses an important lacuna in his earlier work by raising the question of how to know which of a genre’s semantic and syntactic features should be privileged. To solve this question, Altman proposes pragmatics. He argues that a film’s inclusion in or exclusion from a particular genre category necessitates a consideration of a film’s totality and cannot be decided based on the amplification of any single element. In order to determine which semantic and/or syntactic features make meaning and, furthermore, to determine the significance of that meaning, it is imperative to know the uses to which they are employed. By paying attention to the relationship of an individual factor to the sum of influential factors, Altman focuses on the use—on the pragmatic application—of a particular semantic or syntactic feature when considering a film’s genre affinity.

For example, though a horse and a desert landscape are standard semantic markers of the western, the presence of both does not necessarily supply sufficient evidence to make the claim that a particular film is a western. Certainly Carroll Ballard’s 1979 classic children’s adventure film, *The Black Stallion*, about a little boy and horse stranded on a desert island after surviving a shipwreck would not be confused with a western. To assess the significance of the horse and desert to the film’s genre categorization, it is imperative that their uses be taken into account. By the same logic, male friendship at the center of a film’s narrative does not automatically determine buddy-film status. Rather than value a semantic element as inherently meaningful, as carrying a single and unchanging significance, Altman suggests considering these constituent pieces of genres in a way parallel to how a phoneme unit produces meaning in a language. Just as a single sound has various meanings in various languages and creates different meanings depending on who utters the sound and who hears the sound, the significance of semantic pieces in a particular genre depend on use: how they are used, by whom they are used, and for whom

they are used. Furthermore, when Altman focuses on use as a predominant factor in a discussion of genre affinity, he does not limit himself to a film's diegetic features, but also stresses that attention be paid to social institutions, habits, and history, within which films circulate.

Contemporary examples of the Russian buddy film genre dating from the late glasnost' period and extending into the post-Soviet era use the masculine dyad to a specific purpose: to articulate two differing points of view in order to find fault with former common-sense beliefs. In his book *Genres in Discourse* Tzvetan Todorov insists that genres exist as part of a social institution, a theory with which the so-called ideological film critics (for example, Steven Neale and Altman) agree. Todorov believes that

[I]like any other institution, genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong. [...] [A] society chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology; that is why the existence of certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelators of that ideology and allow us to establish it more or less confidently. (19)

Support for Todorov's thesis can be found in the American buddy film of the 1980s. Two well-known film series, Walter Hill's *48 Hrs.* (1982) and *Another 48 Hrs.* (1990) and Richard Donner's four *Leathal Weapon* films (1987, 1989, 1992, and 1998) display America's desire to place African-American and white characters side-by-side. As film studios strove to produce films that would appeal to both white and African-American markets, the cop movies that placed Eddie Murphy together with Nick Nolte and Mel Gibson along side Danny Glover proved to be successful cross-market products. The positive conclusions functioned to provide Hollywood-fantasy resolutions to real-world racial division. As box office hits, the studios had the economic incentive necessary to turn individual films into film series, a process that propelled the

recognition of the buddy film by American film critics.<sup>15</sup> In the Russian buddy film of the late glasnost' and the post-Soviet periods, diversity functions as a “revelator of ideology” only insofar as it reveals the crumbling of a former monolithic ideological structure. When the characters find themselves standing on shaky ground, unsure of how to act in unfamiliar territory, questions, not answers proliferate as a society caught in flux renegotiates who, how, and even by what geographical landscape Russia should be represented.

Lungin, Rogozhkin, and Todorovskii do not quote American buddy films or reference them in interviews. In fact, they deviate from the Hollywood variant of the genre insofar as they refrain from using conciliatory endings. Rather than attend to foreign conventions, the films discussed here are informed by Soviet cinematic practices and ideological specificities dating back through the Thaw-era and even to Stalinist cinema. In significant, if insufficient ways, each of these films bears resemblances to other cinematic genres. For example, in *Taxi Blues* Lungin refers back to the socialist-realist reeducation narrative—the *perevospitatel'nyi fil'm*. Classic examples of this genre include Nikolai Ekk's *Road to Life* (*Putevka v zhizn'* 1931) and *Chapaev* made by the Vasil'ev “Brothers” in 1934.<sup>16</sup> Rogozhkin depends on stereotypical markers of the war film in *The Cuckoo* and Todorovskii uses an unexpected variant of a melodramatic love triangle narrative. It is useful to examine briefly how these films, while reminiscent of other popular Soviet genres, ultimately reject them. Despite certain significant similarities, these films fail to fulfill the standard ideological or pragmatic function of these other genres from which they borrow. By abandoning these other narrative models, they also, in effect, renounce the ideologies each of the genres traditionally articulate. In summary, if “a genre is the historically

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<sup>15</sup> For a description of the economic and social conditions that led to the popularization of the mixed-race male dyad in the American buddy film see Fuchs, Gillan, and Jordan.

<sup>16</sup> Historical accounts of the reeducation film can be found in Budiak (258-269), Zorkaia (1989, 186-189).

attested codification of discursive properties,” to reiterate Todorov’s claim, then as these examples of the contemporary Russian buddy film discredit former discursive models they demonstrate the ineffectuality of those models in post-Soviet society.

Consideration of the films will help to clarify this point. Rogozhkin employs certain standard features of the war film in *The Cuckoo*, but for purposes that are at odds with that genre’s pragmatic function. War films constitute a distinct genre in Russian cinema, and as such, like war films of any national cinema tradition, “their meanings have an active role and a social effectiveness of their own, to the extent that they function actively as components within the construction of socio-historical reality, rather than simply as reflections of it” (Neale 16).<sup>17</sup> War provides a useful narrative by which to forge a sense of national identity because it tends to arouse patriotism by solidifying a sense of shared experience and, furthermore, because it allows for the characterization of the “other,” the enemy, against whom national identity is defined. The semioticians Iurii Lotman and Boris Uspenskii explore this phenomenon in Russian culture when they draw attention to the structural binary oppositions typical of the dramas of nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary classics, which are played out as duels, both literal and metaphorical. Both Soviet and post-Soviet Russian culture’s reliance on war narratives—duels played out on grand scales—structured on an “us” (read: good) versus “them” (read: bad) binary, allows for simple, indeed even simplistic formulations of Soviet and later Russian identity.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Youngblood (2007) offers a sustained analysis of Russian war films across the twentieth century.

<sup>18</sup> Early Soviet cinema traditionally glorified and mythologized the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War—e.g., Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* (*Bronenosets Potemkin* 1926) and Efim Dzigan’s *We Are From Kronstadt* (*My iz Kronstada* 1936); World War II is the grand narrative of the latter half of the Soviet era—e.g., Mikhail Chiaureli’s *The Fall of Berlin* (*Padenie Berlina* 1949) and Grigorii Chukrai’s *Ballad of a Soldier* (*Ballada o soldate* 1959); and in the post-Soviet era directors have turned to the

At the film's beginning *The Cuckoo* presents itself as a war film. Military uniforms, warring armies, weaponry, military aircraft flying in formation and dropping bombs combine with the sound of explosions, of the various soldier groups' different languages, and of military-speak (references to rank, to tribunals, etc.) to provide the film with the standard visual and auditory scenery of the war genre. However, these fundamental attributes fail to fulfill their functions. Explosions do not signify a victory of one army over another, but turn out to be so-called friendly fire (Soviets bomb Soviets). The Finnish and Soviet soldiers on whom the film focuses, are not heroes, but war criminals. The Finn's refusal to be a sniper and insistence on his pacifist—not Fascist—goals incriminate him among the German Nazis, who in the film's opening episode chain the young soldier to a boulder and leave him to die. At the same time Ivan, the aging Soviet soldier, is convicted of writing anti-Soviet poetry and rides in the back of a jeep to his own tribunal. Moreover, the war imagery with which the film begins is not sustained; in fact, it functions as a red herring. *The Cuckoo* strays far from standard war movies as the front line, armies, soldiers, and other markers of military action are quickly pushed to the periphery of the screen. By the film's third scene, the two soldiers, who hold the viewer's attention, have extricated themselves from their unpromising circumstances by various means and end up living together in the tranquil setting of Lapland at a woman's homestead where humanistic and mystical rather than national or militaristic concerns dominate. To label *The Cuckoo* a war film is to overemphasize the film's historical setting. In an interview published in *Iskusstvo kino*, Rogozhkin himself minimizes the significance of war to the film: "Our film is not

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contemporary war against Chechnya, which, while offering a new enemy and set of problems, continues to depend on emblematic Manichean struggles—e.g., Aleksei Balabanov's *War (Voina)* 2002).

about death, not about war” (Rogozhkin); “Your film is not about war?” (Petr Shepotinnik, interviewer); “War is merely the background of the action” (Rogozhkin).<sup>19</sup>

In *Taxi Blues* Lungin initially sets his two lead characters into roles reminiscent of the Soviet reeducation film. Ivan Shlykov, the taxi driver, whom Soviet film scholar Anna Lawton describes as “an average citizen who believes in law, order, and duty, and looks with equal suspicion at the marginal elements of society and the reformist trends of perestroika” is presented initially as a respectable member of the proletariat (205). Shlykov’s staid, tight-lipped, and tense behavior results from his moral code that equates Soviet identity with working-class values. His socialist persona is evident in his thick, muscular physique, in the places he frequents—his modest room in a communal apartment and his workplace, the taxi depot—and in his violent reactions against people he perceives to be “class enemies.” Twice he erupts in violent outbursts as he beats up ideological opponents, whom he considers social parasites because they do not participate in Russia’s labor force and, therefore, do not follow the governing principles of Soviet socialist society. As the heir of Soviet values, Shlykov attempts to replicate the role of mentor, a stock character of the *perevospitatel’nyi fil’m*, in order to “reeducate” those whom he judges to be on a wayward path. Film critic Petr Shepotinnik emphasizes this point when he bluntly states: “As a generically Soviet character, Shlykov has but one obsession: to teach others how to live” (133). The particular “disciple” on whom the film focuses is Lesha, an alcoholic Jewish saxophonist and member of the bourgeois intelligentsia. Lesha has a frail body and pallid complexion marred by deep-sunken eyes, missing teeth, and short-cropped thinning hair. Shlykov’s conservative principles allow him to assume a position of superiority, sanctioned by centuries of anti-Semitism in Russia, over the drunk, rowdy, and reveling Lesha that is

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<sup>19</sup> Rogozhkin: “Наш-то фильм не о смерти, не о войне.” Petr Shepotinnik: “Вы снимали свой фильм не о войне?” Rogozhkin: “Война—лишь фон действия.”

reinforced after Lesha fails to pay his seventy-ruble cab fare, thus positioning the characters into a relationship of creditor and debtor. The introductory section of the film concludes with an aggrandizing image of Shlykov (Figure 21): shot from below, the tableau-like stillness of the taxi driver's silhouetted frame in front of a Soviet-era apartment building complex at dawn recalls the iconography of Soviet monuments, thus hinting at his supposed association with the socialist realist positive hero.



Figure 21: Shlykov looking monumental in *Taxi Blues*

Lungin's oblique references to socialist values, however, operate as a kind of mock-heraldry as the remainder of the film systematically does away with championing Soviet iconography and values. The opposing personalities of the film's protagonists parallel the juxtaposed landscapes the film highlights in its opening scene. *Taxi Blues* begins with panorama shots of Moscow during a holiday celebration: fireworks explode in front of beautiful, monumental Stalinist skyscrapers; red flags decorate a bridge on which Muscovites have gathered for the occasion; and four successive buildings along the Arbat—one of Moscow's busiest thoroughfares—project the letters *CCCP* (USSR). The camera then quickly shifts to a very different picture of 1990s Moscow. Interwoven into the initial and cinematically familiar

picture of Moscow that shows the Kremlin, St. Basil's Cathedral, a poster of Lenin hanging on the History Museum at the entrance to Red Square is a scene of inebriated bohemians in search of a party and another hard-to-get bottle of vodka. Ekaterina Istomina, writing in *Iskusstvo kino*, considers Lungin's *Taxi Blues* as a binary cinematic representation of Moscow. She writes:

The film's initial dualism constructs the city as two fields of stormy activity, two independent territories. Moscow is divided into two clear aesthetic models: High Moscow (façade, tribunes, placards) and Low Moscow (underworld, interior, backyards). It is divided into high and low, into its face and its backside, into the coin and its flip side. Both Moscows possess their own intricate designs and seem to be required not to concern themselves with the other, not to know about the other. But it is precisely their productive contact and to a certain degree even their collaboration that carves out the meaning and the dynamic of all the heroes' adventures. (64)<sup>20</sup>

As Shlykov seeks out the jazz musician time and time again in order to demand that he repay his debt, the remainder of the film shows Moscow's back alleys lined with drunks, prisons cells filled with prostitutes, deserted streets teeming with teenage gangs, and other urban wastelands. Indeed, as Istomina correctly notes later in her article, the film may show two Moscows, but does so in unequal proportion. Rather than privilege the glorious Moscow

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<sup>20</sup> “Изначальный дуализм фильма соорудил для города два поля бурной шоу-деятельности, две самостоятельные территории. Москва оказалась расположенной на два эстетически ясных шаблона: Москву-верхнюю (фасад, трибуна, вывеска) и Москву-нижнюю (дно, нутро, задворки). На верх и низ, на лицо и изнанку, на медаль и ее оборот. Обе Москвы обладают собственным замысловатым орнаментом и как бы обязаны не соприкасаться друг с другом и друг о друге ничего не знать. Но именно их плодотворное соприкосновение и в какой-то мере даже сотрудничество высекают смысл и динамику всех приключений героев.”

scenery, the film presents it as a kind of Potemkin Village, a façade that hides the plagued urban corners typical of late perestroika. In much the same way, Shlykov's ostensible role as revered mentor proves to be an anachronistic role, one just as nugatory as the socialist ideology he tries to convey. Unlike the reeducation film, which would require that Shlykov raise Lesha into socialist consciousness, Shlykov's own perceived position of authority is diminished as he slowly comes to realize his own ineffectuality: Lesha achieves international fame despite, or perhaps thanks to, his indifference to Soviet principles, thus making Shlykov superfluous.

The third film, Todorovskii's *The Lover*, employs one of the most standard narrative architectonics—the male-male-female romantic triangle—in a notably nonstandard manner. Instead of focusing on the bonds between the lovers and the beloved, as one might expect, Todorovskii initiates the film with the death of Lena—Dmitrii's wife and Ivan's mistress—thus eliminating the men's object of desire and the apex of the love triangle and stressing their homosocial bond.<sup>21</sup> More important to this argument, however, is Todorovskii's resuscitation of Abram Room's 1927 silent classic *Bed and Sofa* (*Tret'ia Meshchanskaia*), a film to which Petr Todorovskii (the director's father) was also drawn; Todorovskii senior shot an innovative remake of it titled *Retro à trois* (*Retro vtroem*, 1998). Room's film shocked contemporary viewers with its critical depiction of post-revolution housing shortages and unabashed portrayal of polyamory.<sup>22</sup> When Volodia (Vladimir Fogel) moves in with the husband-and-wife pair,

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<sup>21</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's examination of homosociality—"the *structure* of men's relations with other men" (2)—refers to René Girard's description of the erotic triangle as a graphic schema useful to her analysis of male homosocial desire. As in the Girardian love triangle, there is a direct relationship between the bond that connects the two rival men and each of the bonds that connects the men to their beloved. The greater the men's bonds to the woman, the stronger the bond between the two men.

<sup>22</sup> For a series of critical reproaches of *Bed and Sofa* from the time of its release see ““Tret'ia Meshchanskaia’: otliki pressy” republished by *Iskusstvo kino*. See also Graffy (89-123).

Liudmila and Kolia (Liudmila Semyonova and Nikolai Batalov, respectively), the marital couple's apartment becomes the scene of Liudmila and Volodia's adulterous, though not necessarily impermissible romance. Writing on the film seventy years after its release, the preeminent Russian film critic, Neia Zorkaia, insists that the film's threesome, who share a cramped communal apartment in Moscow as easily as they share one another, personifies the "Leninist cultural revolution," which employs the model of the "new Soviet person" in order to engage in questions of quotidian existence, including everything from new housing configurations to rapidly shifting gender relations (1997, 90). Zorkaia reads the film's finale, when Liudmila, pregnant and refusing to have an abortion, leaves both the apartment and men behind, as visually articulating an early Soviet stance as well as a feminist position (90). In her estimation, the act of leaving underscores Liudmila's rejection of the petty-bourgeois apartment, a political act that doubles as a feminist protest against the morally dubious men. Zorkaia asserts: "the female theme (and the female image) in Russian cinema (particularly of the Soviet period), as a rule, turns out to be linked to the theme of male weakness, or, at any rate, positions the male characters' emotional defects in relation to purported female ideal" (91).<sup>23</sup>

The younger Todorovskii picks up the narrative at just the point that both Room's and Petr Todorovskii's films end: whereas *Bed and Sofa* concludes with Liudmila leaving the two men and Petr Todorovskii drowns his heroine in the penultimate scene, Valerii Todorovskii begins his film with Lena's death, and, therefore, the typical competition played out between two male characters in love with the same woman, the attempt to "win" the woman can have no consequence. In order to forge a visual link to the early Soviet film and emphasize continuation,

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<sup>23</sup> "Женская тема (и женский образ) в русском кино (советского периода в особенности), как правило, оказывается связанный с темой мужской слабости или, во вском случае, каких-то душевных изъянов мужских персонажей в сравнении с литым женским идеалом."

rather than remake, the younger Todorovskii revises a shot from the end of Room's *Bed and Sofa* in the English language poster of *The Lover*. Upon discovering Liudmila's departure, Room's two male protagonists self-reflexively look at themselves and at each other in the absent woman's dressing table mirror (Figure 22). The shot is structured as a triangle by capturing Kolia's image twice—he is seen both with his face angled down in the upper right corner of the screen and once in profile, reflected in the mirror in the upper left corner. Volodia's face in the mirror, situated in the lower right of the screen, completes a triangle. With this visual reference to a threesome, Room emphasizes Liudmila even in her absence, and does so with moral judgment: the men's downcast glances suggest their culpability.



Figure 22: *Bed and Sofa*

The *Lover*'s film poster, already presented in the previous section (Figure 17), similarly uses the woman's dressing table mirror, but rather than suggest triangulation, Todorovskii arranges his protagonists to make one man the reflection of the other, positioning them on two parallel planes. This minimal shift is significant. Without a woman to compete for, Dmitrii and Ivan turn to each other and forge a relationship that proves to be simultaneously excruciating and vital as they suffer and mourn Lena's passing. Todorovskii, thus, masterfully translates the

protagonists' shared preoccupation with Lena into the film's preoccupation with the relationship between two men, a shift that bears on the film's categorization as a buddy film.

The failure of these films to qualify as examples of the war, reeducation, or romantic drama genres, of course does not determine their status as buddy films. Ideological film-genre theorist Dudley Andrew reminds his reader in *Concepts of Film Theory* that “[g]enre is a specific guise of ideology, the visible edge of a vast subterranean emplacement determining the various institutions and practices of culture, clandestinely working on the unconscious of spectators” (112). Thus, as these films fail to fulfill the ideological function of the genres they recall, they begin to reveal the obsolescence of the values traditionally conveyed by those genres. This is not to suggest that the buddy film is either a repository of all genres or what is left-over when all other genre categories stop working. The ultimate failure of previously relevant genres—which, as Andrew insists are, in large part, vessels of distinct ideologies—is used in the buddy film to highlight the fragmentation of formerly stable ideological structures. In other words, just as the ideology imparted by the mentor-disciple relationship on which many socialist-realist reeducation narratives depends is outmoded, so too is that genre. Similarly, the Manichean binaries typical of World War Two films have become too simple: representations of friend and foe are too complicated to benefit from such uncomplicated oppositions in the post-Soviet era. And finally, unlike the brief period of feminist political change during NEP (The New Economic Policy 1921-1929), which sets the scene for Liudmila to challenge patriarchal domination in *Bed and Sofa*, in *The Lover* Dmitrii's breakdown and eventual death signal that the patriarch no longer exists.

It is worth mentioning that the most basic narrative structures of many standard genres resemble one another. Altman notes that Hollywood genre films “constantly oppos[e] cultural

values to counter-cultural values” and, therefore, “genre films regularly depend on dual protagonist and *dualistic* structures” (emphasis in original, 24). He continues to explain that

In the archetypal Western scene, the sheriff confronts an outlaw in a shoot-out; the gangster is doubled by a rival gang leader or FBI agent; the US Army commander is matched by a German or Japanese counterpart; the human hero is pitted against a monster from prehistory or out space; even Fred Astaire must share the billing with Ginger Rogers. (24).

This type of dualistic construction is also evident in the buddy film, but an important difference is that the buddy film *requires* a dualistic construction (or, as a variant of that duality, a triadic construction). Furthermore, this commonality among film genres does little, however, to efface the differences among or unique aspects of individual genres. It is simply like recognizing, by means of example, that most American brick homes include an underground foundation, tend to be constructed with four-sides, and rise two or three floors high, those levels connected by stairs. Such typical construction does not diminish our ability to distinguish an elaborate Queen Anne Victorian from a reserved Colonial Brownstone, or a Second Empire home with a mansard roof from a Cape Cod style home with dormers and widow’s walk. More important than identifying the dualistic construction, is answering the following question: what pragmatic function does it have in the Russian buddy film?

*Taxi Blues*, for example, employs Shlykov as a perestroika-era version of the New Soviet Man, a rather incompatible historical hybrid. Shlykov’s association with proletarian values is communicated through his employment and his muscular physique. As a taxi driver, Shlykov’s close association with his car recalls the dominant Soviet trope of man and machine. In Soviet iconography the man-machine hybrid existed as part of the overall attempt to triumph over

nature and transform man into a superman.<sup>24</sup> Boris Polevoi's 1946 novel *Story of a Real Man* (*Povest' o nastoiashchem cheloveke*) about a double amputee pilot, who resurrects himself on metallic prosthetic legs and miraculously returns to his machine—his airplane—supplies a particularly clear example. As a taxi driver, Shlykov derives his livelihood from his car—or, in Russian, his *mashina*. Like the Stakhanovite production heroes of the 1930s, Shlykov wins awards for his commitment to labor—a red sticker in his cab recognizes him as a celebrated communist worker (an *udarnik kommunisticheskogo truda*). These markers of Soviet success are subverted or revealed to be defunct as director Lungin refers to the economic hardships that plague the working class during late perestroika. With little to subsist on, Shlykov is forced to rely on  *blat*—the illegal, but pervasive use of connections during the Soviet period to secure necessities—and to participate in the black-market vodka economy in order to pad his measly income.

Visual imagery that connects Shlykov to labor extends into the domestic space of the communal apartment where he lives. Once home after the long night of driving Lesha and his friends around Moscow, Shlykov strips down into his shorts and exercises on a primitive steel weight machine reminiscent of factory machinery. The display of Shlykov's body at work brings to mind the association of the New Soviet Man with physical exercise. According to Russian film scholar Julian Graffy this defining politicized feature of the Soviet body derives, at least in part, from Nikolai Chernyshevskii's proto-socialist-realist novel *What is to be Done?* (*Chto delat?*?, 1863), in which the protagonist Rakhmetov “combines voracious reading to educate his mind with a programme of gymnastics and a diet of raw beef steak to build up his

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<sup>24</sup> See Clark (93-113) and Kaganovsky (2008) for detailed analyses of the man as machine metaphor in Stalinist culture. Although the prominence of the man-machine trope reaches its apex during Stalinism, Hellebust's *Flesh to Metal* offers a compelling study of metallurgic imagery in the 1920s.

body" (29). Moving from pre-Soviet literature to Soviet painting, the nearly nude and powerfully built Shlykov also recalls the scantily clad athletic bodies of the New Soviet Man featured on the canvases of the painter Aleksandr Deineka.



Figure 23: Shlykov's exercise links man and machine *Taxi Blues*



Figure 24: Shlykov lifting weights in *Taxi Blues*



Figure 25: Aleksandr Deineka, *Runners*, 1933

Throughout the Soviet era, intense and revealing battles raged around body culture. In his monograph, *Sport in the USSR: Physical Culture—Visual Culture* Mike O’Mahony emphasizes the pervasive significance of physical culture, *fizkultura*, defining it as “[n]ot only physical exercises and gymnastics, but also hygienic practices, such as bathing in sun [and] air and water” (16-17). O’Mahony concurs that physical fitness was expected of the New Soviet Man, insofar as physical and mental health translated directly into productivity and military ability. Within Soviet iconography a healthy corporeal existence represents a healthy and ideologically fit mind, in the legacy of Chernyshevskii’s Rakhmetov. Thus, not only is Shlykov connected to the Soviet ideal of labor through his car or *mashina*, but the display of his physicality also communicates the high degree to which he quite literally embodies this dominant Soviet trope.

Lungin uses Shlykov’s muscular frame as a counterpoint to Lesha. The film begins with the assumption (sanctioned by centuries of anti-Semitism in Russia) that the working-class man should be superior to the alcoholic Jew. However, as the film continues it is Shlykov’s values that are revealed to be out-of-date, localized, and provincial. Working-class values have lost their valor and validity: work will not make you free. Lesha’s failure to become a venerable Soviet citizen, counter-intuitively, proves to be his liberation. And, moreover, his non-Russian, Jewish identity does not hinder him from international success. His free-form improvisational jazz, a musical style that tended to elicit suspicion if not outright condemnation throughout Soviet history, played on his saxophone—an instrument that was briefly illegal during Stalinism (Starr 85, 216)—matches his free-form belief system.<sup>25</sup> By existing outside of ideology, thanks

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<sup>25</sup> S. Frederick Starr convincingly demonstrates in his monograph *Red and Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* that despite many impediments, jazz music always had players and aficionados. Improvisation and free-form styles, however, received some of the harshest censorship. Writing on the Civil War era, Starr notes that “[i]mprovisation, of course, was out of the question, and remained so in

to drunken stupors and his self-proclaimed status as a “freak” and Buddhist who communicates directly with God, Lesha is able to transgress Soviet moral and social codes and achieve great notoriety on both the international and Soviet music scenes.

As Lesha becomes increasingly successful, Shlykov, conversely, becomes increasingly dejected and his masculine machismo challenged. Lesha, though drunk and alienated from labor, though Jewish and surrounded by bohemian musicians (including an African-American jazz artist and his very capitalist-minded Los Angeles producer), rises to fame precisely because he has no association with an already antiquated Soviet ideology. Unfettered by any sense of loyalty to a Soviet regime, which by 1990 has become profoundly disjointed, Lesha seeks and attains musical success in two ideological antipodal metropolises: New York and Moscow.

Lesha’s American concert is televised in Russia. In addition to entering into the domestic space of apartments via the small television screen, he is also projected onto a billboard-size screen above a Moscow thoroughfare that Shlykov happens upon while driving his cab one evening. This transoceanic broadcast, which recasts Lesha into Russian space via America, looms like an otherworldly phantom haunting the Moscow sky. This monumental display of Lesha over the Soviet capital makes him into an unlikely hero on a new kind of propaganda poster for a new era. Lesha’s ability to pass easily through geo-political borders without lugging

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Russia for another decade” (47). Jumping ahead to the mid-1930s, Starr explains that “[d]uring the Red Jazz Age that extended to 1946, [...] highly idiosyncratic jazz ensembles came increasingly to resemble one another” (131). He goes on to attribute this homogenization to “Stalin’s massive effort to standardize Soviet economic life” that included the necessity for all artists to join unions. This tendency shifts during the post-Stalin era when “the main feature of Soviet jazz [...] was its emphasis on improvisation” (251). However, even in the 1980s, “years after rock had outstripped jazz as the main locus of deviance in music,” Starr laments that “old-fashioned critics were still trying to clean up jazz” and that “[p]atronge, too, followed conservative lines” (318).

around any ideologically-laden baggage conversely relates to Shlykov's inability to transgress the social barriers that previously dictated acceptable Soviet behavior. Moreover, the porous nature of—or, more specifically, Western influence infiltration into—late Soviet culture gains additional relevance in a discussion of the film's production: *Taxi Blues*, financed by a panoply of international production companies, marks the first cinematic success of ASK, the American-Soviet Kino Initiative.<sup>26</sup>

Upon his return to Moscow, Lesha appears transformed from penniless drunk to celebrity: he is met with fanfare at Sheremet'evo airport and whisked away in a red Mercedes to play a concert. Shlykov stands on the periphery of this scene; though nearby, he is hardly noticed. At the concert, Shlykov watches the saxophone virtuoso and cries: another layer of his masculine shell crumbles. Following the concert, Shlykov and Lesha seem to adopt the roles of Maksim Maksimich and Pechorin, the one-time-friend and title character, respectively, of Mikhail Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time* (*Geroi nashego vremeni*, 1838-1840). Shylkov invites Lesha over to celebrate, goes home to set the table for their reunion, and like Maksim Maksimich, who unexpectedly meets Pechorin a second time after much time has passed, hopes to be greeted warmly by his old friend. Lesha, following in Pechorin's footsteps, is an antihero of the perestroika era: he fails to fulfill this expectation and does not show up until much later. To add insult to injury, when Lesha unexpectedly appears at Shlykov's apartment in the middle

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<sup>26</sup> According to Alexander Donskoi, the American-Soviet Kino Initiative functioned as a “non-governmental, non-state organization at the USSR Film-makers [sic] Union,” which is “independent, and deals with American and other partners” (36). In other words, despite the organization’s name, the initiative also fostered film co-productions between the Soviet Union and countries other than the United States. In the instance of *Taxi Blues*, four French production companies—ASK Eurofilm, Centre National de la Cinematographie, La Sept Cinema, MK2 Productions—and three Soviet organizations—Lenfil'm Studios, Goskino, and the Soviet State Committee for Cinematography—collaborated.

of the night with a group of friends, he stays only long enough to inflate a blow-up sex doll and toss it over to Shlykov. Left dumbfounded, dressed in a silk robe, and holding the doll, Shlykov becomes a carnivalized version of his former macho self.

Several American and British scholars have identified *Taxi Blues* as a buddy film and use this context in order to make sense of the film's treatment of masculinity in Russian culture.<sup>27</sup> In an unpublished paper presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies conference in 1997, Laura Olson provides a particularly provocative reading of the film. She correctly notes that Lungin, riffing on such classic American buddy films as *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Roy Hill, 1969), *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger, 1969), *Off Limits* (Christopher Crowe, 1988), and *Lethal Weapon* and *Lethal Weapon 2*, brings his two protagonists characters of differing ethnic, class, religious, and political backgrounds together in such a way as to "play out a drama of male homosocial bonding that defines masculinity" (2). She goes on to argue convincingly that unlike its Hollywood predecessors *Taxi Blues* never presents masculinity as simple or unproblematic, but, rather, embeds the characters into a relationship with homoerotic overtones constructed according to a submission/domination paradigm. The film begins with Shlykov dominating Lesha physically and financially; when, upon their second meeting Shlykov beats up Lesha and takes his saxophone—which Olson, employing the Freudian metaphor, identifies as his phallus—he asserts his masculine authority over Lesha. Once deep in Shlykov's debt, Lesha becomes, in Olson's estimation, akin to a slave, who is commanded to work, to strip off his European clothes, a process that doubles as a type of remuneration (the clothing has monetary value on the black market) and as an enticing strip tease, during which Lesha's humiliation serves as Shlykov's titillation. However, later when

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<sup>27</sup> See Horton and Brashinsky (166-168), Pally, and Jaehne.

Shlykov demands that Lesha serenade him and his girlfriend, Kristina (Natal'ia Koliakanova), on saxophone, Lesha's ability to seduce enrages Shlykov. Olson writes:

This notion of woman as the locus of a power struggle between men is brilliantly acted out in a scene in which Vania's [Shlykov's] girlfriend Christina [sic] is seduced by Liosha's [sic] music. The framing of the three characters constantly emphasizes the triangulation taking place in this scene, and the camera lingers on several images of triangular objects. The angles of the shots show the transfer of power from Vania to Liosha: while the sequence begins with several low-angle shots of Vania and Christina and high-angle shots of Liosha, as Liosha gains the upper hand, the shots of Liosha and Christina become low-angle, as if to emphasize Vania's denigration. (10)

Vania Shlykov attempts to reassert his masculine dominance by violently forcing himself on Kristina. However, this brutal act, as well as others—for example, when Shlykov's recital of a naval song at the meat-packing plant where Kristina works—degrade into savage rampages and underscore not Shlykov's machismo, but his loss of control. Shlykov's barbaric outbursts are precisely that—barbaric, which is to say primitive and uncivilized—and reveal his inability to adapt as the Soviet Union along with its myths and ideological demands dissolves. Left behind, not only by Lesha, but more generally speaking, by the collapsing Soviet society, Shlykov's is revealed to be superfluous, flaccid, and emasculated.

If Lungin's cinematic demonstration of Shlykov's demise is wrought with psychological trauma and violent reactions, Rogozhkin's undermining of the World War Two soldier as an example of a culturally sanctioned Soviet-era masculine type in *The Cuckoo* employs a mixture of humor and magical mysticism. From the beginning of the film, Rogozhkin complicates the

possibility for any straightforward portrayal of his Russian protagonist, Ivan, who straddles uncomfortably between two personalities. On the one hand, he has been accused of writing anti-Soviet poetry and appears phlegmatic as he is driven to a tribunal, intimating indifference to the war. On the other hand, upon awaking in Anni's hut after having been thrown from the bombed jeep that was taking him to court, Ivan, though suffering a concussion, reacts violently to Veiko's SS uniform and expresses vehement hate for any representative of the enemy faction, suggesting his dedication and commitment to the Soviet cause. Commenting on this duality, Mark Lipovetskii describes Ivan's consciousness as being "boarded up with ideological blocks in a jumble with Esenin-esque 'sentimentality'" ("V gnezde" 72).<sup>28</sup>

This inequitable mix alternatively makes Ivan the equivalent and opposite of Veiko, his counterpart in the buddy film masculine dyad. Both male protagonists evince a love for literature and writing poetry. Furthermore both convey their frustration with and dwindling enthusiasm for the war. Veiko states:

I'm a man, just like you. I want to live, not fight. I'm not a soldier. Aren't you sick of shooting? If you want to shoot and kill people who are just like yourself, go ahead. But I want a different life. The world is so wonderful. I came to understand this when I was chained to the boulder. I would like to write poetry, music.<sup>29</sup>

In a separate conversation with Anni, Ivan reveals that he has accomplished precisely what Veiko hopes to do: he "wrote lyrics about beauty, about nature" in order not to go crazy while

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<sup>28</sup> "[Его сознание] заколочено идеологическими блоками вперемешку с есенинским 'сентименталитетом'" (72).

<sup>29</sup> "Я человек, как и ты. Я хочу жить, а не воевать. [...] Я не солдат. Тебе не надоело стрелять? Если ты хочешь стрелять и убивать таких, подобных тебе, давай. А я хочу другой жизни. Мир такой прекрасный. Я это понял, когда был прикован к скале. Я бы хотел писать стихи, музыку."

fighting on the front lines.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, unable to understand why Veiko fails to act according to the rules of war and kill him, Ivan resignedly gives in: “Fine, to hell with you, live. You’re still young, haven’t yet lived at all. Yeah, but I’m tired. Tired of fighting. My soul has become empty from war.”<sup>31</sup> However, by embedding his buddies into a trio within which no one speaks a common language, Rogozhkin undermines these verbal clues that link Ivan and Veiko, and prohibits them from acquiring communicative significance within the film’s diegesis. Rather, miscommunications abound that provide comic relief and function, much to the detriment of Ivan’s integrity, at least for the viewer who makes sense of these various languages with the help of subtitles or voice-over translations. For example, when Veiko attempts to figure out Ivan’s name, Ivan answers, “*Poshel ty*”—the Russian equivalent of “fuck off”—which Veiko innocently interprets as the answer to his question. Therefore for the remainder of the movie, Ivan loses his name, becoming instead a condensed version of the obscenity—“Psholty.”<sup>32</sup>

With the relative failure of language to produce meaning, visual clues, including the display of the characters’ behavior, function to pit Ivan and Veiko against one another and construct them as opposites. Rogozhkin accomplishes this in two interrelated ways: first, despite their similar spoken sentiments regarding the war, only Veiko acts pacifistically. Ivan persists in perceiving his counterpart as a Fascist and repeatedly attempts to kill him. This misapprehension links Rogozhkin’s Ivan to Ivan (Vania) Shlykov of *Taxi Blues*: just as Shlykov misguided maintains unfathomable faith in proletarian values during the late 1980s, Ivan holds onto the

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<sup>30</sup> Он “лирику писал про красоту, про природу.”

<sup>31</sup> “Ладно, черт с тобой, живи. Молодой ты еще, не пожил совсем. Да и устал я. Воевать устал. Душа пустой стала от войны.”

<sup>32</sup> In the film’s credits, Ivan’s untoward nickname is contracted into one word, in which the “e” of the obscenity on which the name is based is replaced with an “o,” a change that affects spelling, but not pronunciation in the Russian. My transliteration of the name is based on this spelling.

war-era binary of “us versus them” in a situation where it is no longer applicable. Second, in much the same way that Shlykov’s inability to adapt proves to be his downfall, in *The Cuckoo* Ivan’s insistence on attributing meaning to Veiko’s SS uniform, even through Veiko’s actions deny the uniform any signification, results in Ivan making a fool of himself time and time again. It is important to note that these two elements occur in tandem with one another—attempts to play the role of dutiful Red Army soldier occur alongside Ivan’s emasculation—suggesting an almost cause and effect relationship. In other words, Ivan’s insistence on maintaining his standard war-era binary of “us versus them” is not only laughable, but also crippling. Veiko, by contrast, benefits from his youth, health, and virility, characteristics that further accent Ivan’s age and enfeeblement. Several examples will help to clarify this point.

Ivan remains determined to rid this Lapland homestead of the ostensible Fascist threat and emerges from the hut wearing nothing but one of Anni’s skirts, much to everyone’s amusement, with a knife behind his back (Figure 26). Ivan lunges at Veiko, who nimbly dodges out of the way, while Ivan clumsily tumbles backward revealing a nude backside. The minimal physical assertion leaves him coughing and spitting out blood—Ivan is more a harm to himself, than to his perceived opponent. Moreover, rather than constitute bravery, Ivan’s murder attempt is laughed at: Anni shakes her head and rolls her eyes, expressing annoyance; Veiko criticizes Ivan’s choice of weapon, pointing out that the knife’s handle is too short to be effective. Read in the context of phallic symbolism, Ivan is a castrated man. Ivan’s diminished status, weakness, and defeat are visually suggested by his hunched-over position situated in the lower right-hand corner of the screen (Figure 27).



Figure 26: Ivan with knife in *The Cuckoo*



Figure 27: Ivan defeated in *The Cuckoo*

At the end of the film Ivan again attempts

to murder Veiko in a nearby forest where a German plane has crashed. At the precise moment that Veiko finds a flyer stating Finland's withdrawal from the war and attempts to explain the good news to Ivan, Ivan—with a pistol that he has taken from the dead airplane pilot—pulls the trigger. Immediately afterward, Ivan reads the Russian version of the flyer, understands that Veiko no longer constitutes an enemy, and calls Veiko a friend as he tries to stop the bleeding and carry him back to Anni before the wound becomes fatal. This change of heart emphasizes Ivan's inability to act independently of Soviet ideological demands—during war, this peaceful Finn dressed in an SS uniform can only be an enemy; once the war has ended, he immediately transforms into a friend. The film characterizes Ivan's mignon-like obedience to the Soviet

cause as daft, laughable, and idiotic. As Veiko fairly comments: what difference should this decision between Finland and the Soviet Union make?

Lapland is not neutral in the same way as Sweden or Switzerland. Rogozhkin presents it as a place on the periphery of both civilization and culture, where the seasons and agricultural schedules rather than political agendas dictate human behavior. In Lapland, a legendary home to witches,<sup>33</sup> time does not progress according to a linear historical model, but rather depends on life cycles that contain the past and the future simultaneously. In the film's poetic finale Anni appeals to ancient folk remedies and legends to resurrect Veiko from the land of the dead (*iz strany mertvykh*). This scene provides narrative balance: in the film's third scene from the beginning Anni heals Ivan; in the third scene from the end, she heals Veiko. Furthermore on this night she sleeps with Ivan, because, as she states, she needs the warmth of a male body next to her, but from the point of view of narrative balance, Ivan's evening with Anni evens the score between the men, so to speak. Anni's mode of apprehending the world and interacting with others derives neither from Culture—literary classics or philosophy—as it does for Veiko, nor from a sense of patriotic duty as it does for Ivan. She understands and acts via the body, her own as well as the men's. Unlike Ivan's and Veiko's bodies, which are marked physically by their age, relative strength, and which exhibit the historical and political fabric of their personal histories in the War, Anni's body as well as the men's bodies when she is in control of them—for example, when she lures Veiko from the land of the dead—exist outside of civilization, without ideological trappings, and are controlled by only the most primitive desires: hunger, sex, and the drive to live.

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<sup>33</sup> In its definition of the Lapland, *The Oxford English Dictionary* includes the following: "Formerly, the fabled home of witches and magicians who had power to send winds and tempests" (649).

The film concludes with an epilogue: Anni sits with her two twin sons in an autumnal landscape and tells them about their namesakes, their fathers Psholty and Veiko, who returned to their respective homes many years prior. The biological impossibility of Anni's story is trumped by her strange nomadism that triumphs over the history of men. There is an etymological play on words embedded into the film's events that helps to explain how within Anni's world her towheaded twin sons can be attributed to two different men. By entering her home, Ivan and Veiko are pulled out of the Great Patriotic War—*Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina*—as the Soviets refer to the period after the Nazi invasion. As they leave the war behind, which notably happens psychologically for Ivan just prior to spending the night with Anni, they also leave behind patriarchal-based social structures; metaphorically the film represents this shift by refusing to attribute paternity to either of the buddies. Once fully in Anni's sphere of influence, war-era patriotism has as little significance as paternity—*ottsovstvo* or *otechestvo*. In English, patriotic and paternity derive from the same root: *pater*, the Latin for father; in Russian, too, *otechestvennyi* and *ottsovstvo* or *otechestvo* share the same root: *otets* or father.<sup>34</sup>

The question of paternity continues to be a dominant factor in the critical examination of post-Soviet masculinity presented by Todorovskii's *The Lover*, the third buddy film under consideration here. While Rogozhkin uses the mythical Lapland to do away with patriarchal authority, which is coded positively in the film, Todorovskii's rendering of Dmitrii's doubtful paternity occurs in a contemporary, urban milieu where proximity and mobility bring a wide

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<sup>34</sup> Although in its current usage *otechestvo* refers specifically to one's fatherland or homeland, Vladimir Dal's *Explanatory Dictionary of the Great Russian Living Language* (*Tolkovyi slovar' velikorusskago iazyka*) gives as the word's first definition, "the state of father, being a father" ("состоянье отца, бытность отцомъ") and gives the following example with subsequent clarification: "His paternity was doubtful; it is unknown whether he is the father" ("Отечество его сомнительно; неизвестно, онъ ли отецъ").

variety of people in contact with one another. Every encounter and conversation contributes to Dmitrii's rude awakening and results in intense psychological torture. If Rogozhkin problematizes the grand narrative of World War Two by moving his protagonists out of modern civilization where patriotic machismo has no value, Todorovskii projects the dissolution of masculine dominance onto the screen by placing his two characters at the center of contemporary post-Soviet civilization. In the city Dmitrii crosses paths with all of society—with relatives, coworkers, acquaintances, and even strangers who supply him with pieces of information that uncover the lie that is his past.

Upon finding Lena's letter to her lover, Dmitrii transforms from the stoic head of the family into a maniacal scorned husband. As he comes to realize Ivan's extended, if previously unnoticed, presence in his life, Dmitrii turns to him with the questions that drive him mad: when did their affair begin? How did they meet? What presents did Ivan give Lena? Ivan has questions for Dmitrii too; he asks whether Lena ever attempted to leave Dmitrii. Despite both men's warning to the other to "stay out of sight" and "never show up again," the two seek each other out time and time again. They appear at one another's apartments. They meet only somewhat unexpectedly at the cemetery several days following Lena's burial. Despite the illicit nature of Ivan and Lena's extramarital relationship, the film does not side with one or the other of the characters. The protagonists are figured as equals. Each man depends on the other, each mourns Lena, each deserves sympathy, something that only the other can supply.

Despite—and ultimately because of—the characters' antagonisms, the film gradually reconfigures itself as the least plausible of genres—the buddy film. Cynthia J. Fuchs describes it in her article "The Buddy Politic," this genre "typically collapses intramasculine differences by effecting an uncomfortable sameness, a transgression of boundaries between self and other,

inside and outside, legitimate and illicit” (194). Todorovskii’s melodramatic rendition does just this. He employs the buddies’ shared suffering, pain, drunkenness, and memories of Lena to efface the their differences, most notably the discrepancy between their professional and class statuses (Dmitrii is a linguistics professor and Ivan is a retired army officer) and their legitimate or illicit claims on Lena. However, unlike the Hollywood examples of interracial cop buddy films cited by Fuchs that depend on a “collective performance of extraordinary virility” visually manifested when the “partners triumphantly detonat[e] all villains and nearby vehicles” (195), Todorovskii does not inscribe masculinity into violence or physical combat. Acts of aggression in *The Lover* function oppositely. Rather than affirm masculine prowess, they challenge or even diminish it. When Dmitrii throws a punch, it is the physical manifestation of his psychological hysteria; when he plummets into frantic rage it is a symptom of his lack of control.

Drawing on the literary criticism of René Girard, Eve Sedgwick asserts that

[w]hat is most interesting for our purposes in [Girard’s] study is its insistence that, in any erotic rivalry, the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of “rivalry” and “love,” differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent. (21)

In *The Lover* the “bonds of ‘rivalry’ and ‘love’” are represented by three symbols—Lena’s letter to Ivan, Pet’ka, Lena’s son, and the tram that runs between Ivan’s and Dmitrii’s apartments. Each of these symbols metonymically stands in for Lena in her absence. Significantly, the letter and Pet’ka, two of the symbols that signify Lena, frame Ivan and Dmitrii’s relationship—the men first meet when Ivan arrives at Dmitrii’s apartment to retrieve the letter and their last meeting occurs when Ivan attempts to convince Pet’ka that he, not Dmitrii, is his biological father.

Furthermore, just as Lena dies from the stress caused by her position between the two men, Dmitrii and Ivan's rivalry and competition essentially eliminate these replacement objects: Dmitrii steals the letter back from Ivan and tears it up as a symbolic gesture to end Ivan and Lena's affair; and Pet'ka distraught, disoriented, and frightened by the disturbing argument regarding his father's paternity runs away. Dmitrii's intrusion into Ivan and Pet'ka's family life poses questions far more complex, and in ideological terms more meaningful, than physical parturition. It suggests the necessity to rewrite history, to reevaluate what for so long has seemed an inalienable truth, to reassess fundamental understanding of the self, and to reexamine the entirety of what was believed to be true. As presented by Todorovskii, Dmitrii and Ivan's antagonistic relationship only affects a small social microcosm of family members and close friends. However, the resulting trauma functions as a metonym, which can be found in all examples of the Russian buddy film, and, when metaphorically expanded, reveals the genre's concerns with a contemporary society that, like these characters, finds itself reevaluating the very core of their existence.

The film's first signifier of Lena and Ivan's relationship is the tram, which "appears" initially as an auditory image during the films opening credits and introductory scenes. At the moment that Dmitrii finds the letter, the sound of the tram passing can be heard and functions as an aural foreshadowing of the story about to unfold. When he reads the letter a second time, the camera shoots him from behind, first from a distance then zooming into become a point-of-view shot providing the film's viewer a glance at the only objects in Dmitrii's field of vision: the letter and several used tram tickets. The red-striped tram that passes in front of Dmitrii's office window and disrupts his concentration is the one that carried Lena the five stops between her husband's and her lover's apartment. In the film's diegetic present Dmitrii's obsessive desire to

find out the details of his dead wife's affair leads him onto the tram to recreate Lena's trip. He solicits information from the kind, old conductor, who innocently reveals to Dmitrii that, yes, Lena traveled on the tram often. With the narrative significance of the tram established, Todorovskii employs it as a visual indicator with double significance. At times it stands for Lena's position between the two men, as seen most literally in Figures 28 and 29.



Figure 28: *The Lover*



Figure 29: *The Lover*

In other instances, the camera, situated on the track, captures two identical red-striped trams passing in different directions. Nearly indistinguishable, though nonetheless juxtaposed by their opposite movements—one heading toward the camera, the other, away—these dual trams visually parallel the masculine duo, who, to reiterate Fuchs share an “uncomfortable sameness, a transgression of boundaries between self and other (see Figures 30 and 31).



Figure 30: *The Lover*



Figure 31: *The Lover*

A psychoanalytic reading helps to better understand how Todorovskii uses the buddy film genre and specifically the characters' rivalry to undermine Dmitrii's masculinity. Sigmund

Freud's concept of the sex and death drives in *Civilization and its Discontents* can explain why in the characters' attempt to redirect their sex drive from Lena onto the objects that metonymically stand for her (the letter, Pet'ia, and the tram) they actually move closer to the death drive, which manifests an "instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness" (119). The contradicting drives coincide with Freud's notion of "double individuals" that take symbolic root in the opposing (pre-) Christian demands that man "shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" and "love thyne enemies." In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud writes:

The element of truth behind all this, which people are so ready to disavow, is that men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creature among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, [...] to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (111)

Indeed the protagonists of *The Lover* do humiliate each other, cause each other pain, torture each other, and, in the end, effectually kill each other too. Although Ivan first approaches Dmitrii with a friendly request to share a bottle of vodka in Lena's honor, his nonchalant presence and status as "living proof" of his wife's infidelities sends Dmitrii into a justified rage. His mental and physical demise quickly perpetuates as Dmitirii comes to realize that not only did his wife betray him, but so did many of his in-laws and shared friends, who knew of Ivan and Lena's fifteen-year relationship. In one scene in particular Dmitrii's fury is excruciating: he visits Lena's brother at work and seeks pity when he reveals to him what he already knew: that Lena

had been lying to everyone for all of these years. Unshaven, tearful, and hoarse from obsessive smoking, Dmitrii stands in an aisle behind a shelf of red file boxes, Lena's brother stands, head bowed and silent, on the other side of the shelf in the parallel aisle. Placed in this red room (again, a reminder of Lena and Ivan's passion and love) Dmitrii, like a madman, cries "Why? Why? Help me! Help me!" Ironically, the only person able to help Dmitrii—to answer his question "Why?"—is Ivan, the same person who causes these hysterical outbursts.

Both men turn to each other to fend off their suffering by displacing their libidinal desires (Freud 79), which was previously directed at Lena. This sexual reference is not to be understood literally. Thomas Parisi in his explanatory addendum to *Civilization and its Discontents* clarifies that "an important element of the sex instinct" is an "aim of recovering something essential that has been lost" (31) and that while "sexual activity is one of the many mechanisms that an organism uses [...] to ensure the survival both of itself and its species" (31), Freud's conceptualization of the sex drive "has less to do with the mechanics of reproduction [...] and more with a kind of existential seeking of a satisfaction that proves ever elusive" (26). Rather than fulfill a purely biological or reproductive function, "it is an attempt to recapture or return to a lost peaceful state" (26-7). But while their odd friendship offers temporary solace, rage, and aggression, the component features of the death drive prove to be the stronger forces. Most upsettingly, and most detrimental, these forces eventually eliminate all traces of Lena.

In effect, then, the men in their attempt to redirect desire into their homosocial friendship, ironically obviate the opportunity to continue desiring—Dmitrii destroys Ivan's letter and Ivan, who believes himself to be Pet'ka's father, destroys Dmitrii's relationship to his (supposed) son. The film concludes when the ability to desire has been lost. The pleasure principle disappears; or, to return once more to Freud, "Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals"

fails (122). Ivan disappears without a trace. Dmitrii, left with absolutely nothing—no wife, no son, and no friend—gets back on the tram, travels the five stops, and, quite literally reaches the end of the line. In the film’s penultimate shot, Dmitrii, already dead, sits on the tram late at night. His head is feebly propped against the dark window, in which his image is reflected, thus replacing the image of his rival with his own. The death drive destroys its own.

#### 4.2 CONCLUSION

Elena Meshcherkina, who works at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, bases her work on New Russian masculinity on the premise “that masculinity is a relational phenomenon—that is, masculinity is formed through interaction both among men, and between men and women” (“New Russian Men” 105). As she tracks one of the fundamental differences between Soviet-era masculinity and its post-Soviet variant, she notes that “[t]o be a man in Soviet society was to have a place in a rigid hierarchy, and individual men were forced to adapt to this hierarchy” (105). “In post-communist Russia,” she continues, “horizontal relations between individual men have assumed a far greater importance” (106). Certain post-Soviet social networks continue to operate according to a rather fierce pecking order—the New Russian businessmen of interest to Meshcherkina have re-erected vertical chains of command as a means to adapt to the demands of the new capitalist society. The characters that constitute the male pairs in these examples of the buddy film, like most Russian men, have not been able to adapt successfully to rapidly transforming post-Soviet society. Thus, they continue to use outmoded hierachal models of masculinity that posit—as in the films discussed here—the proletariat above the bohemian, the Red Army soldier higher than the enemy, or the husband at an advantage to the lover, but discover that they no longer work. The contemporary Russian buddy film refers

back to these hierarchical models in their references to other Soviet cinematic genres, and does so in order to demonstrate their ineffectiveness. Furthermore, because the systems that they use to define masculine roles are now inert, it follows, that their individual displays of masculinity are similarly defunct.

If Meshcherkina describes how masculinity is structured into post-Soviet social relationships, co-authors Sheila Puffer and Daniel McCarthy consider how Russia's adoption of capitalism exists in the transitional sixteen-year period from 1999 to 2005. In the wake of the Soviet Union's centrally planned economy, minimal "institutional development" came in to fill the vacuum. In the absence of institutions—defined by the economists as "the humanly devised constraints that structure human interactions and include formal rules and laws as well as informal influences like cultural norms"—they identify "a clan organizational form of capitalism" to be dominant (2; 3). In other words, without a state-organized system of economic rules, "transactions, including economic exchanges, are based primarily on personal relationships rather than formal rules" (3). Although the economy, as such, is not primary in these films, the sense of having to revert to personal connections, rather than rely on broad, state-level institutions to create meaning does resonate here and may provide some explanation for the rise of these dyadic and triadic (examples of which come in Chapter 4) relationships during precisely this same historical period.

The cinematic partnerships featured in these contemporary Russian buddy films enact a struggle that comes from holding onto outdated models of masculinity and failing to find or settle on a new one. According to Donalson, the author of *Masculinity in the Interracial Buddy Film*, the American buddy scenario too "easily simplif[ies] the critical questions and concerns that face men in American society" by "testif[ying] to the ideal at the expense of the real" (184).

The Russian version of the genre does not fall into this trap. Eschewing such happy and uncomplicated Hollywood endings, these films conclude without drawing any conclusions at all. That is, they remain open-ended. In the final scene of *Taxi Blues*, a car chase ends when Shlykov, who mistakenly believes he is following Lesha, crashes into a car driven by an Asian man. The two cars burst into flames and the resulting columns of smoke rise in front of the same Stalinist skyscraper in front of which, at film's opening, fireworks had exploded. The shift from celebration to destruction may symbolize the end of Soviet ideology's stronghold and, more locally, Shlykov's demise, but it does not provide any information on Lesha. What will happen to him? Will his success last or will he return to the tough Moscow streets? One rather anticipates the latter. In any case, the film hardly offers Lesha as a character to emulate. At the end of *The Lover* Dmitrii dies on the very tram that ferried his wife back and forth between her husband's and her lover's homes. Ivan has packed up and vanished. When Ivan and Veiko of *The Cuckoo* separate, Ivan at last explains his real name to Veiko, who nonplussed responds, "Psholty Ivan," in other words, "Fuck you, Ivan." After offering the same farewell salutation to Veiko, the two head in separate directions, their futures and fates uncertain.

The open-endedness of the Russian buddy film may be its most progressive feature. The genre employs the clash of juxtaposed characters to stage a confrontation between two belief systems—that is the genre's pragmatic function. However, it does not do so to teach its viewers how to life or whom to emulate. The genre is neither pedantic nor pedagogic.

## 5.0 CHAPTER 4: VETERAN MAN AND THE END OF MACHISMO

The buddy films considered in the previous chapter depend on the masculine dyad and focus on the characters' antagonistic relationships. The accidental pairing of two hitherto unacquainted men in those films sparks conflict that functions to erode seemingly permanent and sacred beliefs (e.g., the superiority of Soviet socialist ideology, paternity, straightforward binary codifications of friend and foe). The characters' incompatible perceptions of the world allow one of them to destabilize the other and to challenge his inherited, conservative point of view rooted in a defunct Soviet myth. Another inflection of the buddy film joins three, or in one exceptional instance as many four characters together. In these examples of the genre the small group of men portrays diversity in their appearances as well as in their social positions, exists at odds with their contemporary milieu, and suffers through difficult cultural shifts. With the small shift from two characters to three or four comes, however, certain modifications; most notably, the antagonism of the male dyad is replaced with expressions of camaraderie and compassion in the face of societal changes that challenge inherited notions of masculinity.

The buddy films of primary interest here, Andrei Smirnov's *Belorussian Station* (*Belorusskii vokzal* 1970), Vadim Abdrashitov's *Time of the Dancer* (*Vremia tantsora* 1997), and Aleksei Muradov's *The Truth of the Shchelps* (*Pravda o shchelpakh* 2003), demand our attention for representing the masculine crisis resulting from destabilizing cultural shifts. The four decades that stretch across these films requires that we move backwards historically from the disintegration of the Soviet Union—the moment that precipitates the breakdown of dominant

myths in the buddy films featuring the dyad—to the 1970s, when, according to sociologists Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova, the Soviet liberal press began writing about the “crisis of masculinity” (435). Reference to this crisis appears frequently in analyses of late Soviet culture. However, late- and post-Soviet Russian cinema more often than not masks this crisis with compensatory masculinity that asserts an excessive manliness to make up for actual lack. Whether it is the deadly vigilante warrior-protagonists as in Aleksei Balabanov’s *Brother* movies (*Brat* 1997; *Brat 2* 2000) and Aleksei Mizgirev’s *Hard-Hearted (Kremen’)* 2007); or the young, trained killers in any number of war films—for example, the Russian lead actor, Ivan (Aleksei Chadov), in Balabanov’s *War (Voina)* 2002 or the group of young soldiers in Feodor Bondarchuk’s patriotic *Company 9 (9-aia rota)* 2005 about the Soviet-Afghanistan war; or the litany of terrifying Johns and policemen that violently torture the three prostitutes in Iurii Moroz’s *The Spot (Tochka)* 2006 cinematic representations of men from the last decade repeatedly rely on violence, domination, and nationalism to affirm a “might makes right” display of machismo. Perhaps no film serves as a better example of the interplay between compensatory masculinity and violence as Aleksandr Nevzorov’s film about the Russian-Chechen conflict, *Purgatory (Chistilishche)* 1998. In addition to the unrelentingly acts of graphic violence enacted on the male body (e.g., crucifixion, beheading), the film repeatedly visually refers to male genitals as a locus of power: soldiers shoot their opponents in the crotch; Afghan soldiers are shown urinating on dead Russian soldiers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Popular culture examples that link machismo and violence are also found in the Russian *detektiv*, or crime novel. In Anthony Olcott’s monograph on the genre, he writes that “[a]lthough [Aleksandra] Marinina may be more explicit than many of her fellow authors in her identification of sex with aggression and power, her interweaving of love and violence are, in fact, entirely typical of the *detektiv* genre as a whole” (60).

In the buddy film, by contrast, violence is almost totally absent. Bands of three or four male characters bound by the trials and tribulations of war experienced together or simply by life-long friendships provide an intimate collective, within which the characters express frustration with tears, physical weakness, and sympathy toward one another. It is not their involvement in war, *per se*, that they lament; it is not some sort of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Rather, it is their distance from the war—from the sense of valor, heroism, and pride that military participation is supposed to grant a man—that they bemoan. The characters' involvement in military action—or, similarly debilitating, their non-involvement—impinges on their ability to define themselves as virile Russian men in the represented diegetic present.

This chapter's title—"Veteran Men and the End of Machismo"—is meant to conjure two meanings. First, and most straightforwardly, it refers to the veterans, the exservicemen, who served in the Soviet or post-Soviet military and fought in war. The characters of *Belorussian Station* and *Time of the Dancer* identify primarily with their status as veterans and only secondarily with their social roles as fathers, husbands, or workers. However, by extracting these military men from the war film and placing them in a buddy film, the semiotic value of the soldier changes and, therefore, functions as an invitation to viewer to shift his expectations. While official state rhetoric may champion these men in parades and celebrations, children, wives, and employers expect them to shed their uniforms and shift their allegiances back to the family and work. This return to civilian life is plagued by emotional, physical, and psychological struggles resulting from the disjuncture between their prestige as soldiers and their insignificance in quotidian life that systematically diminishes the masculine pride afforded by their veteran status.

In her investigation into the relationship between the human existence and war, Barbara Ehrenreich hypothesizes war's vital role in cultural definitions of masculinity. She begins by problematizing theories that link war with a male instinct, noting that no such instinct has been proven to exist and, moreover, history is packed with examples of men who go to great lengths to avoid participating in war. In short, no natural or biological link can be found to link men with war (8-12). Ehrenreich's interests are in the cultural uses of war, which she does identify as "one of the most rigidly 'gendered' activities known to humankind" (125). She identifies war as "an activity that has often served to *define* manhood itself" (127). Without question, Russian masculinity and militarism have long been interwoven. In the analysis of Russian masculinity that follows, the sociologists Temkina and Zdravomyslova present engagement in military action—and specifically in World War Two—as a defining feature of Soviet hegemonic masculinity. For this reason, it is not surprising that as the distance between these veterans and the war grows (whether spatially, temporally, or in terms of cultural appreciation) or as war itself becomes an increasingly less honorable mission, as Abdrashitov suggests in *Time of the Dancer*, the ability to use veteran identity to achieve heteronormative, positive masculinity falters; hence, the end of machismo.

A second, somewhat more figurative meaning of "veteran men" shifts the definition of "veteran" from ex-serviceman to "one who has seen long service in any office or position; an experienced or aged person" (OED def. 2). In this reconfiguration, the notion of "veteran men" refers to men who are experienced at being men. It identifies the male life-cycle (i.e., lived experience), rather than to military service, as proffering men the necessary opportunities to induct oneself into a masculine role. Redundant as this may initially sound, it makes sense in a culture ruled by essentialist-gender definitions. Russian culture makes no apologies for

advocating a gender politic that reads, most simply, as a tautology. For example, the contemporary author and essayist Viktor Erofeev known for his rather outlandish diatribes on gender writes, “A man is a man when he thinks of himself as a man” (46). As the characters in these films undergo a gender crisis, they are well aware of the attributes that culture suggests they should exemplify thanks to their long experience in the culture. However, even with this veteran knowledge of what qualifies as manly, they are incapable of conveying such unproblematic displays of masculine virility. They are not the masters of their domain at home; they falter in the workplace; their physical health begins to deteriorate; and they struggle in everyday life. Hence, veteran men and the end of machismo, now a crisis associated with the life cycle, rather than military conflict.

To make this point more convincingly, the first two sections of this chapter provide overviews of two sets of scholarship: one investigates the masculine crisis in late- and post-Soviet society and the other considers how representations of compensatory masculinity in visual cultural texts indicate this crisis. The third section of this chapter places *Belorussian Station* and *Truth of the Shchelps* side-by-side. A detailed analysis of these two exceptionally different films elucidates the historical period that spans from early Stagnation to the post-Soviet period, within which this particular variant of the Russian buddy film must be situated, and initiates a discussion of how films of the same genre can adhere to or depart from predominant expressions of ideology.

Insofar as gender, and specifically masculinity, is the dominant ideological construct under scrutiny here, the chapter’s fourth section, drawing still on *Belorussian Station* and *Truth of the Shchelps*, but also pulling in Abdrashitov’s extraordinarily complicated film *Time of the Dancer*, considers the Russian buddy film’s nostalgic rendering of hegemonic Soviet

masculinity. This section also identifies how the genre employs ritual social customs used to display masculine prowess—sexual conquests, drinking, dueling (figuratively and literally)—but strips these ritual events of their effectivity. Participation in these events, therefore, fails to provide the characters the opportunity to transition themselves into positions of codified or acceptable masculinity. In other words, the protagonist groups share in ritual events that typically anoint men into masculine subjects, but in the buddy film such ceremonial customs, like the men themselves, are revealed to be ineffective, or, if you will, impotent. Finally discussion of the futility of typical male bonding rituals incorporates a consideration of the genre’s dominant imagery. Perhaps because these films by and large keep their characters from finding a comfortable way to be adult men, they use the imagery of infancy and childhood, on the one hand, and of death, on the other, to underscore the inability for the characters to exist comfortably as middle-age men. In other words, to return to the life-cycle metaphor, because while alive these characters are stuck in a symbolic state of childhood, they do not have access to those life events that would grant them the status of veteran (i.e., experienced) men.

## 5.1 CONTEXT

Simply the identification of a masculine crisis as a social and historical event exposes Russian culture’s reliance on essentialist definitions of gender. Temkina and Zdravomyslova’s article is not without its own hints of essentialist rhetoric. For example, they explain that this crisis refers to a moment in late Soviet history when the “impossibility [for men] to fulfill traditional male roles, which is linked to the curtailing of liberal rights (ownership, political freedom, freedom of conscience), implicitly is considered the reason for the destruction of

genuine masculinity” (435).<sup>2</sup> This reference to “genuine masculinity” undermines the entire project of masculinity studies, which, like feminist studies before it, seeks to dismantle essentialist definitions of gender, thereby making claims for a single, “genuine” masculinity simply untenable. However, it would be a misreading to attribute the championing of a “genuine masculinity” to Temkina and Zdravomyslova; their syntax distances them from a necessary agreement with essentialism. Their article is useful because it provide insight into the particular logic used within Russian culture to explain the causes of the masculine crisis. The co-authors locate recognition of the masculine crisis within the liberal press as a way to demonstrate societal acknowledgement of it and in order to describe how the concept of this crisis circulated.

According to Temkina and Zdravomylova, as a social phenomenon this so-called masculine crisis exists as a “discursive fact” within the liberal press; for example, in *Literary Newspaper* (*Literaturnaia gazeta*) and the so-called “thick journals”—*Foreign Literature* (*Inostrannaia literatura*) and *New World* (*Novyi mir*)—beginning in 1970.<sup>3</sup> Despite the inclusion of these publications in the so-called liberal press, the three explanations of this phenomenon extracted by Temkina and Zdravomyslova to summarize the typical ways that Soviet sociologists wrote about male victimization are anything but liberal by a contemporary Western standard. Each maintains a conservative outlook, advocates returning men to positions of unchallenged patriarchal dominance—to that so-called “true masculinity”—and is laced with a misogynistic thread. To reiterate, it is not these contemporary sociologists who advocate a

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<sup>2</sup> “Невозможность исполнение традиционных мужских ролей, связанная с ограничениями либеральных прав (собственности, политических свобод, свободы совести), имплицитно считается причиной разрушения истинной мужественности” (435).

<sup>33</sup> Specifically, Temkina and Zdravomyslova cite an article by the Soviet demographer B. Ts. Urlanis published in *Literary Newspaper* in 1970 as the first to engage in a discussion about the crisis of masculinity (435).

single, normative conception of masculinity, but the Soviet liberal press that sought to establish and endorse an immutable set of gender characteristics to be equated with maleness.

The Soviet press blames the demise of masculine prominence, first, on demographic statistics that calculate women as outnumbering men in post-World War Two Soviet Union, thus leaving men at a disadvantage within the overall population (436). Second, there is the scientifically questionable claim of biological discrimination: women tend to live longer than men, thus demonstrating that men, not women, are the weaker sex (436). And, third, the press of the time held the plague of modernization accountable for the ruin of the nuclear family and gender dynamics. The slippery-slope argument presented in the liberal press rhetoric works as follows: men lose their dominion over women in the workplace; men become increasingly superfluous; men are denied their “rightful” position of authority as laborers; men turn to alcohol and extramarital affairs, which leads to higher divorce rates, and, it follows, an increase in single-mother homes. The argument even goes so far as to suggest that as a result of fatherless households boys are more likely to mature into homosexual men (436-7). Noting that similar attempts to explain the masculine crisis continue well into the post-Soviet period, Temkina and Zdravomyslova provide a quotation from postmodern author Erofeev’s series of short writings titled simply *Men* (*Muzhchiny*, 1997). Erofeev condemns women’s sexual emancipation, which in his estimation begins to take shape in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, as a key factor leading to the diminishment of men’s ostensibly previously unshakeable position of social authority (32-3; qtd Temkina and Zdravomyslova 439).

Rebecca Kay, a professor of Russian gender studies at the University of Glasgow, provides similar rational in the introduction to her monograph, *Men in Contemporary Russia: The Fallen Heroes of Post-Soviet Change?* She echoes Erofeev’s claim, though, notably,

tempered with a feminist tone, when she explains that “women [...] were frequently castigated for allowing their success in the world of work to lead them to ape ‘male’ behavior in everything from simply wearing trousers to smoking and drinking to an extent deemed unseemly in ‘the fair sex’” (13). Kay goes on to explain that in an effort to combat this perceived gender confusion there has “been a revival and re-emphasis of rigid and essentialist notions of gender in Russian society” since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (13). The pressure to maintain macho images occurs within the challenging social and economic climate of the early 1990s, which with its unprecedented inflation and rapid rise in unemployment mitigate men’s ability to sustain such roles. Sarah Ashwin and Tatyana Lytkina write on the implications of the debilitating economic transition that accompanied the shift from Soviet to post-Soviet Russia and argue that Russian “men’s status in the household is defined by their role as primary breadwinners and that when this role is lost, it is very difficult for them to define a new position in the domestic sphere” (190-1). Based on the ironclad gender roles that pervade Russian society, men are generally not appreciated for their help around the house. According to Ashwin and Lytkina, even exhausted Russian women, who shoulder the “double burden” of work and home, prefer not to see their husbands washing the floors or cooking dinner (194; 197-9).<sup>4</sup> Only a limited number of chores including such stereotypically masculine tasks as home renovations or taking out the trash are delegated to husbands and sons. Ashwin and Lytkina conclude that the “pressure to do gender

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<sup>4</sup> Natalia Baranskaia’s novella *A Week Like Any Other* (*Nedelia kak nedelia*, 1969) highlights the “double burden,” shouldered by Soviet women, who held down careers while simultaneously maintaining primary responsibility for the family and home.

appropriately shapes the form of men's demoralization by constraining the choices that men feel are open to them" (203-4).<sup>5</sup>

In *The New Soviet Man and Woman: Sex-role Socialization in the USSR*, Lynne Attwood links the two time periods discussed above—the 1970s and the transitional era of the early 1990s—when she explains that “[p]edagogical interest in sex differences in personality, and the subsequent attempt to resocialize women into more domestic roles, began in the relative stability of the Brezhnev period” (9). She continues to note that although “[t]he death of Brezhnev [1982] led to three rapid changes in leadership, and then the onset of *Glasnost'* and *Perestroika*,” thus setting the Soviet Union on a path of reform in most spheres of cultural life, “this had little impact on the 1970s model of sex role socialization” (9). Rather than inspire a liberal, feminist reappraisal of gender roles, the overwhelming changes leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union, according to Attwood, only reinforced gender codes that assigned women to the home and granted men uncontested patriarchal domination.

This active reinstatement of traditional gender roles demanding women to act like women and men like men (defined in the most retrograde terms), occurs not simply because women became in many instances primary breadwinners or more freely expressed their sexuality, though this certainly presented a challenge to conservative values. It is imperative not to overlook the intricate web of key historic events and influences occurring as early as the post-war Thaw era and continuing throughout Stagnation and well into the *Glastnost'* and *Perestroika* period that led to the sustained period of masculine crisis. For example, the residual trauma of World War Two on the male psyche cannot be overestimated. Other events, which have been sufficiently written about elsewhere (and do not need to be fully analyzed here) include Khrushchev's

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<sup>5</sup> Although Ashwin and Lytkina do not engage with Judith Butler's gender theory, their use of the expression “to do gender,” very much recalls Butler, who \_\_\_\_

Twentieth Party Congress speech (1956), the Soviet military attempt to curtail the Prague Spring (1968), the disastrous ten-year long Soviet-Afghanistan war, that some scholars cite as a precipitating moment in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, and, of course, the disintegration of the Soviet Empire. Furthermore, the rise of bourgeois culture during Stagnation and the resulting increased economic stratification of Soviet society peaked with the onset of a capitalist economy in the 1990s. These events led to a far more complicated, polyphonic cultural sphere that could no longer champion the New Soviet Man as the single, acceptable masculine type. Stagnation culture created a far more diverse population, but there was no ideology to incorporate or make sense of this diversity. Russian men who fought in World War Two and coping with middle age in the 1970s were raised with the expectation of adopting one of a limited number of acceptable archetypal models of masculinity, and were, therefore, unprepared to adapt to this cacophonous social landscape.

Temkina and Zdravomyslova list four such archetypes available to the late-Soviet man. The first two fall under the heading of “retrospective nostalgic heroic models” (*retrospektivnye nostal'gicheskie modeli geroev*). They include, first, “hegemonic Soviet masculinity” (*gegemonnaia sovetskaia maskulinnost'*), which the authors describe as being represented by the previous generation—by the fathers of the late-Soviet men—who industrialized the USSR or who fought in World War Two (442-43). The other retrospective model, “traditional Russian masculinity” (*traditsionnaia russkaia maskulinnost'*), has two instantiations divided by class. The Russian peasant (*russkii muzhik*), as idealized in the 1970s by the Village prose writers;<sup>6</sup> and

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<sup>6</sup> Village prose (*derevenskaia proza*) refers to a literary style dominant in the 1960s and 1970s that romanticizes rural life as authentically Russian in order to evoke a cozier, homegrown nationalist spirit that contradicts the monumentalism of the Stalinist era. Writers associated with Village prose include,

the peasant's genteel counterpart, the nobleman-aristocrat (*dvorianin-aristokrat*), a dominant subject in such diverse cultural texts as semiotician Iurii Lotman's analysis of the Decembrists<sup>7</sup> to the bard music of Bulat Okudzhava (435-44). The other two models—western hegemonic masculinity (*zapadnaia gegemonnaia maskulinnost'*) and Soviet femininity (*sovetskaia zhenshvennost'*)—are considered to be synchronic models that exist contemporaneously to the late-Soviet man, but which are inaccessible to him.

By the 1960s and even more so by the 1970s, middle-age men faced the realization that these available models—hegemonic Soviet masculinity, traditional Russian masculinity, the image of the Russian peasant, and the image of Russian nobleman—did not coincide with who they were. In short, expectations did not and, in fact, could not coincide with reality. Moreover, the next generation—the children born in the 1970s—not only grew up with fathers who suffered the confusion engendered by the changing society, but they, too, weathered a tumultuous shift: the transition into post-Soviet capitalist society.

It is useful to temper Temkina and Zdravomyslova's rather empirical reading of the masculine crisis with Alexei Yurchak's interpretation of late Soviet culture (which he dates as

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among others, Valentin Rasputin, Vasilii Shukshin, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. For a detailed investigation of the themes, genres, and literary language typical of this style, see Parthé.

<sup>7</sup> In his article “The Decembrist in Daily Life (Everyday Behavior as a Historical-Psychological Category),” Iurii Lotman's describes the Decembrist not simply as a political revolutionary, but as culturally specific type. He characterizes their everyday conduct as a result of their noble heritage and as a result of their ability to cultivate a distinct public personality. Among the qualities exemplary of the Decembrists that Lotman isolates are insatiable loquaciousness that replaced action (99-101); cultivated “seriousness as a behavioral norm” (102-103); theatrical and brusque conduct (105-107); carousing during leisure time as a necessary complement to military service and demonstration of freedom (124-128); condemnation of entertainment as spiritually empty (135-137); and the sacredness of the cult of brotherhood (139-143).

1950s-1980s). Yurchak demonstrates how a “hegemony of form” comes into existence via the development of “normalized discourse” in Soviet culture. He argues that the Party’s authoritarian discourse overtime came close to “the so-called ‘semantic model’ of language, according to which the literal meaning of texts is considered to be directly linked to linguistic form and independent of context” (48). Official texts circulated as repetitions of themselves and displayed a kind of “ideological literacy” by “reproducing the precise passages and structures of [...] language in one’s texts and speeches” (48). Yurchak explains that

[a]fter the 1950s [i.e., after Stalin’s death in 1953], with the disappearance of the “external” voice that provided metadiscussions and evaluations of that language, the language structures became increasingly normalized, cumbersome, citational, and circular. The language became what I [i.e., Yurchak] termed *hypernormalized*. [...] (75 emphasis in the original)

Yurchak continues to argue that this hypernormalization produced a hegemonic and unitary authoritative discourse, but that “because authoritative language was hegemonic, unavoidable, and hypernormalized, it was no longer read by its audiences [i.e., the Soviet people] literally, at the level of constative meanings” (76). If we tether Yurchak’s analysis of heteronormative language to this discussion of how gender roles were articulated, it seems quite clear that here, too, Soviet rhetoric dominated, and therefore, limited the possible ways to talk about masculinity or, for that matter, femininity.

Yurchak locates a distinction between what he terms constative meaning and performative behavior. He uses the example of voting to describe that while this hypernormative language was not understood as communicating a literal truth, the Soviet people did respond to it performatively. The example of voting provides an illustration of this distinction: regardless of

one's personal views on a particular resolution brought to vote at a party meeting, people voted for it. He concludes: “[t]he performative dimension of this act did not *describe* reality and could not be analyzed as true or false; instead it produced effects and created facts in that reality (76). If it is possible to think about how this phenomenon might relate to this attempt to describe the definitions of masculinity during the late Soviet period, it seems that as the Soviet liberal press wrote about the masculine crisis and, therefore, normalized stereotyped gender expectations (providing constative meaning), any claims about how men were actually living remain elusive.

This concept of performance, therefore becomes particularly useful to the analysis of visual representations of the so-called masculine crisis. Rather than make claims that a masculine crisis took place, recognition that the concept circulated in the press, provides the opportunity to witness how it was then performed, thus creating it to be a cultural, if not empirical, fact within late Soviet culture.

## 5.2 DEBATES IN MEDIA STUDIES

Moving from sociological and anthropological studies to cultural analysis, scholars of late- and post-Soviet visual media who focus on gender identify a surge of machismo, strength, and patriarchal authority that accompanies, or, to be more accurate, masks representations of the masculine crisis during both the Stagnation and immediate post-Soviet eras. Writing on television culture during this period, Elena Prokhorova addresses the relationship between cultural, economic, and political events and identity crisis:

Devaluation of national symbols, fragmentation of national mythology, arrested economic development, and impotent gerontocratic leadership marked the crisis of national identity in the 1970s. [...] Soviet masculinity as cultural construct was built primarily on the foundation of the political utopia, and once [it] started showing signs of decay, masculinity as the icon of Soviet modernity underwent a crisis. (132)

The ideological function of television as the most popular form of official culture during the Brezhnev era meant, however, that programming must communicate the masculine ideal and give no indication of this crisis. Prokhorova argues that the “dual crisis of Soviet national mythology and of the conventional image of the ‘real man’ brought about gendered TV scheduling” (134). She goes on to demonstrate convincingly that specific genres traditionally popular among male viewers—“spy thrillers, detectives, [and] police procedurals”—“were ideally suited for the project of recuperating the obsolete masculinity of Soviet patriarchy’s golden days” (134-5).

The further away from the “Soviet patriarchy’s golden days” we move, the more excessive and even violent representations of men become. Attwood’s article “Sex and the Cinema” provides an overview of the representation of sex and sexuality in Russian film dating from 1988, when Vasilii Pichul’s *Little Vera (Malenkaia Vera)* was released. While advancing a hypothesis similar to Prokhorova’s—namely, that the masculine crisis produced, perhaps counter intuitively, the resurgence of manly men in visual media—Attwood approaches her topic from a different angle. In an attempt to make sense of the proliferation of misogynistic and violent imagery in *Glasnost*'-era Russian filmmaking, Attwood follows the reasoning of Anglo feminist film scholars who read the “glut of films appearing in the early 1970s which depicted women

being raped” as a patriarchal punishment doled out to women, who owing to the women’s movement “were able to claim their own sexuality” (84). Attwood notes that while there is no comparable woman’s movement in Russia, a similar backlash phenomenon occurs. She writes, echoing the research of the Russian and Anglo sociologists presented above, that “[f]rom the mid-1970s on, alarm was expressed in the Soviet press about the ‘masculinisation’ of women and the challenge this posed both to Soviet manhood and to Soviet society” (84). This threat to patriarchal gender relations results in a proliferation of imagery showing men, who reassert their control by dominating women physically, sexually, and even economically.

Continuing along the timeline to post-Soviet culture, Eliot Borenstein writing on the rapid proliferation of pornography in the early 1990s treats the men’s magazine *Andrei* as symptomatic of a larger phenomenon. While the magazine’s straightforward economic objective is to sell sexual images of Russian women to Russian men (374), Borenstein explains its ideological function as a form of recompense for men suffering from Russia’s diminished position in international relations, which results in Soviet masculinity being besieged from all sides.

The main ideological role of *Andrei*’s agenda is compensation for the trauma associated with the lost position of global dominance, with the trauma suffered not only by the entire nation, but also in particular by the Russian man. Sex becomes the magical formula necessary for the Russian man to cope with the enduring shock. (375)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “На повестке для журнала *Андрей* стоит главная идеологическая задача по компенсации травмы, связанной с утратой позиций мирового господства, травмой, переживаемой не только всей нацией, но и, в особенности, русским мужчиной. Секс становится той магической формулой, которая необходима русскому мужчине для того, чтобы справиться с перенесенным шоком.”

In popular post-Soviet Russian cinema, the image of men has been decisive. In her article “National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov,” Susan Larsen demonstrates how the popular films of these directors set out to construct an appropriate hero for the post-Soviet period. She notes that Mikhalkov’s *Burnt by the Sun* (*Utomlennye solntsem*, 1994) and *Barber of Siberia* (*Siberskii tsiriul’nik*, 1998) and Balabanov’s *Brother 2* return to “models [that] are all emphatically masculine, as are the conflicts and communities central to these films, each of which casts paternal and fraternal bonds as vital threads in the tattered post-Soviet fabric of Russian national identity” (493). She continues:

Much of the pathos of these films derives from a common anxiety about what it means to be Russian at the end of the twentieth century, and most of the films articulate that anxiety in terms of threats to masculine “honor” and “dignity” (Mikhalkov) or national “might” and “right” (Balabanov). The conflation of national identity with masculine authority is a key component of these films’ appeal to Russian viewers. (493)

Bondarchuk, like Mikhalkov and Balabanov before him, offers his viewers hyper-masculine characters, whose violent might and brute force combine to present a spuriously heroic image of Russia. Were Larsen to have written her article a few years later, she could have included Fedor Bondarchuk’s film *Company 9* about soldiers who transition from boys into valiant, patriotic men as they advance from boot camp to the war in Afghanistan. Of course, *Company 9* is less of a historical recount, and more of a historical rewrite that offers audiences valorizing, if hyperbolic and bombastic images of themselves.

In opposition to Stagnation-era popular television images of stereotypical manly men, *Perestroika* cinema's burgeoning use of male sexual violence on women, the post-Soviet pornography boom that provides men the opportunity to reassert—even if only in fantasy—their dominant role, or recent blockbuster hits that realign masculinity with nationalism, the buddy film stands out as an exceptional genre that allows for atypical content. Unlike Brezhnev-era television or late Soviet and early post-Soviet cinema that obscure crisis with hyperbolic men, like the New Russian, whose dominant masculinity promotes, in the words of Helena Goscilo and Nadezhda Azhgikhina, “the real macho” (“*nastoiaishch[ee] macho*”) (531), the buddy film allows average men to gather in small groups and express frustration, sadness, confusion, and anger as they come to realize their compromised, even minimized role in contemporary society.

### 5.3 VETERANS AND SHCHELPS: CHARACTERS OF THE SAME GENRE?

Much of the discussion of the contemporary Russian buddy film thus far has concentrated on the telltale characteristics of an already developed form, on the semantic blocks typical of the genre and their typical syntactical arrangements. It is now necessary to examine the genre from a diachronic point of view. Genre study provides a unique opportunity to observe how a particular model of representation—here, the representation of the masculine crisis evinced by the trauma associated with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and shift to post-Soviet culture—changes over time and, simultaneously, to look at how various directors play with and morph that model. Instead of maintaining a simplistic understanding of genre cinema as synonymous with commercial filmmaking, an inclusive definition that investigates art house, *auteur*, commercial, and popular cinemas’ use of genre is preferable. Such a non-exclusionary consideration of genre reveals how varied directors depend on a genre’s familiar structure as a

type of foundational base, a system, or—to borrow terminology from Ferdinand de Saussure—as a kind of *langue* within which an otherwise idiosyncratic, strange articulation—a unique instance of *parole*—can be understood.

Two films—Andrei Smirnov’s *Belorussian Station* and Aleksei Muradov’s *Truth of the Shchelps*—despite being made approximately thirty years apart and despite employing distinct cinematic registers, are, despite all odds, ripe for comparison. Smirnov’s eminently popular melodrama about four frontline friends’ reunion after twenty years is well known and much loved by Soviet audiences. Muradov’s arthouse drama about three childhood friends, to the contrary, never acquired much of an audience. As Nina Sirivlia, who wrote a review of the film for *The Art of Cinema (Iskusstvo kino)*, put it “I’m afraid this film is not fated for the festival [circuit] or the box office” (2003).<sup>9</sup> In a similar vein, Birgit Beumers notes that with the exception of a screening at the Kinotavr film festival in 2003 and the Best Male Actor award conferred on each of the film’s male protagonists, the film was absolutely unnoticed (2004). Thus, this comparative perspective identifies the genre bond between these two films and, as a result, *Belorussian Station* sheds light on Muradov’s film, which strikes the viewer as so idiosyncratic that even Sirivlia in her review acknowledges the difficulty she faced in trying to identify any cinematic analogy.

Smirnov’s classic was, to put it euphemistically, a “collaborative” project insofar as censors diminished directorial authority and independence. Initially, Smirnov worked together with director Larisa Shepit’ko. After the Soviet censors interfered, however, she retracted her name from the credits, not wanting to be associated with the cleansed and simplified version of her work. At least in film critic Sergei Lavrent’ev’s opinion, Smirnov did not share Shepit’ko’s

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<sup>9</sup> “Фестивальная судьба ей, боюсь, не светит, прокатная—тоже.”

qualms; Lavrent'ev characterizes Smirnov as employing a “precise and tranquil style of direction [...] that does not force the viewer to strain himself while watching this story of frontline friends’ reunion.”<sup>10</sup> Pronounced by Neya Zorkaya to be “a declaration of the younger generation’s love for their fathers,” the film resonated with an audience that nostalgically recalled the honor of the post-war period while struggling with the embourgeoisement of early Stagnation (254).

Muradov’s film, in contrast, does strain the audience. It is a complicated and disjunctive film that seems to eschew ready-made genre frameworks, particularly because Muradov crafts the film to work against conventions of narrative cinema. He subverts standard strategies of signification, a primary example of which is apparent already in the title. “Shchelps,” a made up word, refers to a make-believe mythical creature that has no image, no face (*oblik*). This double negative achieved by using a word in the film’s title that does not exist in order to name a creature that does not exist begins to divulge Muradov’s intentional avoidance of pre-fabricated meaning. Moreover, Muradov fills his film with visual and aural non-sequiturs that make it a challenging viewing experience. For example, he uses extra-diegetic sound—machine gun fire, a jackhammer, barking dogs, opera music, crying babies—that has no relationship to the events occurring simultaneously on screen and thereby impedes typical cinematic visual/aural correspondence. Similarly disorienting is the host of secondary characters, completely superfluous to the film’s narrative, who appear out of nowhere and disappear just as quickly. Case in point: in the film’s opening episode, one character approaches a tall, pregnant and wide-eyed young woman and asks her a question. This brief interaction provides neither the inquiring character nor the viewer with information. The woman remains completely silent and then

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<sup>10</sup> “Четкая, спокойная режиссура Андрея Смирнова, не заставляющая зрителей напрягаться, вглядываясь в историю встречи фронтовых друзей.”

(<http://mega.km.ru/Cinema/encyclo.asp?TopicNumber=323>)

subsequently exits the frame, never to materialize in the film again. This mute character is the first in a long series of red herrings. She, like the shchelps of the title, signifies a lack of signification. Questions often have no answers in Muradov's film. Verbal dialogue does little to temper the inexplicable formal features: conversations sometimes follow logical argumentation, but just as often do not. These confusion-producing use of a red herring that leads the viewer on a proverbial wild goose chase for explanations that simply do not exist is duplicated in the film's narrative about three men on a search for information, which like the shchelps, remains elusive, even chimerical.

Despite being made thirty years apart and differing in their visual and narrative styles, *Belorussian Station* and *Truth of the Shchelps* are, nonetheless, ripe for comparison. Key to my argument is both films' use of the buddy film genre. Examples of the Russian buddy film featuring three and four men in their collective protagonist group offer noteworthy examples of men who do not or cannot live up to the hegemonic status afforded them. Similar to *Taxi Blues*, *The Lover*, and *Cuckoo*, these films—as is typical of the genre—focus on dejected and displaced men of late- and post-Soviet society, who, though infrequently represented in genre cinema, epitomize the masculinity crisis of the time period. Similarly frustrated with the task of or simply incapable of acting as the “avatars of a potent nationhood,” as Michael Shapiro describes the relationship of Hollywood cinematic representations of masculinity from the 1980s to the state, the characters of the Russian buddy film genre do not reproduce socially sanctioned representations of masculinity; they cannot (140). Instead, the characters struggle with their inability to achieve or to maintain what society expects of men. The sense of crisis manifest in these films results not from the clash of two differing worldviews (as is typical of buddy films

featuring the dyad), but from the discrepancy between the expectations inherited in the characters' formative years and the frustrating actuality of adult lives.

The last time the buddies of *Belorussian Station* were all together, they were dressed identically in their uniforms—having just shared the experience of war. If in their youths they were indistinguishable, now, as middle-aged men, they convey the heterogeneity typical of the constellations of protagonists paradigmatic in the buddy film genre. Each hails from his individual post, suffers the physical fatigue of middle age and the psychological uncertainty of his role in contemporary Soviet society. By opening *Belorussian Station* with Colonel Matveev's funeral and subsequent wake, the film provides sufficient reason for the four central characters' palpably depressed state. However, already at the wake it becomes clear that each of the characters bears a sense of sorrow exacerbated, but not caused solely by the colonel's death. As middle-age men, they suffer from a general sense of social alienation in the modern world, where the younger generation's pomposity, arrogance, and fun-loving carefree lifestyle have usurped the weighty sense of honor, spiritual devotion, and nationalism associated with the war era.

The accountant Nikolai (Anatolii Papanov), suffers at work, where he struggles to understand what is expected of him. Humiliated by his younger boss, who reprimands him for his inability to grasp the nuances of contemporary economics, Nikolai sits in the boss's office dejected, humiliated, and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He quotes obscure accounting rules from the 1940s and 1950s that, while outdated in his boss's opinion, prohibit Nikolai from fulfilling the tasks asked of him. Vania, played by the great Evgenii Leonov, is a working class laborer—a repairman—who resonates mediocrity to such a degree that not only is he mistakenly taken for a petty thief and chauffeur at the wake, but he accepts the affront, too passive a man to

stick up for himself. His backbone proves to be similarly weak at home, where he cowers before his emotionally distant wife, who chastises him for never before having written and told these same friends about the physical difficulties he faced following the war. Viktor Sergeevich (Aleksei Glazyrin) exists on the other side of the economic spectrum: as the boss of a large factory, he parades his elevated social status physically manifested in his sharp suit and chauffeured car. The other men witness Viktor's commanding presence among his workers, but are not impressed. Viktor's domineering style—marked by an authoritarian tone and use of scare tactics as a motivating force—implicate him as old fashioned, even dictatorial. Finally, Aleksei (Vsevolod Safonov) completes this picture of Soviet diversity: as a journalist, he typifies the *intelligent*. Unfulfilled goals to write a novel reveal that he, too, has stagnated in middle age.

*Truth of the Shchelps* also opens with the reunion of friends at a funeral. Andrei Speranskii, Tolia Feldman, and Zema (Kamil' Tukaev, Aleksei Shliamin, and Leonid Okunev, respectively), find themselves in a disorienting situation when they respond to a strange request made by another old friend, Dania Orlov, to attend the funeral of a woman, whom they do not know. Unclear as to their purpose at this unknown woman's funeral, unable to find Orlov following the funeral, and unsettled by their day-long journey throughout their hometown, the characters engage in a chaotic hunt. As the three men wander through the city, bumping into old friends, past lovers, and many unknown people, they reflect on their present lives by confronting their pasts. Now in their forties, the three main characters have a shared history that spans from the 1960s to the post-Soviet 1990s, a time period that coincides with the difficult passage from Soviet to post-Soviet society. The actor Tukaev describes the film as raising many of the same issues that concern him in his own life:

*Truth of the Shchelps* is a story [...] that deeply disturbs me, because in my theatrical circle, among forty-year olds, we often consider what we are good for and why were we born. We absolutely realize that we are not warriors or victors like are grandfathers; we are not the builders of communism like our fathers; and we are not the children of the future like our descendants. We are forty year olds. It's a kind of substantiality. We grew up within the framework of specific behavioral norms. And then all of a sudden they told us: "Hey guys, it's not at all like that, you're not living right." (*Posle detstva*)<sup>11</sup>

The film portrays post-Soviet masculinity as a set of frustrations associated with midlife and the complicated transition from Soviet to post-Soviet culture. Although the film's narrative transpires in the course of one day, the referential time span considered by the film's characters looks back to the Soviet period. This retrospective glance—emphasized as the veteran (in the sense of having long experience) men remember their childhoods, during their reunions with long-lost friends, and, in the final moment of the film, when the 6 on Speranskii's apartment door, unhinges and spins down to become a 9, thereby transforming the number 60 to a 90—serves to indicate the dislocation of the characters' present existence in the 1990s from their past in the 1960s.

Much like the characters of Smirnov's film, Muradov's trio also struggle with the changing values a society that compromise their ability to assert themselves as stable men.

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<sup>11</sup> “‘Правда о щелпах’ – история про трех сорокалетних друзей, которая меня сильно взволновала по той причине, что в своей театральной среде, среди сорокалетних, мы часто обсуждаем, на что пригодились и зачем родились. И совершенно точно осознаем, что не являемся ни воителями и победителями, как наши деды, ни строителями коммунизма, как отцы, ни детьми будущего, как наши потомки. Мы – сорокалетки. Есть такая субстанция. Мы выросли в рамках определенных норм поведения. А потом нам вдруг сказали: ‘Эй, ребята, все не так, вы не так жили.’”

Speranskii suffers a cuckolded existence as an unsuccessful artist married to and financially supported by an advertising executive wife. Doctor Tolia Feldman's greatest claim to fame is his list of ex-wives rivaled only by Henry VIII. Consistently unsatisfied and in perpetual pursuit, Tolia, at least according to Speranskii, has never been able to be happy. Zema, unemployed and homeless, exists alone in the world tormented by despair over his best friend, Sasha, who is crazy. In the film's diegetic present, this triad reconvenes only to discover that they inhabit the world of the disenfranchised. As they move throughout the small city, they encounter the forsaken: forgotten lovers, abandoned animals, disabled and handicapped children and adults, and a host of people, who are diseased and dying. These characters are the shchelks personified: like the imaginary creatures, these are the nonexistent stragglers—the faceless—whom post-Soviet society does not see.

Distanced from the nostalgically-recalled past or, simply, without access to viable models of masculinity, the constellation of men in both films rely on one another in the diegetic present of the films to express their profound melancholy caused by a general sense of insufficiency and ineffectiveness. This, in turn, results in expressions of social alienation represented variously among the characters. One character may experience indignity at work, while another fails to be able to assert himself as the head of his household, still another may simply be an outcast, suffering from loneliness and destitution. In an overview of films screened at the 2003 Kinotavr festival aptly titled “Midlife Crisis: Sochi 2003,” Elena Stishova acknowledges this attempt to retrieve values by “experiencing a collective past” and through “group portraits of outsiders” as relevant to Muradov’s film (2003).<sup>12</sup> In buddy films featuring three or four male characters, the

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<sup>12</sup> Stishova writes: “В фильмах нынешнего конкурса я вижу попытку идти к непреходящим ценностям в обход героя, через переживание коллективного прошлого, [...], через групповой портрет аутсайдеров (*Правда о щелках*) (“Кризис среднего возраста”).

anti-hero protagonists join together in an act of solidarity that provides respite from their troublesome existence. Friendship fortified by formative stages of life—typically, war or childhood—provides socially acceptable reasons for the characters’ strong homosocial bond.

Recognition of genre affiliation accomplishes much more than simply to draw attention to character diversity and diminished social status of male characters in these movies. It also begs the question of how two films diametrically opposed in their production values and relationship to the mainstream cinema can be filed under the same genre category and helps to further complicate Russia’s tradition of dividing cinema into genre and *auteur* (as discussed at length in Chapter 1). This unlikely coupling provides for an investigation of how an art house film and *auteur* creation like Muradov’s *Truth of the Shchelps* fit in an argument dedicated to genre. After all, while film studies historically has posited the genre film and *auteur* cinema as antithetical production models and, moreover, while the school of genre film theory that emerged simultaneously with the post-1968 concern over cultural production influenced by Louis Althusser, prefers to read these categories as differing in their relationship to dominant ideological structures, this argument contends that *Belorussian Station* and *Truth of the Shchelps* not only belong to the same genre, but, furthermore, similarly reveal untenable gender expectations, thereby maintaining similar ideological emphases.

Muradov’s adherence to the buddy film genre in *Truth of the Shchelps* provides a visual and narrative framework imbued with *a priori* significance, necessary in this film, which consistently undermines formal conventions of cinematic semiotics. Genre in this instance functions like a musical hook or riff—a familiar rhythm or standard chord progression—that anchors a song by providing something familiar, thus allowing the possibility for variation, experimentation, and even randomness. *Truth of the Shchelps* is so random that it needs to

embed itself in a genre tradition in order to work within a structure that itself has meaning. Moreover, Muradov goes so far as to borrow liberally from Smirnov as he constructs his post-Soviet, postmodern, and *chernukha*-influenced film about a group of men frustrated with the challenges of contemporary life. While it would be an overstatement to suggest that *Truth of the Shchelps* is a remake of *Belorussian Station*, Muradov adopts several narrative moments from Smirnov and inserts them into his film. The following three similar episodes, described in detail, provide evidence of Muradov's recurrent referencing of Smirnov's classic, and will demonstrate how the dissociative, non-sequiturs that fill Muradov's film in fact acquire meaning when reconsidered in the context of genre.

1. Both films begin with a funeral: the four friends of *Belorussian Station* gather at the funeral of Colonel Matveev, with whom they fought in the war; the three buddies of Muradov's film gather at the morgue to mourn a woman they have never met. The nearly identical establishing shots of both films taken from the funereal episodes not only employ the standard mise-en-scène of the buddy film genre, but also mark Muradov's visual quotation of Smirnov (see Figures 32 and 33).



Figure 32: Veterans reunited in *Belorussian Station*



Figure 33: The friends reunited in *Truth of the Shchelops*

Furthermore, Muradov imitating Smirnov, more or less repeats the culmination of events that lead to these establishing shots. As the principle characters of *Belorussian Station* assemble together, each one entering the group in succession, they greet one another with heartfelt hugs, laconic salutations, and saddened faces. Nikolai Dubinskii approaches Viktor and Aleksei, who have just happened upon each other moments prior, Nikolai breaks an uncomfortable silence when he says, “well, hello, perhaps,”<sup>13</sup> a suggestion that immediately leads to the old friends embracing. Ivan—Vania—is the last to arrive. The others catch sight of him walking along the cemetery wall; he is deeply saddened by Colonel Matveev’s funeral and with tears in his eyes he joins the others and gives each of his old friends a heartfelt hug hello. Once all gathered, Smirnov uses this shot (see Figure 32) of the four men with their collective gaze focused on the grave of their recently buried friend to underscore the film’s lugubrious tone.

Muradov recreates this episode in *Truth of the Shchelops*. As Speranskii walks to the morgue, Tolia Feldman exits the hospital where he works, and the old friends’ paths intersect. Tolia, parroting Nikolai of *Belorussian Station*, playfully jokes and asks Speranskii, “Let’s

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<sup>13</sup> “ну, здорово, что ли”

embrace! Aren't you going to kiss?"<sup>14</sup> Speranskii refusing to express maudlin emotionality instead dispassionately gives his old friend his hand to shake rather than his cheek to kiss. As in *Belorussian Station*, the group of characters amasses one-by-one, and so it is no surprise that Zema, who replicates Vania in several ways (e.g., physical appearance, emotionality, lowly social status) arrives last. He, mimicking Vania, walks along a wall as he approaches, and, furthermore, enters the frame four minutes into the film, precisely the same moment that Vania appears on screen in *Belorussian Station* (see Figures 34 and 35).<sup>15</sup>



Figure 34: Vania approaches in *Belorussian Station*

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<sup>14</sup> “Давай поцелуемся. Не будешь целоваться?”

<sup>15</sup> The shot that captures Vania's approach starts at 4 minutes, 36 seconds and ends approximately ten seconds later at 4 minutes, 44 seconds. Zema's entry lasts minimally longer and is comprised of two shots, but occurs almost precisely at the same juncture in the film. He first appears 4 minutes, 06 seconds into the film and the two shots that capture his approach and awkward entry conclude, not coincidentally, at 4 minutes, 44 seconds.



Figure 35: Zema approaches in *Truth of the Shchelps*

Whereas Vania is already within the cemetery wall when he first appears on screen, in *Truth of the Shchelps*, Zema walks along the exterior of a concrete wall that encloses the morgue. With apparently no easy way to transition from outside to inside the morgue, Zema has to jump over a high metal fence. Once Zema finds Speranskii and Tolia, the overall tone among the friends is one of irritation and confusion. In place of warm greetings, the men repeatedly inquire why they have been summoned to the morgue; none of them knows the answer. Finally an unidentified man pokes his head out of a door and instructs the trio to come in and retrieve a deceased old woman, followed by a second nameless man, who announces that he will bring the hearse around. This only adds to their confusion and they all direct their gazes into the distance toward the place from where they expect the hearse to appear (see Figure 33). While these comparable opening episodes in the two films produce the same effect—to gather old friends on the occasion of a funeral—Muradov changes the mood accompanying the action; rather than depressive melancholy, his characters feel irritable and perplexed.

2. The popularity of *Belorussian Station* is due in no small part to the film's heroes' ability to resurrect, if only briefly, their former heroic status. Their reunion provides the veterans

not only with the chance to reminisce on simpler times, or to commiserate with one another, but also with the opportunity to march into a metaphorical battle when they join together to save a young man from gas inhalation. Russian film critic Aleksandr Shpargin describes the film's heroes in the diegetic present as "dwelling in time and in their emotional discord." Shpargin continues to note that while in the present "conversation does not flow, [because] they have become too different from one another from the point of view of social status and in terms of their perceptions of contemporary reality," they "meet [...] in order to return back, to the past" (82).<sup>16</sup> Thus, when Vania receives notice that a young coworker is having trouble repairing a gas leak, he dutifully goes to his aid, and as though marching back into battle: his buddies—his comrades—accompany him. Together they remove a heavy manhole cover, descend underground, fix the problem, and in the process find Pet'ka, the young boy, who, unable to stop the leak, has passed out from gas inhalation. Realizing the urgency of the situation, they collectively work to raise the nearly asphyxiated boy out of the noxious sewer, stop a passing car, and beat up an uncooperative young driver, who selfishly will not agree to take them to the hospital. Aleksei commandeers the car and races Pet'ka to the hospital where immediate care insures his imminent recovery. Stishova reads the entirety of Smirnov's film as working to this moment of revived heroism: "This final image of the Generation of victors is skillfully created by the entire trajectory of the film" ("Misteriia vokzala" 23).<sup>17</sup>

Muradov cannot provide his characters with the same opportunity; his characters are prohibited from restoring some lost honorable prestige because they have never had access to

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<sup>16</sup> "[Г]ерои, пребывающие с временем и с собой в душевном разладе, встречаются [...], чтобы вернуться назад, в прошлое — разговор не заладится, слишком разными они стали и по социальному статусу, и по восприятию сегодняшней реальности."

<sup>17</sup> "Искусно подготовленный всем ходом фильма финальный образ Поколения победителей."

such venerable status. It is impossible to return to what has never been. Nonetheless, Muradov provides piecemeal references to this scene from *Belorussian Station* throughout his characters' search for Orlov. Two moments in particular stand out. First, the three protagonists enter a strange cavernous apartment, where they hope that yet another old friend might supply them with Orlov's phone number. Following a strange and upsetting conversation, Speranskii goes to the bathroom where he finds a young man trying to drown himself. The men pull him out of the bathtub in an attempt to save him, but the young man runs out of the room and hangs himself. Again, the boy's suicide attempt is averted at the last minute. At the same time that this chaotic series of events transpires, Speranskii quite literally stumbles upon a woman, lying naked on the floor. Tolia, the doctor, checks her pulse and determines that she is not simply sleeping, but nearing death. They rush her to the hospital where Speranskii tries to resuscitate her while Tolia prepares a shot of adrenalin that brings her back to consciousness. Upon leaving the hospital, Tolia reports to a nurse: "We've saved the asphyxiated. The patient is conscious."<sup>18</sup>

Second, immediately following this strange episode of saving a young man and an asphyxiated woman, who in combination resemble the suffocating worker from *Belorussian Station*, the three friends in *Truth of the Shchelps* decide to drop in on Orlov. Why they decide to go at this point in their search or how they know where to find him, remains unanswered, as do many of the questions in the film. They agree that they best not arrive empty handed without a gift, and so, with nothing else available, they extract a manhole cover out of the street and haul it to Orlov, presenting it to him as a present. The randomness of the gift fits in with the film's overall use of objects and characters that lack signification, and, therefore, raises few eyebrows.

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<sup>18</sup> "Асфиксию сняли. Пациент в сознании."

Important to this argument, is the fact that it also refers back to the heroic scene in *Belorussian Station*, even while prohibiting Speranskii, Tolia, and Zema from becoming victors.

3. Muradov repeats Smirnov's use of a Bulat Okudzhava's song as diegetic music. In the final episode of *Belorussian Station* the four men visit Raisa (Nina Urgant), a nurse and dear friend from the war, for an emotionally charged evening. While there, they gather at the table in the intimate space of a small room, and for the first time toast Colonel Matveev properly. In this company, the men freely express their despondency. Not only do they mourn the loss of Matveev but they also mourn the lost of their collective past, when they were heroes. These melancholy emotions are given a voice when they sing a heart-rending song ostensibly from the front. They sing, "we need one victory, one for all! We are ready to sacrifice everything!"—a refrain and a sentiment as true for the characters now as it was during the war.<sup>19</sup> David Gillespie

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<sup>19</sup> Okudzhava wrote the song "We will sacrifice everything!" ("Мы за ценой не постоим!") specifically for *Belorussian Station*. The lyrics follow:

"Здесь птицы не поют,/ деревья не растут,/ и только мы плечом к плечу/ врастаем в землю тут.  
(Birds don't sing here/ trees don't grow/ it's only us, shoulder to shoulder,/ who take root in this land.)

Горит и кружится планета,/ над нашей родиной дым,/ и, значит, нам нужна одна победа,/ одна на всех – мы за ценой не постоим. (The planet burns and spins/ there's smoke over our motherland / and this means we need a victory/ one for all—we are ready to sacrifice everything.)

Припев: Нас ждет огонь смертельный,/ и все ж бессилен он./ Сомненья прочь, уходит в ночь отдельный/ десятый наш десантный батальон. (Chorus: Deadly fire awaits us, but it is increasingly powerless./ Doubts be gone, alone our tenth battalion enters into the night.)

Едва огонь угас – / звучит другой приказ,/ и почтальон сойдет с ума, / разыскивая нас./ Взлетает красная ракета,/ бьет пулемет, неутомим... (Hardly is the fire put out/ when a new command calls/ and the postman goes crazy/ searching for us./ A red rocket flies in/ a machine gun fires tirelessly...)

describes the emotional emphasis of this song as serving “to underline [the characters’] lament for the loss of single-mindedness and unity in the postwar generation” (477). It is beneficial to take Gillespie’s comment one step further and note that the loss of single-mindedness and unity creates the social space typically glimpsed in the buddy film, which is marked by heterogeneity and diversity.

While in Smirnov’s film Okudzhava’s lyrics bring tears to the men’s eyes, in Muradov’s, reference to the bard elicits disgust from Speranskii, who upon hearing “Midnight Trolleybus” (“*Polnochnoi trolleybus*”), screams, “I hate Okudzhava! I hate kitchens!”<sup>20</sup> This outburst is not the non sequitur it first seems. Reference to the song comes up while the men are gathered around a table in the cavernous apartment mentioned above. Speranskii rejects the emotionality and sentimentality associated with Okudzhava’s music and with the Soviet kitchen, a highly symbolic space in everyday, domestic culture that provided the possibility for intimate gatherings suitable for impassioned conversations, critiques of Soviet power, and the opportunity for atypical privacy. Soviet culture scholar, Svetlana Boym, explains that a politically-alternative “kitchen culture” emerged among the Soviet intelligentsia during the 1960s. She explains that

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Припев (Chorus)

От Курска и Орла/ война нас довела/ до самых вражеских ворот –/ такие, брат, дела./ Когда-нибудь мы вспомним это –/ и не поверится самим... (From Kursk and Orel/ the war takes us /to the furthest enemy gates/ such, brother, is our mission./ Someday we’ll remember this/ and won’t believe it ourselves.)

Припев (Chorus)

<sup>20</sup> “Я ненавижу Окуджаву! Я ненавижу кухни!”

the kitchen provided a perfect informal setting for the subtle, causal but friendly intimacy that became a signature of that generation. [...] The kitchen salon of the 1960s was where grown-up children continued to bury their secrets and to celebrate their shared escapes from the predictability of Soviet life. (147-8)

Whereas in Smirnov's film Okudzhava elicits a lament, in Muradov's it evokes anger: the bard's emotionality (like the nostalgia for the cozy space of the 1960s kitchen) engenders irritation at constantly being fed and faced with the false promise of having access to a lyrical past.

In each of the three instances that demonstrate Muradov's reproduction of Smirnov, there is undeniable difference within the repetition. The films have dissimilar emotional emphases: whereas *Belorussian Station* relies on patriotic sentimentality to honor men, whose former heroic status falters in their contemporary lives, Muradov's protagonists in *Truth of the Shchelps* suffer a sustained level of frustration. Similarly, although both films present obstacles, only in *Belorussian Station* do these impediments provide the characters with a set of challenges that they can temporarily overcome and thereby reassert their relevance as manly men, even if this can only occur in confined spaces. When they seize the car from an uncooperative youth, they in essence proclaim the superiority and honorability of their generation over young men. Moreover, when they land in jail as a result of their theft, their time in the cell provides them time to bond with one another followed by the policemen's recognition of their venerable status as veterans of the war.

Conversely, when in *Truth of the Shchelps* Speranskii is almost arrested for firing a gun, the policemen decide that he is not worth their while. Moreover, in the post-Soviet film obstacles are only obstacles: twice the characters have to jump over walls; their inability to locate Orlov is upsetting, not redemptive. The divergent emphases imbedded into these recycled

episodes reveal how two buddy films relate differently to the persistent masculine crisis that, as demonstrated above, has its roots in the 1970s and continues, not without change, well into the post-Soviet period. The two sets of protagonists empathize contrastively with the hegemonic Soviet masculinity described by Temkina and Zdravomyslova. Film genres do not progress in the sense of moving along a teleological path toward a more, perfected form. They do, however, change over time and register historical, political, and ideological shifts.

#### 5.4. LOSING ACCESS TO MASCULINITY: THE FUTILITY OF FIGHTING, DANCING, AND MAKING LOVE

The four characters in *Belorussian Station* try to realign themselves with the dominant model of masculinity of the 1970s—hegemonic Soviet masculinity, as defined by Temkina and Zdravomyslova—by emotionally returning to a valorized past and resurrecting a sense of honor merited by having served during World War Two. Although the quotidian world represented by bosses, family, and the young generation no longer puts these men on a venerable pedestal, their heroic rescue of the nearly asphyxiated boy as well as their visit to Raisa's provide them with a temporary restoration of their heroic and virile masculine status. In contrast, the triad in *Shchelkun* is born too late to attempt to assert themselves as belonging to such lofty company. Whereas the generation of men who hit middle age in the 1970s recalls romantic masculine heroism and laments the waning appreciation of it in everyday life, the generation born in the 1970s grows up knowing that these older myths of male heroism are not only inadequate, but also untenable in the late and post-Soviet milieu. The demise of the type of masculinity projected on screens only a generation earlier parallels the demise of the formerly sacred hero who, owing to his inscription into Soviet history, had been anointed by the state. A concentrated

look at the post-Soviet buddy films featuring the male triad (rather than dyad) reveals the ineffectiveness of stereotypical masculine activities (especially, but not limited to military service) to instill socially-sanctioned masculine status.

Helena Goscilo examines the renegotiation of gender roles in *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost*. She argues that despite the “cataclysmic displacements effected by Russia’s partial transition to a market economy,” indicators of gender from the Soviet period are maintained in post-Soviet era, resulting in an aspect of post-Soviet culture that “is more Soviet than post-” (31-32). The significance of these indicators, however, becomes reversed or inverted. Goscilo writes: “Gender-specific Soviet hieroglyphs continue to glyph along, in the sense that, [...] part of what was formerly sacred (Greek *hiero*) now has been declared sacrilegious” (32). Although Goscilo describes the profanation of pseudo-religious iconography and the new tenor ascribed to old metaphors used to represent womanhood in post-Soviet Russian culture, her hypothesis of the shift from the religious to the profane, or the reverent to the irreverent, is also relevant to the post-Soviet buddy films’ renegotiation of manhood. For example, Abdrashitov’s *Time of the Dancer* and Muradov’s *The Truth of the Shchelps* replace previously revered customs with vulgar enactments of ritualistic behavior. Fighting, whether in war or in local skirmishes, dancing, drinking, attending ceremonies, and even sexual intercourse fail to transform characters into macho men in this inflection of the buddy film.

Caught out of sync with contemporary society’s expectations, the characters ultimately fail to transcend into manly men when they participate in ritualized rights of masculine passage. This inability results in the portrayal of the buddies as oscillating between or residing in one of two symbolic life stages: infancy and near death. Sirvilia hits the nail on the head when she

makes precisely this point in her article on *Truth of the Shchelps*: “In their on-screen existence there are only two unquestionable constants: childhood and death” (“Pokolenie proigravshikh”).<sup>21</sup> The same is true of each buddy film under consideration here—*Belorussian Station*, *Truth of the Shchelps*, and *Time of the Dancer*—all include references to these life stages that long precede and distantly follow middle age. As has already been discussed, *Belorussian Station* and *Truth of the Shchelps* open with funerals and include scenes of secondary characters nearing death. In contradistinction from these scenes suggesting the end of life, both films also portray the buddies as children, incapable of taking care of themselves. The buddies’ in Muradov’s film reenact their childhood search for imaginary shchelps. In *Belorussian Station* the four veterans are depicted as little boys during their visit to Raisa. Immediately following their unexpected arrival at her door, the film cuts to a scene of the four men, shirtless and bent over a bathtub, as Raisa bathes them. Mimicking a mother’s caring, loving, and distinctly asexual gaze, she appraises their bodies and lovingly criticizes their potbellies. Later that same evening, she tucks her boys into bed, thus underscoring their infantile needs. The following considers how imagery suggesting perpetual infancy and death magnifies the futility of rites of passage and thereby emphasizes these characters’ inability to achieve normative adult masculinity (see Figures 36-39).



Figure 36: Raisa washes the men in *Belorussian Station*

<sup>21</sup> “В их существование на экране есть лишь две несомненные константы—детство и смерть.”



Figure 37: Drying off after the bath in *Belorussian Station*



Figure 38: Raisa tucks in Lesha, *Belorussian Station*



Figure 39: Ivan and Viktor snuggled up like little boys *Belorussian Station*.

As in *Belorussian Station*, war in Abdrashitov's *Time of the Dancer* marks the apex of masculinity. Anything following war compromises this position. Just as in Smirnov's film of 1970, in the post-Soviet *Time of the Dancer* three old friends from an imaginary Ural town cross paths and attempt to renew their lives in the post-war period. However, this time the war in question is not the Great Patriotic War, but rather an unnamed, allegorical war. Viktor Astaf'ev writes that the movie is about the end of some (*nekaia*) war and the difficulty of living following war, about how war breaks spirits and irreversibly weighs on one's character (50).<sup>22</sup> Ol'ga Surkova summarizes the main idea of Abdrashitov's film in the following way: "If in [the film] there is indeed a 'clear idea,' then it is the courageous [manly] civic position of the artists, an endeavor to understand and analyze the new psychological and sociological situation of simple people of the former USSR, who participated in local fratricidal wars" (66).<sup>23</sup> The troubled psychological situation referred to by Surkova derives not only from the shift from war to peacetime, but also from the characters' unequal access to the war. Abdrashitov complicates his masculine triad by making the characters' respective relationships to the war asymmetrical. Valerii (Iurii Stepanov) and Fedor (Sergei Garmash), who is affectionately, and significantly, nicknamed Fidel' thanks to his bushy beard reminiscent of Castro, fought. Andrei, often called by the childish diminutive Andreika (Andrei Egorov), never made it to the battlefields. The film

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<sup>22</sup> "Кроме говоря, фильм этот о том, как непросто после воины жить, как ломает война судьбы, как она бесповоротно влияет на характер человека" (50).

<sup>23</sup> "Если в нем все-таки есть 'ясная идея', то это мужественная гражданская позиция художников—попытка понять и проанализировать новую психологическую и социальную ситуацию простых людей бывшего СССР, втянутых в локальные братоубийственные войны" (66). The word "*muzhestvennyi*" from the root *muzh*—husband or man (*muzhchina*)—can be translated as "courageous" or "manly." This etymologically-based polysemy further emphasizes the characteristics embedded into Russian notions of masculinity.

provides a nebulous explanation: he was too late. This important inequality plays into the buddy film genre's insistence on expressing diversity within a collective protagonist.

Having not undergone this formative stage in Russian male life, Andreika is retarded in a perpetual childlike state with an insatiable desire to play war. He enters the film on horseback dressed in a Cossack military costume. Although the costume makes narrative sense—Andrei dances in a Cossack dance troop—his tendency to wear the military regalia even when not performing suggests an infantile attachment to the uniform. Like a child who wears his security blanket as a cape in order to “become” a superhero, Andrei’s military uniform projects an imaginary personality, with which he desperately wants to be associated. The association of Andrei with the famous Russian squat-and-kick dance called the *kazachok* functions to align him with traditional images of performative Russian masculinity. Cinematic representations of this Russian folk dance often function as symbolic shorthand to suggest a character’s heritage among the Russian folk (*narod*), but exclusion from the upper-echelons of enlightened positive heroes. Take, for example, Mikhail Chiaureli’s *The Vow* (*Kliatva*, 1946). This socialist realist classic follows the members of one family as they proceed along the teleological path that leads each through his own personal revolution as he passes from a state of spontaneity (*stikhiinost’*) to one of political consciousness (*soznatel’nost’*). The family’s uncle, an older, uneducated peasant, expresses his elemental enthusiasm for the socialist cause when he is overtaken by a spontaneous and insuppressible desire to perform the knee-slapping folk dance in front of Stalin while visiting the Kremlin. In other words, if Andrei of *Time of the Dancer* can be compared to the uncle of *The Vow*, then Andrei is stuck in a position of spontaneity, having not had the experience of the war to push him along the spontaneity-consciousness dialectic. However, before getting swept up in our own spontaneous enthusiasm and taking this comparison too far, it is necessary to step

back and note the obvious difference: for Andrei and for the post-Soviet buddies there exists no elevated, socially- or politically-sanctioned state equivalent to socialist realist consciousness. Though this lack is, perhaps, nothing to regret, it does suggest that without a teleological path, such ritualistic types of behavior have nowhere to lead.

The same is true of Valerii, who uses sex, and in particular extra-marital affairs—to affirm his masculinity. However, rather than confer a Don Juan status on him, Valerii's amorous escapades are literally paralyzing: when he runs after the object of his desire, Katia (played by the seductive Chulpan Khamatova), he aggressively wrestles her into lovemaking that ends when his war injury flares up and leaves him temporarily immobilized. There could hardly be a less impressive scene of male conquest. In fact, it ends up with Katia stomping on Valerii's back; though she is trying to get his spine realigned, the visual effect suggests his defeat (see Figure 40).



Figure 40: Katia dominating Valerii in *Time of the Dancer*

Valerii's inability to use sex to secure his manhood parallels Andrei's inability to use his dance performances to inscribe himself into a community of virile Cossack men. If anything, his

costumed showcases exude the same kind of schlocky, commodified nationalism one might experience from a visit to the World Pavilion at Disney World's Epcot Center. His appearance on horseback during this first show elicits Larisa's father to compare to recognize Andrei's pose as an imitation of the silhouette image on a pack of Kazbek cigarettes, suggesting the material culture quality of this superficial folk showcase (see Figures 41-42). If the commodified nature of Andrei's stage act is only hinted at by the visual parallel that links him to the Kazbek cigarettes, then by the film's conclusion it is undeniable. When Andrei's dance show moves off the stage and into a restaurant packed with foreign tourists, his rendition of the traditional Russian masculine dance is irrevocably detached from its proud, militaristic and folk roots, and becomes nothing but an empty performative act—hence the title of the film, which signals that this post-Soviet existence is a time for superficial grandstanding.



Figure 41: Andrei in *Time of the Dancer*



Figure 42: Kazbek cigarettes, *Time of the Dancer*

Like most childhood desires, Andrei's fantasy to become a military man of one kind or another is naively unfettered by any recognition of the strife caused by physical infirmity and psychological depression resulting from actual participation in war. His buddies, however, know these afflictions well: Fedor suffers from incurable exhaustion, fatigue, and palpable depression; Valerii walks with a limp resulting from an injury sustained during the war. Incapable of

realizing that war turns men into invalids (emotionally or physically), Andrei's childish desire to become a cavalier hero leads him to draw a toy (!) gun on a man, who responds by preparing to pull the trigger on his own real pistol. Fedor intervenes into Andrei's duel, breaks his own interdiction never to kill another man, and saves his buddy when, from a hidden position, he shoots and kills Andrei's adversary. Not realizing Fedor's involvement, Andrei believes the impossible has happened—that his fantasy has become reality—and that his toy gun has metamorphosed into a deadly weapon. The shock causes Andrei to faint into a symbolic transformative sleep, from which he wakes a new man. This childish ruse ends tragically, when the murdered man's friend seeks revenge on Andrei, but mistakenly shoots and kills Fedor, who had only just recently fallen in love and begun living a normal married life. Fedor's short-lived matrimonial bliss brought him close to inscribing himself into the archetype of traditional Russian masculinity described by Temkina and Zdravomyslova. He regrows his Castro-esque beard, increasingly resembling a traditional Russian peasant, and with a Tolstoian flare gathers honey from his own apiary. However, if there is any conclusion to be made from Fedor's entry into this normative Russian masculine role, it is that it necessarily has to be cut short according to the rules of the genre. Neither Valerii's philandering, nor Andrei's dancing or faux-fighting, nor Fedor's attempt at establishing a normal, middle-age, male life is granted.

Muradov, like Abdrashitov, calls particular attention to the ineffectiveness of performing gender by similarly undermining the ritualistic function of the duel. Over halfway through *The Truth of the Shchelps*, two characters set up a kind of suicide duel. Igor', one of the many extras that enter and exit the film without consequence, is an enormously fat man whom Speranksii, one of the three main characters, calls a bloodsucking capitalist. Igor' wants to be shot, executed for his bourgeois tendencies and Andrei agrees to service his request—an agreement that already

bastardizes the formal rules of the duel (one cannot ask to be shot). When Igor', too drunk to stay vertical, lies down in a bed of garbage rather than stand at the appointed spot Andrei screams, “That’s not how it’s done! You’re ruining the film!”<sup>24</sup> Igor’ responds, “You’re building an empty aesthetic!”<sup>25</sup> The characters’ comments have an immediate referent—the film itself—which Muradov crafts to work against standard conventions of narrative cinema, perhaps in order to move away from an “empty aesthetic” system. These remarks may also be understood to refer to the emptying-out of meaning from such ritualized customs in a post-Soviet context.

In her article, “The Emergence of the Duel in Russia,” Irina Reyfman examines how the duel became an established ritual among Russian nobility. Within the constellation of factors that participated in making the duel a standard method of problem solving in the nineteenth century, Reyfman identifies its use as an “honor code [...] by which Russian noblemen asserted both their status as a privileged class and their rights as individuals” (30). The duel “dictated the correct course of actions for an insulted party, prescribing a set of standard reactions to situations involving honor (32). If the pitiable men of the buddy film can be compared to the “insulted party,” then the use of ritual behavior must be read as attempts to secure a sense of notability, illustriousness, pride, and esteem, and to retrieve the honor they believe themselves to deserve, but are consistently denied.

Neither involvement in ostensible masculine activities, nor access to the material objects (i.e., guns) that suggest achieving male adulthood actually elevates, inducts, or initiates the buddies into manhood. Rather, bumbling attempts to use such ritual events and objects to this end highlight the characters’ profanity, vulgarity, and buffoonery. Rituals now function as

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<sup>24</sup> “Так не положению! Картину портишь!”

<sup>25</sup> “Ты проводишь пустую эстетику!”

empty vessels devoid of meaning; they have become, to evoke Mikhail Bakhtin, carnivalized. If ritualistic behavior typically functions to represent socially sanctioned ways of behaving in society, then in these buddy films they have the opposite effect. The absence of significance augments the men's frustration and ineffectuality in post-Soviet Russian society. Furthermore, the ineffectiveness of these rituals is compounded by the buddy film's tendency to present its characters in either a perpetual state of infancy, on the one hand, or as approaching death (sometimes only metaphorical death), on the other. Recognition of this alternation between the two antipodes of the life cycle supplements the discussion of the lost function of ritualistic behavior insofar as many of the traditional ceremonial rites are meant to usher a boy from infancy into adulthood. Without a stable heteronormative masculine role to fulfill in middle age, the man can perform these rituals, but the rituals prove to be defunct.

## 5.5 CONCLUSION

In 1946 American director William Wyler's critically acclaimed film *The Best Years of Our Lives*, hit the silver screen. In his review, screenwriter and World War Two veteran Abraham Polonsky summarizes the film with the salty language one might expect of a former soldier. He writes: "As the plot goes, three veterans meet by accident and return to their city in the same plane. Each goes home and is welcomed: one to the rich emotional sympathy of an upper-class family; one to an earnest but narrow white-collar house; and one to a poor man's broken home and a slut of a wife" (257). Maintaining the diversity typical of the genre, this American buddy film brings together three men who in combination suggest diversity: each from a distinct economic class. Not only does their shared experience in war bond them together, but it also hints to an extra-diegetic past, during which their masculinity was at its height. Scarred

by their war wounds, both emotional and physical, their reintegration into civilian life proves to be yet another battle, but this one diminishes their heroic, masculine status, while augmenting general social anxieties around the disruptive potential of the demobilized men's return. David Gerber, a history professor at SUNY, Buffalo has written a compelling article that refers to Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* in order to discuss the difficult reintegration process for World War Two veterans. "Few remember today that the prospect of the World War II veterans' demobilization and reintegration was a cause for widespread concern, indeed, alarm long before V-J Day," explains Gerber. He characterizes the returned veteran as affecting a contradictory social reaction or as he calls it a "divided consciousness" (546). While wanting to celebrate the veterans for their heroism and sacrifice, America was plagued by a fear that their return would be a "threat to social order and political stability" resulting from the debilitating effects of their violent experiences (546).

Indeed, *The Best Years of Our Lives* shows the societal reaction to the veterans' diminished masculine status following the war. Homer Parrish (Harold Russell), who returns a bilateral amputee with prosthetic hands, is greeted with pity by his girlfriend. Al Stephenson (Frederic March) hits the bottle, but his upper-class family patiently tolerates his drunkenness. Last, the youngest of the three, Fred Derry (Dana Andrews), who comes from the other side of the proverbial tracks, has the hardest time. An unsupportive family and a cheating wife leave him alone and unsupported. When he loses his job at the local drugstore following a macho showdown—he punches a customer—he seems to have hit rock bottom. Not surprisingly though, this popular Hollywood box-office hit does not end on such a low note. Patience, pity, and friendship help each of the men to reestablish himself and lead to a classic Hollywood happy ending, a conclusion, for which Polonsky does not hide his disdain:

Writing for the movies is writing under censorship. The censorship forces stereotypes of motive and environment on the creators, and the problem is to press enough concrete experience into the mold to make imagination live.

Unfortunately, in the *Best Years*, as in most social-problem fiction, the artist falls into the trap of trying to find local solutions in existence for the social conflicts, instead of solving them in feeling. This is, of course, the industry's demand for happy endings. Now the truth of the matter is that veterans have been sold out *en masse* by society. The picture exposes the fraud of America's promises to its soldiers, the promises of businessmen and cheap publicists. (258)

Perhaps Polonsky would have preferred the Soviet and post-Soviet buddy films' unrelenting treatment of their former heroes. Of course the immediate post-war environment in the Soviet Union did not harbor any contradictory emotions—it was all celebration. Significantly though, unlike Wyler's film, the Russian buddy film does not develop out of the immediate post-war ethos. Only after the passing of a generation, once the level of congratulatory pomp and circumstance had faded did the cinematic genre become useful to Russian filmmakers. Smirnov's *Belorussian Station*, the first Russian buddy film to problematize hegemonic Soviet masculinity defined in terms of military service and veteran status appears nearly twenty-five years after Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives*. The proliferation of the genre in the recent post-Soviet years not only underscores the unsuitability of the heroic distant past for the present, but also suggests the denigration of the archetypal models of masculinity. The untenable, insufficient, or simply unsustainable images of macho men that continue to flood Russian screens in blockbuster hits become increasingly disassociated from the economic, political, and martial ruins of the contemporary past. Rather than continue to mask or varnish

reality, the Russian buddy films does not make impossible promises, it does not rely on happy endings: the Russian buddies can aspire to, but cannot achieve heteronormative masculinity.

Stephen Cohen investigates cinematic representations of the American postwar masculinity crisis in *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties*. He interprets the visual proliferation of images suggesting a masculinity crisis as a way to “challenge the culture’s own impression that the typical American male, presumed to be coherent, stable, and equivalent to the national character, actually existed outside of representation” (xi). This, I contend, is precisely what the Russian buddy film accomplishes. Without a deceptive happy ending, these films fail to project an image with which men would want to identify on the screen. However, they do reveal and unmask the struggles suffered by the post-Soviet man, who was born too late to claim participation in the Soviet Union’s most cherished victory and, perhaps, had been born too soon to live unfettered by the tumultuous economic, social, and political changes to have swept through their country’s history over the past two decades.

## 6.0 CHAPTER 5: BOSOM BUDDIES: THE FEMALE BUDDY FILM

Olga Reizen, one of the few Russians film critics to attempt a definition of the buddy film, foregrounds the genre's gender prejudice when she writes: "The cinema of buddies [...] means that masculine friendship is at the center of the narrative [...], that women are relegated to secondary roles if they appear on the screen at all, [and] that this friendship is an anthem to decency, support, and mutual assistance" (140).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, up until this point, the films considered in this dissertation have featured, almost exclusively, masculine relationships and the minimal scholarship dedicated to the Russian buddy film similarly focuses on male-centered texts.

Reizen is content to name two films featuring male relationships from 1968—*Two Soldiers Were Serving* (*Sluzhili dva tovarishcha*; dir. Evgenii Karelov) and *Dead Season* (*Mertyyi sezon*; dir. Savva Kulish)—as (unsubstantiated) evidence of the buddy film's existence in Soviet cinema.

Even so, Reizen overstates the case—though, admittedly, only minimally—when she formulates the buddy film as “necessarily” meaning that the relationship between and among *men* is at the center of the narrative. American cinema from the 1970s through the contemporary moment offers a handful of examples. Annette Kuhn identifies Claudia Weill’s *Girlfriends* (1977) and Fred Zinnemann’s *Julia* (1977) as female buddy films in her article “Hollywood and New Woman’s Cinema.” Kuhn, writing that both “take up a genre popular in the 1960s and the 1970s, the male ‘buddy movie’” (126), employs these examples of the genre in order to

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<sup>1</sup> “Кино приятелей [...] означает, что в центре повествования мужская дружба [...], что женщине отведена второстепенная роль, если она вообще появляется на экран, что это дружба—гимн порядочности, поддержке, взаимовыручке” (140).

investigate how the female spectator may or may not identify with female protagonists, and hypothesizes the consequences of a classical cinema that is “‘affirmative’ of women” (126). In *Shot/Countershoot* Lucy Fischer also refers to *Girlfriends* as a buddy film when she replies to Molly Haskell’s query, “Where, oh where, is the camaraderie, the much vaunted mutual support among women?” (Haskell 371) in a chapter on the reigning clichés within cinematic representations of female friendship (Fischer 216-249). Fischer pairs Weill’s film with George Cukor’s *Rich and Famous* (1981) in order to compare an independent film, directed by a woman that offers positive (i.e., feminist) images of female friendship to a Hollywood example of the buddy film that relies on a misogynistic cinematic portrayal of its female buddies.

In her monograph *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* Karen Hollinger identifies one film that in her opinion perfectly blends the buddy film and female friendship genres: Arthur Hiller’s *Outrageous Fortune* (1987). As “a male buddy film that happens to star two women, Bette Midler and Shelley Long,” *Outrageous Fortune* employs “the adventure format necessary in the buddy formula” while simultaneously functioning “as a feminist allegory [that] pose[s] significant challenges to the patriarchal status quo” (111-13). Hollinger suggests that the film’s feminist bent, perhaps the result of a screenplay written by a woman, Leslie Dixon, qualifies it as a woman’s film.

Ridley Scott’s *Thelma and Louise* (1991) stands out as a commonly cited, and notably contentious, American example of the female buddy film.<sup>2</sup> It won copious awards: the Oscar, Golden Globe, and Writers Guild of America award for best screenplay went to Callie Khouris’s original script (1992); the London Critics Circle Film Award (1991) selected Susan Sarandon for

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<sup>2</sup> Among the many articles and reviews that refer to *Thelma and Louise* as a buddy film are Braudy, Clover, and Kinder’s contributions to the collaboratively-written article, Carlson, Corliss, Hart, Maslin, and Putnam.

Best Actress; The Boston Society of Film Critics (1991) chose Geena Davis for the same accolade; the National Board of Review (1991) decided not to settle on only one of the two leading ladies and presented both Sarandon and Davis with Best Actress awards. In addition to these industry prizes, the film also boasts success in the theaters: it grossed over \$40 million in the US market alone.<sup>3</sup> While the popularity of this buddy film is undeniable, the extent to which it also functions as a woman's film is less clear.<sup>4</sup> Considered under the more general rubric of the woman's film, the American female buddy film is put to the test. Scholars question the extent to which the gendered switch of the protagonists results in an ideological shift within the genre: does replacing the male dyad with a female dyad create a feminist text? Whereas the films cited by Kuhn, Fischer, and Hollinger run the gamut of feminist to misogynist and operate by and large within the larger framework of the woman's film, the few examples of the female buddy film from contemporary Russian cinema maintain the patriarchal status quo.

Valerii Todorovskii's *Land of the Deaf* (*Strana glukhikh* 1998), Sergei Bodrov Jr.'s *Sisters* (*Sestry* 2001), and Fedor Popov's debut film, *Caucasian Roulette* (*Kavkazskaia ruletka* 2002), each pair two female characters who, in accordance with the rules of the genre, exhibit contrasting characteristics. However, while the standard Russian buddy film juxtaposes its male characters in relation to any number by features (profession, class, military rank, sexual prowess), here the female characters are differentiated on the basis of their level of "femininity" and the degree of commitment they pledge to the respective men in their lives. Although both

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<sup>3</sup> Box office statistics are available at <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/1991/0THLM.php>

<sup>4</sup> In an article in *Time*, Margaret Carlson argues against reading *Thelma and Louise* as a feminist text: "it can hardly be called a woman's movie or one with a feminist sensibility" because of what she characterizes as the protagonists' wild, self-destructive, whiskey-slugging, pistol-totting behavior, in addition to the film's general reliance on the action-centered male buddy genre (57). Carlson's opinion is not shared by other published reviews on the film.

Bodrov and Popov imbue one of their two characters with superior sharpshooter skills and, thus, seem to offer a less traditional image of the Russian woman, their films—and Todorovskii's as well—ultimately recycle these protagonists into such socially sanctioned roles as mothers, daughters, girlfriends, and, most conciliatorily, as damsels in distress. Thus, we might revise Reizen's definition to include the following: and even when female friendship is at the center of the narrative, reductive binary models ensure that women are nonetheless relegated to secondary roles, especially vis-à-vis their male counterparts.

In any list of buddy films, whether American or Russian, films featuring the male dyad will overwhelmingly outnumber those that place two juxtaposed female protagonists on the screen. However female-centered buddy films exist, and though few, their scarcity does not diminish their importance; quite the opposite. If the large number of male buddy films dating from the Stalinist period through the present moment provide an opportunity to scrutinize the genre's dominant semiotic and syntactic trends, modes of representing masculinity, and ideological privileging of particular social groups, then the few Russian female buddy films—all from the post-Soviet period, in other words arriving on the scene around or just after the contemporary male buddy film—offer a glimpse at the pervasive sexism within the Russian film industry.

## 6.1 THE WOMAN'S FILM VS. THE FEMALE BUDDY FILM

In the introduction to her book *In the Company of Women: Contemporary Female Friendship Films* Hollinger offers an explanation for the limited number of female buddy films. In her formulation, American films featuring female friendship derive from a different cinematic tradition than the buddy film.

[I]t might be argued that the female friendship film is merely the women's version of the male buddy film that became a staple of mainstream cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. [...] In spite of the obvious similarity that both male buddy and female friendship films focus on the relationship between two friends, the male buddy films and the female friendship films are not really very much alike.

Whereas the male buddy film typically fits comfortably within the larger confines of the action/adventure genre, the female friendship film is more accurately described as a recently developed subgenre of the woman's film, a multifaceted film genre with a long cinematic history. (1-2)

Hollinger's preliminary definition by means of differentiation quickly alerts her reader that she does not intend to compare male-dominant to female-dominant examples of a single cinematic genre. The representation of female friendship, in her analysis, derives from an other, distinct genre—the woman's film.

American feminist film criticism supports Hollinger's claim: when engaged in an investigation of the female buddy film, it tends to do so by situating the genre within the rubric of the woman's film. For example, Kuhn asserts that Weill's *Girlfriends* and Zimmerman's *Julia* "become women's films by virtue of the simple fact that the buddies in these cases are female. A primary requirement of the new women's film is thus immediately met" (126). Fischer also examines the female buddy film—preferring, like Hollinger, to call it a female friendship film—within the context of the woman's film. Concerned with the relationship of "sociological and semiological modes" (218), Fischer focuses less on questions of genre and more on how the portrayal of women in *Girlfriends* and *Rich and Famous* demonstrates feminist values to greater or lesser extents.

The ease between which these American critics move between distinctions of buddy films and female friendship films needs to be complicated somewhat. Why do the two forms use different terminology—what is the implied difference between friends and buddies? If the female friendship film derives from the woman's film, which is to say from the melodrama, as Hollinger claims, does the female buddy film also have roots in the melodrama? *Thelma and Louise* offers an excellent example to problematize this easy movement between female friendship and buddy films. Tania Modleski writes that “[u]nlike most Hollywood narratives, which give the impression of a progressive movement toward an end that is significantly different from the beginning, much melodrama gives the impression of a ceaseless returning to a prior state” (23). *Thelma and Louise* does precisely the opposite: with its hybrid relationship to the road film, the two protagonists continue moving forward, until, of course, they drive off over the cliff, thus fundamentally exiting (rather than returning). Moreover, the film does not use its female characters to produce the “pathetic,” which Northrop Frye writes is more easily done via the presentation of “the misfortunes of women, children, animals, or fools” (286), instead it uses the female characters in order to reveal how pathetic the men that sound them both at home and in culture in general are. The difference between friends and buddies seems to be in the emphasis of the female friendship film and the female buddy film; the latter is not melodramatic.

It is tempting to hypothesize a parallel to the American female friendship film in Soviet cinema. Vladimir Men'shov's *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* (*Moskva slezam ne verit* 1980), the Oscar-winning blockbuster, has many of the trappings of the genre as defined by American film scholars. The film's three female protagonists—Katia, Tonia, and Liudmila—are bonded by a set of commonalities. Their provincial and working class backgrounds lead them from their various small towns to Moscow and specifically to the room they share in the worker's

dormitory. Despite their disparate goals and personalities, the characters support one another through the transition from adolescence into adulthood, an approximately twenty-year period that the film's narrative spans. Once within the Soviet "woman's world" of the early 1980s, represented by the film as consisting of pregnancy, child rearing, marriage, divorce, as well as careers, the characters' close symbiotic relationship help each to negotiate her personal relationships, as well as her assimilation into urban Soviet society of the stagnation period. Katia, Tonia, and Liudmila's bond vacillates between Hollinger's description of sentimental and social friendship structures. Sentimental friendships, according to Hollinger, are "close, emotionally effusive, dyadic same-sex unions" (7). The exception here of a triadic, rather than dyadic, "same-sex union" is immaterial. Of significance is the girls' ability to "cry and confide" in one another, thus providing them "a temporary respite from the problems women face in their heterosexual romantic encounters" (7). The typology of the social female friendship involve[s] a nurturing tie that does not so much pit women against society as smooth their passage back into it. Through the teaching of female wisdom or the granting of a sympathetic ear, women in these works aid and sustain each other, perhaps by promoting a friend's heterosexual romance or by easing her pain at the loss of her male lover. (8)

Despite its relevance, as a single film *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears* cannot provide evidence of the female-friendship genre in Russian cinema, but, instead, sticks out as an anomaly, if an eminently popular one.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Iurii Moroz's *The Spot* (*Tochka* 2006) recuperates the general plot of *Moscow Doesn't Believe in Tears*. As in Men'shov's depiction of female friendship, Moroz also brings together three provincial girls who have made their way to Moscow in search of a better life.

Claims have been made for the existence of the woman's film genre in Soviet cinema. Maia Turovskaia's attempts to forge a female-centered cinema tradition by offering a brief history of Soviet women directors, film editors, screenwriters, and film critics. She cites Ol'ga Preobrazhenskaia's *Peasant Women of Riazan* (*Baby Riazanskie* 1927) as the first Soviet woman's film, defined by Turovskaia as a film directed by a woman and addressing women's lives ("Woman's Cinema" 142). However, Turovskaia leaves out an important fact; Preobrazhenskaia made *Peasant Women of Riazan* with a male co-director—Ivan Pravov. Included in her list of "present day" (!) examples of Russian women's cinema are Lana Gogoberidze's *Several Interviews on Personal Matters* (*Neskol'ko interv'i po lichnym voprosam* 1978), Larisa Shepit'ko's *Wings* (*Kryl'ia* 1966), and two films by Kira Muratova—*Brief Encounters* (*Korotkie vstrechi* 1967) and *Long Farewells* (*Dolgie provody* 1971) (146-47). While brevity may be the soul of wit, Turovskaia's ability to complete her analysis in a total of eight pages suggests that Soviet women's cinema has an unimpressive, even fledgling history.

Moreover, Soviet cinema's definition of a distinct woman's cinema—an epithet that seems to transfer the literary genre, *zhenskaiia proza* or woman's writing, into cinematic terms—bears a distinct negative connotation within the cinema industry. In 1991 the directors Aleksei German and Elem Klimov were asked to comment on "woman's cinema" both as a term and as a Russian film genre. While neither German nor Klimov suggests that women are less capable of producing excellent films—in fact, each has enormous respect for Russian women film directors—both reject the notion of woman's cinema. German, articulating a (pseudo-) humanist philosophy, argues that there is no reason to distinguish between women and men film directors: "Once a film is shot, it is shot. I absolutely do not sense that it is 'feminine.' I sense that it has

been filmed by a good director” (qtd in Sifer 43).<sup>6</sup> Klimov, the widower of Shepit’ko—one of the Soviet Union’s most celebrated women film directors of the 1970s—explains that his wife’s films may not be labeled correctly as examples of “woman’s cinema” because, from his point of view, her work is too good for such a demotion. While not failing to notice the actual accomplishments of women in cinema, these directors condemn the gendered term: the designation “woman’s” triggers a negative response. Klimov adds insult to injury when he makes the following comparison: “There exists real cinema and lady cinema,”<sup>7</sup> which he defines as lacking muscle (qtd in Sifer, 43). This condescending remark seems to position “woman’s cinema” in opposition to “real,” “muscular” cinema, and in doing so the gendered epithet comes to signal a wimpy cultural object of inherently lesser quality than its male-produced or, at least, strapping masculine counterpart.

Furthermore, it is imperative to contextualize their comments within the rhetoric of Soviet gender politics, which continues to bare significance among post-Soviet cultural producers. This visceral rejection of the gender specific epithet—“woman’s cinema”—is shared by women film directors, and, additionally, is similarly disapproved of in other cultural and social spheres.<sup>8</sup> Repeating the sentiment expressed by Russian women poets and writers alike, film director Kira Muratova renounces the title “woman film director,” preferring instead a non-gendered descriptor. This type of refusal highlights the fear of being associated *a priori* with a second-rate status—woman. Not surprisingly, the diminished value of “woman” as a category or genre of cinema signals the general devaluation of women in society. Turovskia explains that,

<sup>6</sup> “Снято кино и снято. Я совсем не ощущаю, что оно женское. Я ощущаю, что оно снято хорошим режиссером.”

<sup>7</sup> “Существует настоящий кинематограф и дамский кинематограф.”

<sup>8</sup> Refer to the first chapter of Goscilo’s book for a commentary on Soviet responses to feminism and the notion of women’s culture in Russia.

in large part, the refusal to acknowledge work as specifically woman-made results from the Soviet ideal of complete gender “equality,” an ideological fiction—propagated and sufficiently imbibed—that guaranteed the same legal and social rights for men and women (144). This rhetoric of equality, in fact, is not equal at all; the status “male” is elevated to signify “intelligent” or “successful,” as in “she’s a good director, she has a man’s brain,” and the opposite gendered tag—“woman”—refers to lapses in logic, silliness, and, as already mentioned, second-rate status at best.

An imprecise notion of *zhenskoe kino* only complicates the situation. It may be defined as following in the tradition of *zhenskaia proza*, which transmutes moments of quotidian life—what has been termed *byt*—into fictional stories. A straightforward example is Gogoberidze’s *Several Interviews on Personal Matters*, which provides a snapshot of the difficulties of the Soviet woman during the 1970s and can be interpreted as the visual representation of actual social hardships. Or, from a very different perspective, *zhenskoe kino* may suggest something akin to the chick flick or chick lit—popular genres derived from the melodramatic “weepies” and the Harlequin romance that rely on maudlin love stories, heartache, and sentimental clichés in an attempt to elicit an excessive emotional response from the female audience, to whom such texts primarily are marketed. For better or worse, the Russian buddy films *Land of the Deaf*, *Sisters*, and *Caucasian Roulette* do not qualify as woman’s cinema (understood according to Western definitions as produced by women and as focusing on women or according to Russian definitions as concerned with *byt*). Moreover, they also fail to be salient examples of melodrama or the female friendship film. These films, each the product of male directors, screenwriters, and producers, stray far from the everyday, preferring to imbricate their heroines into exceptional and

unlikely man-made predicaments. They eschew the typical, favoring instead extraordinary circumstances.

Hollinger, who locates the male buddy film that became popular in the late 1980s as a subset within the adventure or action genre, unwittingly also describes the Russian female buddy film. Without question American buddy films dating from the 1950s—such as Stanley Kramer's *The Defiant Ones* (1958)—to contemporary examples including *48 Hrs*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Beverly Hills Cop* (Martin Brest, 1984), and, most recently, *Blood Diamond* (Edward Zwick, 2006) place the interracial male dyad into an action-filled narrative. She differentiates, then, the male buddy film from the female buddy film based on the larger categories into which they fit: American male buddy films are a subset of the action film; American female buddy films a subset of the woman's film. Russian examples work in an opposite way. Whereas such male buddy films as *Belorussian Station*, *Taxi Blues*, *Lover*, to name just a few, tend toward melodrama, the three female buddy films in question here position their protagonists within the male-dominant criminal world. As victims of this world, the female characters become ostracized from daily life, pushed out of the public sphere, and forced into hiding, these characters occupy an alienated position outside of quotidian experience.

Concessions are made within these narratives about the victimization of women—that is, the heroines at times contest and act against essentialist qualities traditionally ascribed to women. However, these challenges prove to be more conciliatory than substantial. For example, on the one hand, *Sisters* and *Caucasian Roulette* clearly establish Sveta's (Oksana Akin'shina), one of Bodrov Jr.'s two sisters, and Anna's (Tat'iana Meshcherkina), the young mother of Popov's film, deadly potential: Anna uses her lethal aim in her unlikely job as a sniper, while the still young Sveta, who hopes to become a sniper one day, demonstrates her masterful accuracy at a shooting

range. Furthermore, throughout *Sisters* and *Caucasian Roulette* these characters not only wield firearms admirably, but also demonstrate themselves to be commendable strategists: pluck and quick thinking save the girls from numerous close-calls with violent gangsters (*Sisters*), from enemy soldiers (*Caucasian Roulette*), and from lecherous men (*Sisters* and *Caucasian Roulette*).

On the other hand, insofar as neither Anna nor Sveta accepts the social powerlessness of women within patriarchal structures, their expressions of liberation remain troublesome because, much like the stereotypical 1980s American businesswoman, they simply transfer themselves into typically male roles. In other words, rather than challenge sexist and essentializing definitions of gender, they, too, subscribe such qualities as power, competence, and agency to men, while in their summation ineffectuality, weakness, and passivity remain feminine characteristics. Visually the films extenuate Anna's and Sveta's lack of femininity; the characters sometimes dress in male clothing, wield firearms, maintain harsh facial expressions, and adopt brutish posture (see Figures 43-45).



Figure 43: Sveta of *Sisters*



Figures 44 and 45: Anna of *Caucasian Roulette*



In this way the films fail to offer liberated images of female characters, relying instead on clichéd and reductive binaries. Within a culture famously resistant to feminist politics, the

questioning of traditional feminine and misogynist behavior cannot possibly produce a feminist text because the terms of the conflict continue to be defined by dominant patriarchal structures, namely the Russian film industry and the films' male directors.

## 6.2 GENRE: GENDER BASED? GENDER BIASED?

Resistance to female-centered texts begs the question: is the buddy film necessarily a male-gendered genre? Certain genres—the war film, for example—logically demand a predominantly male cast. War, which is not synonymous with the military, remains by and large the sphere of men and, therefore, visual representations of war tend to focus on men, although notable exceptions exist.<sup>9</sup> That male characters continue to dominate the buddy film in both Russian and American examples of the genre cannot be so easily explained. The buddy film's classic narrative focus on the relationship of two opposed characters need not be gender specific. Its dominant themes—friendship, the clash of personalities in any number of social situations, competing representations of gender—are not unique to men. And, furthermore, the public-space setting typical of the buddy film does not stand out as a uniquely male domain. The reluctance to feature women as buddies on the screen depends not on the genre's semantic qualifications, but on film industries' tendency to represent society as resolutely male.

The substitution of the female dyad for the male dyad in the buddy film does not change the genre beyond recognition. As in all instances, *Land of the Deaf*, *Sisters*, and *Caucasian Roulette* pair characters in order to portray clashing belief systems, interpretative models, or

<sup>9</sup> Soviet and post-Soviet Russian cinematic representations of women in the military include Grigorii Chukhrai's *Forty-First*, Larisa Shepit'ko's *Wings*, Aleksandr Askol'dov's *Commissar* (*Komissar*, 1967), Stanislav Rostotskii's *The Dawns are Quiet Here* (*A zori zdes' tikhie*, 1972), and most recently Aleksandr Rogozhkin's *Transit* (*Peregon*, 2006).

worldviews. Here, too, characters initially portrayed as opposite or antagonistic later become mutually dependent on one another. Visually, characters are juxtaposed via simple differentiation: blonds pair with brunettes (see Figure 46), tall women with short ones (see Figure 47), and young with old (see Figure 48). Although the films' unique and elaborate narratives bring the characters together for various reasons, the films' diegesis—visual and narrative—focuses primarily on the two main protagonists. Comparable stylistic attributes and narrative tropes produce unique meanings in these feminized, but far from feminist, renditions to an otherwise male-hero-dominant genre. Nonetheless, these films belong to the buddy film genre.



Figure 46: Sveta and Dina from *Sisters*



Figure 47: Rita and Iaia from *Land of the Deaf*



Figure 48: Maria and Anna from *Caucasian Roulette*

Like all buddy films, they maintain what Rick Altman labels the semantic features of the genre; that is to say, the standard building blocks of the genre remain by and large unchanged. Not only do all of the films begin with an introduction of the characterological dyad, thereby alerting the audience of the specific *dominanta* around which the narratives will unfold, but each also employs medium and close-up shots to emphasize the characters' similarities and differences. Furthermore, the screen tends to be divided equally between the two protagonists, which has multiple effects. As the genre's typical mise-en-scène, it continually calls attention to the dyad rather than to one of the two characters in such a way as to emphasize such contrasts as likeness and dissimilarity, friendship and rivalry, bondedness and antagonism, and independence and dependency. For example, this still of Sveta and Dina sitting side-by-side (see Figure 49) simultaneously suggests their affiliation owing to their physical closeness while exemplifying their dissimilarity: Sveta's simplicity contrasts with Dina's heavily made-up face and affected tilted top hat. Moreover, the characters' physical proximity to each other, often resulting in touch, emphasizes the intimacy of their bond.



Figure 49: Sveta and dressed-up Dina in *Sisters*

Todorovskii uses color particularly skillfully to draw consistent attention to his mismatched or juxtaposed protagonists. He enhances Rita's and Iaia's starkly different hair

colors—red and black, respectively—by dressing the characters in opposite colors. Sometimes he uses costumes as a counterpoint to their hair colors, thus putting the red-headed Rita in black and the black-haired Iaia in a red-toned leather coat (see Figure 50). In other scenes, Todorovskii employs the classic color binary—black and white—to oppose his protagonists visually (see Figure 51).



Figure 50: *Land of the Deaf*



Figure 51: *Land of the Deaf*

These stills capture the opposition that defines the relationship of the buddy film's protagonists and visually reveal the semantic features listed above. The syntax—or dynamic relationship into which these semantic features are arranged—functions to position the characters at odds with the world around them, as is typical of the genre. These factors cannot be undervalued: they not only demonstrate genre affinity, but analysis of them reveals how women are represented when they finally make it onto the screen.

## 6.3 GENDER DISCRIMINATION: THE RUSSIAN FILM INDUSTRY AND RUSSO-SOVIET CULTURE

It is not the dominant semantic features of the buddy film genre that determine this gender imbalance, but the broader discriminatory practices of Russian cultural industries. The disproportionately small number of buddy films featuring women provides statistical evidence to comment on Soviet and post-Soviet Russian filmmakers' general reluctance to make movies featuring female friendship and preference for masculine machismo, a phenomenon that cross-cultural and diachronic investigations reveal to be unremarkable. The American film industry similarly has been faulted for its disinclination to make female buddy films. Film historian Molly Haskell points out a comparable imbalance between the numbers of male and female buddy films in Hollywood cinema of the 1970s and cites the following three reasons for the discrepancy: "the growing strength and demands of women in real life, spear-headed by women's liberation, obviously provoked a backlash in commercial film" (323); "with the collapse of the star system, women lost much of their economic leverage" (324); and "the good women's parts were, by and large, subordinated to, or upstaged by, the men's and most [...] of the films were men's films" (330).

Lacking Haskell's critical feminist voice, Sergei Sel'ianov, producer of the St. Petersburg STW Film Company attempts an explanation of the scarcity of female actors on the Russian screen in an interview with Diliara Tasbulatova. He comments that "[t]here are no powerful young actresses. [...] There are actors, as many as you want, but [the situation with] actresses is much worse." He continues: "directors are predominantly men. And for them the woman's

world is in many ways closed; they don't feel it.”<sup>10</sup> Sel'ianov's observations bespeak the systemic sexist nature of the film industry. A lack of female directors and actors does not point to a lack of talent among women, but, rather, to an industry that has been historically less welcoming to women and that has created notably few roles for them. Moreover, the few roles available to women tend to satisfy sexist male fantasies that envision women as finding complete fulfillment in the traditional roles that patriarchy has assigned them.

In 2002 at the roundtable titled “A Farewell to Arms?” (“Proshchaj, oruzhie?”) dedicated to the “hero problem” in contemporary Russian cinema, Vida Johnson’s comments critically assess the imbalance of male and female roles. In response to Mikhail Brashinskii’s call to begin thinking about the possibility of women taking over lead roles, Johnson responds:

All right, let’s talk about women. It is very revealing that at the last film festival in Sochi no prize was given for lead female role. Incidentally, the violence and distasteful sex of the last years did not appear on the screen this season; to the contrary, romantic trends have appeared. But in general, women speak very little on screen and when they do speak, it is primarily about something stupid. (9)<sup>11</sup>

Johnson is right—Kinotavr did not give out an award for best female actress in 2002. It again failed to find an actress deserving of the accolade in 2005, though Esther Gorinth and Ira Shipova were given honorable mention for their roles in Lungin’s *Roots* (*Bednye rodstvenniki*,

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<sup>10</sup> “Нет сильных молодых актрис. [...] Актеры есть, сколько угодно, с актрисами хуже.”; “Ведь режиссеры по преимуществу—мужчины. И для них мир женщины во многом закрыт, они его не чувствуют.”

<sup>11</sup> “Что ж, поговорим о женщинах. Очень показательно, что на последнем кинофестивале в Сочи вообще не дали приз за главную женскую роль. Кстати, насилия и безвкусного секса, как в прошлые годы, в этом сезоне на экране не было, напротив, появился романтический тренд. Но вообще, женщина мало что говорит на экране, а когда говорит, то по преимуществу очень глупо.”

2005) and Larisa Sadilov's *Babysitter Required* (*Trebuetsia niania*, 2005), respectively. The sexist practices of the contemporary Russian film industry—an industry that has created few roles for women and which, therefore, excludes Russian actresses—without question is complicit in the extreme gender imbalance within the buddy film genre. In addition to the disproportionately few female actresses working in contemporary Russia's film industry is the tendency to employ male characters to represent the hegemonic social agent, a practice that dates back to the immediate post-revolutionary period.

This bias against representations of women in Russian cultural production has a long history traceable back to formations of the Soviet subject in literature and film. In *Men Without Women* Eliot Borenstein explores the myth of a masculinized society and its interrogation in the literature of Iuri Olesha, Isaak Babel, and Andrei Platonov. Borenstein does not argue that there is an absence of women in Soviet literature of the 1920s. Rather, he convincingly demonstrates early Soviet culture's fixation on masculine characters, masculine values, and male affiliations as resulting in a "topos of masculinity" (38) that pervades early Soviet history.

Katerina Clark's landmark text on socialist realist literature, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, presents the Stalinist myth of the "great family" as key to the rhetoric of the 1930s. "The Soviets focused on the primordial attachments of kinship and projected them as the dominant symbol for social allegiance" (114). Significantly, the symbolic roles are limited to "Soviet society's leaders," who assume the title of "'fathers' (with Stalin as the patriarch)" and "'the national heroes, [the] model 'sons'" (114). With Stalin as the great paternal figure, Soviet heroes, the male protagonists of Stalinist socialist realist literature, enter into a familial structure equivalent to the state, thus providing them the opportunity to ascend higher and higher in the eyes of the Party. These mythical lines of patrilineal descent allow Soviet men to transform

themselves into politically conscious Soviet subjects. In “Forging Soviet Masculinity in *The Road to Life*,” Lilya Kaganovsky provides an illustration of this myth and proceeds one step further when she explicitly cites gender as the dominant attribute to ensure membership in Soviet society. Kaganovsky notes that although *The Road to Life* (*Putevka v zhizn'*; dir. Nikolai Ekk, 1931) “initially seems to privilege women by foregrounding their presence on the screen and introducing Lel'ka Mazikha (Mariia Gonta) as Zhigan’s main operative, it also underscores the impossibility of their conversion [into Soviet society] by (silently) excluding them from the commune” (98). To extend Kaganovsky’s argument further: not only does Ekk’s film preclude women from entering the commune, but its traditional representation of *besprizorniki* as exclusively male reinforces the cinematic imaging and general cultural imagining of early Soviet society as resolutely male.<sup>12</sup>

#### 6.4 GENDERING GENRE: PUTTING WOMEN INTO A MAN’S WORLD

In those rare instances when men do not occupy lead roles in buddy films, their governing presence on both sides of the camera is neither diminished nor challenged. Men remain at the center of the production process as studio heads, directors, and cameramen. Sergei Livnev of Gor'kii Film Studios produced *Land of the Deaf*; Sergei Sel'ianov runs STW, the studio that produced *Sisters*; and Karen Shakhnazarov of Mosfil'm, Feodor Popov of Stella Film, and Sergei Solov'ev of Krug collaborated on *Caucasian Roulette*. Iurii Shaigardanov, Valerii Martynov, Lomer Akhvlediani were the cameramen, respectively, for *Land of the Deaf*, *Sisters*, and *Caucasian Roulette*. Moreover, although women participated as screenwriters for each film, in no instance were the screenwriters solely women. Gul'shat Omarova assisted Sergei Bodrov

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<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth examination of *besprizornikizi*, see Ball.

and Sergei Bodrov Jr. in writing *Sisters*; Iruii Korotkov basis his screenplay for *Land of the Deaf* on the main motifs of Renata Litvinova's story, *To Possess and To Belong (Obladat' i prinadlezhat')*; and Alla Krinitsyna worked with Viktor Merezhko on *Caucasian Roulette*.

Male dominance similarly pervades the diegesis of these female buddy films—obviously not in terms of lead character, but in the construction of narrative conflict and setting. The opening scenes of *Land of the Deaf*, *Sisters*, and *Caucasian Roulette* all situate the female protagonists in spaces that tend, stereotypically, to be the domain of men: the milieu of urban gangsters or the war-torn Chechen landscape. For example, following a short anxiety-ridden introductory scene in the couple's bedroom, Alesha (Nikita Tiunin) and Rita (Chulpan Khamatova) of *Land of the Deaf* go to a casino housed in a ship docked on the Moscow River. In the foreground of the shot Alesha attempts to explain his inability to pay back his gambling loans to the club's owner. In the background a tall, lanky woman performs a striptease for the casino's patrons. In this pernicious space of criminal activity exemplified by exploitative monetary exchanges, gangsters, and the objectification of women, Rita is separated from Alesha, who is sent to find the money he owes, a timely and time-consuming task that keeps him almost entirely off-screen for the remainder of the film. His absence does not, however, rid the film of its masculine milieu; quite the opposite.

Left alone, Rita descends into the bowels of the docked ship and meets Iaia (Dina Korzun), the leggy woman who moments earlier had danced seductively. Having just been fired for slapping a male customer—a former romantic interest who lecherously watched her dance while making out with another woman—Iaia furiously finishes applying her makeup and gathering her belongings when she notices Rita outside her dressing room. Iaia, who is deaf, but able to read lips and speak, intuitively comes to understand that Rita is in “danger from men”

(“*opasnost’ ot muzhchin*”), which is enough to endear Rita to Iaia, who quickly transitions from unknown woman into new friend and even roommate. Rita and Iaia sneak out of the casino undetected, hide in the shadows of Moscow’s streets, and take cover in an artist’s studio, to which Iaia fortuitously has the key. Out of the clutches of one nefarious man—the casino owner who fired Iaia and attempted to hold Rita as collateral for Alesha’s gambling debts—the new friends reenter the tumultuous world of gangsters and pimps. In the spirit of a naive caretaker, Rita, now with sidekick Iaia, hopes to find a way to earn enough money to save her ne’er-do-well beloved, Alesha.

Initially, the film offers prostitution as the women’s only employment opportunity: their bodies, not their brains, are marketable. However, the girls are unable to negotiate acceptable financial terms with the first set of prospective pimps they meet and are psychologically incapable of sexually submitting themselves to the second set. Caught in the bind of being unwilling to exploit their most lucrative asset—as defined by this misogynist, criminal society—Rita must be content to offer a different part of her body: her ears. Agreeing to work for a deaf gangster (Maksim Sukhanov), who goes by the nickname Pig—*Svin’ia*—Rita feigns deafness, eavesdrops on rival gangsters during a drug deal, and saves her boss from an attempted murder.

*Sisters* similarly transitions from scenes of uneasy domestic activity to the dangerous world of gangsters. Bodrov Jr.’s debut film opens with a homecoming: Alik (Roman Ageev)—Sveta’s stepfather and Dina’s father—has just been released from jail. This celebratory occasion suffers from a palpable sense of trepidation. The long awaited reunion between husband and wife, and between father and daughter is interrupted when a rival of Alik’s approaches. The gangster alerts Alik to an outstanding two million dollar debt and hints that his daughter Dina (Katia Gorina) may become collateral. Back at home the festivities are tempered by Sveta’s

refusal to participate in the party honoring her stepfather's return home and by inter-cut shots of Dina sitting in her room working on a crayon drawing of a prison. The domestic space does not fulfill expectations of familial bliss or even feminized domesticity (food burns, gangsters loiter, the children perceive their father as a criminal—Dina sympathetically, Sveta reproachfully). Furthermore, the domestic space provides insufficient safety and, therefore, their mother and Alik deposit the girls in an empty apartment, where they are instructed to hide, but to no avail. The enemy gangsters remain hot on the girls' trail, and a game of cat and mouse ensues as the girls narrowly escape their clutches repeatedly. Alone and on the run, Sveta and Dina have no choice but to take care of each other.

In *Caucasian Roulette* we see a similar reliance on the male domain. The film's opening credits are accompanied by panorama shots of Chechnya's mountainous landscape. The camera eventually focuses on Anna, a beautiful, blond-haired woman, dressed in army fatigues, who sits under a tree nursing her baby. Here, maternal love stands in for the domestic setting, and just as quickly as in the other two films, this ostensible tranquility quickly gives way to peril. A male soldier sits on a cliff above and peers at the mother's serene face through his rifle's viewfinder. Her acute senses alert her to his presence and while masterfully supporting her newborn's head with one hand, she manages to grab her pistol and with one pull of the trigger shoots the soldier dead. In order to get out of the line of fire and keep her son safe, Anna passes the child off to unidentified men in a minivan, changes into civilian clothes, and boards a train, hoping to travel incognito alone in a train compartment that she has bribed the conductor to get.

The other character introduced in the film's opening scene—Maria (Nina Usatova)—is a nervous elderly woman. The camera follows her from behind as she sneaks onto the train without a ticket and tentatively enters the compartment where Anna sleeps, thus disrupting her solitary

trip. The strong, bold, seemingly fearless, young sniper violently reacts to Maria's intrusion, empties the woman's bag on the floor, and insists that she leave. Worse than a meddling older woman, however, is a lecherous train conductor, whose insistent advances lead Anna to invite the older woman back: safety in numbers. Anna and Maria, who often simply goes by "mother"—*mat'*—make an odd pair, on whom the remainder of the film focuses.

Their seemingly serendipitous meeting proves to be quite purposeful. Maria endeavors to find Anna's baby and return the infant to his father, a Chechen warlord, who has taken her own son, a Russian soldier, prisoner. This male-centered premise, which is represented entirely in dialogue and not in the film's visual structure, provides the tenuous narrative logic to pair the film's two female protagonists. Moreover, the train in which these two mothers spend the vast majority of the remainder of the film is presented—like the casino where Rita and Iaia meet and the provincial setting through which Sveta and Dina dodge enemy gangsters—as a space of criminal activity: the train conductor sells passports to local criminal groups at provincial stations and pads his pockets with bribes acquired by transporting illegal cargo.

Within these harsh social environments, exemplified by male criminal activity, the female characters of the buddy film genre become differentiated and juxtaposed based on their respective willingness to submit themselves to such a culture's sexist demands. For example, in *Sisters*, Sveta's and Dina's conflicting personalities are constructed specifically in relation to the extent to which they converge or diverge from stereotypical notions of femininity. Sveta sports a short plain haircut, never applies make-up, and wears a ragged hooded sweatshirt under a dark coat, while Dina dresses like a little Russian Madeline in cutesy dresses with matching hats and colorful scarves. In each of the houses that the girls hide in she finds make-up and applies it liberally. Her long brown hair and bright red lips lend her a womanly look far beyond her years.

In addition to these visual markers, the girls also adopt stereotypically gendered roles. Sveta assumes the paternal role: she is the brains and brawn of the pair, holds and doles out the little money they have, and makes the majority of decisions. Dina takes on the maternal role of caretaker: when Sveta gets sick, Dina buys medicine and brings soup to her.

Popov relies on the highly charged image of the mother—signaled, in part, by his use of the quintessential mother’s name, Maria—to differentiate the two female leads in *Caucasian Roulette*. In a review of the film, Daniel Wild accurately characterizes the protagonists; he writes:

The film’s theatrical limitations of a single location rely on the intensity of the protagonists’ performances to alleviate any monotony. Nina Usatova, nominated for a Nika Award for her role here, plays the old stoic mother, whose grief and hardship are visible in each of her glances. Anna, by contrast, offers a one-dimensional expression of sulky petulance.

Again, the protagonists’ femininity, considered here primarily in terms of their relative maternal natures, has a symbolic function. As Wild correctly notes, “the war in Chechnya easily extends itself to representations within such a gendered maternal framework [...], namely the terror of ‘black widows,’ the ‘Soldiers’ Mothers’ movement, or, more recently, the atrocities of Beslan.” Maria represents the contemporary image of a soldier’s mother, whose role it is both to sacrifice her son begrudgingly to the state and to protect him when the state fails to do so. This image of the Russian mother has a cinematic precedent in Sergei Bodrov’s 1996 classic *Prisoner of the Caucuses* (*Kavkazskii plennik*): Valentina Fedotova plays the mother of the young Russian soldier, Vania (Sergei Bodrov Jr.’s first major role), who has been captured and, like Maria’s son in *Caucasian Roulette*, is held hostage, functioning as collateral for the capturer’s own son.

However, whereas the maternal figure in Bodrov's film attempts futilely to negotiate with warring armies—Russia and Chechnya—Popov pits mother against mother.

If the elderly Maria, with her buxom figure and kerchief-covered head, stands for the quintessential Russian peasant mother, Anna's character derives more from earlier depictions of female soldiers. Like Mariutka, the Red Army female sniper of Grigorii Chukhrai's *Forty-First* (*Sorok pervyi*, 1956), Anna sheds her restrictive military uniform early in the film, transforming her appearance into a more traditional feminine image. But, of course, clothes don't make the woman. Alongside this visual transfiguration eventually comes a breakdown of her hardened—masculine—attitude. Popov "humanizes" Anna, whose character initially emanates a cold, calculating cruel temperament by feminizing her, by ridding her of her callousness. With this shift comes psychological torment: Anna's emotional awakening, drawn out by Maria's critical assessment of Anna's poor maternal nature, is expressed as a hysterical disintegration of the self. Descending into a crazed fit, Anna ventriloquizes Lady MacBeth, proclaiming her guilt and expressing her profound psychological suffering by declaring her inability to wash clean her bloodstained hands.

Unlike her Soviet-era predecessor, Mariutka, who ultimately shoots her forty-first White Army soldier, despite her personal attraction to him, thus fulfilling ideological demands, Anna fails to act in accordance with various instantiations of patriarchal rule—a transgression, the film makes clear, that warrants a death sentence. From a Russian point of view, Anna is a traitor—having rejected her Russian heritage, she joins the enemy army and fights for the Chechens. Within the Chechen social structure, Anna also betrays patriarchal rule. Not only does she leave the Chechen warlord who was both her lover and boss, but worse yet, she takes their son away from him, thus interrupting the possibility for the rightful heir to ascend into a position of power

according to the rules of primogeniture. Moreover, Anna's murderous past marks her as an unsuitable mother: she cries that she cannot hold her baby son in her bloodstained hands. The combination of Anna's disregard for patriarchal rule—both Chechen and Russian—in addition to her lack of proper maternal instincts, as defined by a misogynist culture, forces her into a state of hysteria. In the film's final scene, Anna and Maria flee from the train, where Anna has just murdered the conductor. Running frantically through a train yard, Anna fails to notice a slow-moving engine and collides with it. The blow proves fatal: Anna falls under the train car and soon after dies in Mother Maria's arms while asking for forgiveness.

This crude restaging of the finale to Leo Tolstoi's *Anna Karenina* functions to underscore that this Anna is similarly condemned to death for her moral sins. Like her namesake, Anna of *Caucasian Roulette* is incriminated for abandoning her husband and son, though these are not her only transgressions. Gender chauvinism mingles with national chauvinism in this film: Anna's past relationship with a Chechen warlord signals her impropriety vis-à-vis Russia: not only is Anna a traitor from a militaristic point of view, but because she has literally slept with enemy, she is also guilty of cheating on patriarchal Russia.

Although Bodrov Jr. is less cruel to his young, female protagonists, he too underscores their diminished position within the dominant patriarchal structure. Caught in the world of macho gangsters, Sveta and Dina are denied agency. Forced to become pawns in somebody else's game, they can never act, but only react. In a sense, *Sisters* reverses Aleksei Balabanov's buddy film, *War*. In Balabanov's film three characters—a British actor named John (Ian Kelly), John's fiancée, Margaret (Ingeborga Dapkunaite), and Ivan (Aleksei Chadov), a Russian soldier—end up together in an underground pit of a prison cell; they have been taken hostage by a Chechen warlord. The warlord releases John, sending him to find two million pounds, but

keeps Margaret captive: she is human collateral. Interestingly, here as well as in *Caucasian Roulette*, *Sisters*, and *Land of the Deaf* women and children figure as human collateral. In this male-focused buddy film, though, the emphasis is on the male action hero, whereas in the female-focused counterparts, the emphasis is on captivity.

Despite their national and ideological differences, John and Ivan join together, depend on and protect each other, battle their way out of paying the ransom, and save Margaret. The relationship of the two sets of protagonists (John and Ivan of *War* and Sveta and Dina of *Sisters*) varies, and this difference reveals the discriminatory representation of female characters on the contemporary Russian screen.

Whereas the male buddies of *War* begin as victims—they are prisoners of war—they ultimately transform into active aggressors and heroically triumph over their enemies. John's development into a masculine character is particularly notable and is revealed by his progression from a wimpy and incompetent soldier to grenade-throwing warrior. Dina and Sveta, conversely, begin as victims and remain victims. Although Sveta proves herself to be not only an admirable sharpshooter but also a commendable strategist—her pluck and quick thinking save the girls from numerous close calls with the group of gangsters that want to kidnap Dina—it is Dina's father, Alik, who appears as a *deus ex machina* in the final moments and saves the girls. For this reason, they never acquire the same exalted status of “hero” that their male counterparts do. As Ekaterina Sal'nikova, a journalist at *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, puts it: “They are not avengers, but rather potential victims.”<sup>13</sup> Unlike their male counterparts in *War*, the girl protagonists of *Sisters* are denied the opportunity to become full-fledged heroes. Instead, Bodrov Jr.'s film

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<sup>13</sup> “Они не мстители, а потенциальные жертвы.”

ultimately recycles the girls back into the typical role of the damsel in distress, although admittedly, without the tears and hysterics.

The film's resistance to promote the girls into avengers, heroes, and self-sufficient protectresses may be accounted for by their gender and young age: Sveta is thirteen, Dina only eight. Natal'ia Sirivlia takes issues with, in her opinion, the inappropriate inclusion of young female protagonists in the criminal variety of buddy film genre. In a dialogue with Elena Stishova, Sirivlia states:

A child is a different matter. The child character actualizes a different set of audience expectations. [...] The creators of this film did not think about this when they placed their heroines into the conventional world of generic gang feuds—into the world of *Brother* and *Brother 2*. This space, to put it sternly, is not intended for young girls. (106)<sup>14</sup>

Were Sirivlia speaking about the real world, her maternal-toned condemnation of the film's integration of girls into such a world might carry more weight. Within the sphere of genre cinema, however, Bodrov's choice is both humorous and, at least theoretically, an appealing innovation. Bodrov's repetition of the gangster environment functions as an inside joke: he places the sisters in a world familiar to fans of Aleksei Balabanov's sequential hits *Brother* and *Brother 2* (*Brat*, 1997; *Brat 2*, 2000), in which he starred and on which he obviously riffs, as the title makes clear. At the same time, this setting works as a red herring: the typical character of gangster movies—the shaved-headed thug dressed in a leather coat and seated in a Jeep

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<sup>14</sup> “Ребенок—иное дело. Персонаж-ребенок актуализирует другую систему зрительских ожиданий. [...] Создатели фильма не задумывались об этом, помещая своих героинь в условный мир жанровых бандитских разборок—в мир *Брата* и *Брата-2*. А это пространство, строго говоря, не предназначено для маленьких девочек.”

Cherokee—though included in *Sisters*, is thankfully pushed into the background. This character type has been so thoroughly codified in other films that here his image alone sufficiently signifies an association with a world of corruption, crime, and mafia loyalties.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, Bodrov Jr.’s dependency on the gangster image as a visual signifier suffices to remind the viewer constantly that the girls are fighting against a world of mafia corruption. This aspect of the plot, however, does not dominate as it does in Balabanov’s *Brother* movies. In fact, the film only barely fills in the details of Alik’s debt to a mafia leader. Igor’ Mantsov correctly points out that “The short film ignores the meaningless parts that construct the criminal story. The authors are totally uninterested in the meaning of the gangsters’ problems” (29).<sup>16</sup> Rather than mar the film with details of a gangster movie plot, Bodrov Jr., following the tradition of the buddy film, focuses on the protagonists, their relationship to each other, and their relationships to their family.

The characters’ young age and female gender place them within an Oedipal family structure; their respective relationships to the family, and specifically to Alik, the family patriarch, initiate the film’s differentiation of the girls. The younger Dina is happiest with her parents, and especially with her father. Her love for him never falters: she jumps into his arms the moment he is released from prison, and continuously defends and goes into raptures over him. Even after Dina comes to understand fully her father’s association with the criminal world, she taunts Sveta with the following words: “My father, even though he is a thief, loves me. But

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<sup>15</sup> The thuggish gangster makes stock appearances in *Brother*, *Brother 2*, *Antikiller* (*Antikiller*; dir. Egor Konchalovskii, 2002), *Land of the Deaf*, *Moscow* (*Moskva*; dir. Aleksandr Zel'dovich 1999), *The Tycoon* (*Oligarkh*; dir. Pavel Lungin, 2002), and in the television mini-series *The Brigade* (*Brigada*; dir. Aleksei Sidorov 2002).

<sup>16</sup> “Непродолжительная лента игнорирует бессмысленные частности, из которых строится криминальное произведение. Авторов совершенно не интересует смысл бандитских разборок.”

your father dropped you and your mom.”<sup>17</sup> In a second instance she even uses her newfound knowledge of her father’s affiliation with the criminal world to ward off a possibly inappropriate advance by a Gypsy. Sveta, by contrast, abhors her stepfather to such a degree that she rejects her mother’s new family and chooses, instead, to live with her maternal grandmother. Alik, Sveta’s stepfather, functions as a kind of synecdochic metaphor for an entire world of crime, corruption, and material wealth that Sveta rejects. Moreover, although *Sisters* does not engage in the same racist portrayal of Caucasians that Balabanov’s films (specifically the *Brother* movies and *War*) are accused of, Alik’s Dzhigit identity condemns him in Sveta’s nationalistic eyes.<sup>18</sup>

The girls’ opposing feelings toward the family patriarch translates into the girls’ opposite positions within patriarchal culture. It should come as no surprise that the film’s protagonists are at odds with each other—the buddy film genre demands this. However, the way the girls are differentiated signals a distinct change from male-gendered examples of the genre. Buddy films present competing notions of masculinity in relation to social categories linked, but not reducible, to gender. For example, Shlykov and Lesha, the protagonists of Lungin’s *Taxi Blues*, are distinguished by class, religious, and ethnic affiliations. In *Belorussian Station* military rank and class affiliation impinge on notions of masculinity. And in Balabanov’s *War*, national identity and experience in battle bespeak the characters’ degrees of manliness. Unlike these examples, *Caucasian Roulette* and *Sisters* judge their characters based on the commitment they pledge to various representative patriarchs.

In *Land of the Deaf*, Todorovskii—the most accomplished of the three directors considered here—also constructs the two lead characters’ conflict around the question of faithfulness to men. From the film’s opening scene, Rita displays her unfaltering dedication to

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<sup>17</sup> “Мой отец, хотя и бандит, меня любит, а твой вас с матерью бросил.”

<sup>18</sup> For critiques of the Balabanov’s racist politics see Lipovetskii and Dondurei.

her boyfriend, Alesha, despite his gambling debts that have put both Rita's and his own well-being at risk. Rita supports Alesha, reassures him that everything will work out, and innocently sits by his side as he attempts to find an excuse that will appease the casino owner. After Alesha leaves Rita at the club—ostensibly to gather money, which she knows he does not have—she assumes the burden of Alesha's debt and the film's plot revolves around her attempt to acquire money for him. Rita's steadfast devotion and loyalty to Alesha contrasts with Iaia's insistence that a woman should assert an air of independence with men. Iaia, whose self-given name is the repetition of the Russian first-person singular pronoun—I—a symbolic title that draws attention to her autonomy, boasts that in response to a romantic proposal she was distant and proud (“*ia byyla nedostupnaia i gordaiia*”). Although Iaia agrees to help Rita acquire money, she disapproves of Rita's intention to give the money to Alesha, insisting that all men are scoundrels and that Rita should think of herself.

In opposition to *Caucasian Roulette* and *Sisters*, which favor loyalty to men, *Land of the Deaf* champions the female characters' loyalty to one another and portrays Rita's dedication to Alesha as woefully naïve. Rita sympathizes with Alesha even after he abandons her to the casino owner, has sex with Iaia, and wastes the money—the money that she has gone to extreme measures to acquire in order to rescue him—in the course of several minutes at a roulette table. It is only once Rita turns her attention to saving Iaia, whose ears the casino owner threatens to cut off if he does not receive his money, that the characters extricate themselves fully from the world of men, depicted in the film invariably as criminals, gangsters, and delinquents. When Rita approaches The Pig with a final request for money, the significance of the money has already changed: no longer is she trying to rescue Alesha, now her focus is Iaia.

This shift in loyalty results in a finale shoot-out, during which Rita loses her hearing. At sunrise, Iaia and Rita, who have been hiding behind a small wall, emerge to find chalk outlines of the murdered men. In their absence, the two girls join hands and run off into the Moscow morning, and presumably to the utopian world—the land of the deaf—an island, according to Iaia’s fantasy, with beautiful beaches and palm trees where money is in abundant supply.

Mikhail Brashinskii misinterprets this final scene when he reads it as a playful reflection on an American genre, which he is unable to name but describes as consisting of “Mafiosi, dressed in Armani, with a ‘Mexican duel,’ during which each man aims at the man nearest to him in the closed circle, with casinos and drugs, with shoot-outs and corpses” (18).<sup>19</sup> Brashinskii argues that Todorovskii adopts this genre *as if* to use it, but masterfully disrupts expectations by only providing an outline of the genre, while avoiding the actual sound of gunfire and refusing to show murdered bodies.<sup>20</sup> However, Brashinskii’s use only this final scene in his interpretation of the film’s genre tendencies places too much importance on one moment without consideration of the film as a whole. Like Bodrov, who pushed the gangster element into the background in *Sisters*, Todorovskii places his heroines in the criminal environment, but the criminal world is not the primary focus. The ‘Mexican duel’, as Brashinskii calls it, needs neither gun shots nor corpses, because this finale does not decide who among the gangsters is the fastest draw or the victor. The focus, as is appropriate for the genre, remains on Rita and Iaia.

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<sup>19</sup> “[Это] рефлексия на американский жанр. Как не называй его, а он явно есть—с мафиози, одетыми от Армани, с ‘мексиканской дуэлью’, где каждый целит в ближнего по замкнутому дулами кругу, с казино и наркотиками, с выстрелами и трупами.”

<sup>20</sup> Brashinskii writes: “Обещает событие, а дает только контур. Выстрелы не слышны, трупы не показаны.”

## 6.5 CONCLUSION

Analysis of the specificities of *Sisters*, *Caucasian Roulette*, and *Land of the Deaf* exposes differences between them and more typical male-dominant texts. Whereas in Soviet and Russian male buddy films characters share the experience of childhood (*Goodbye, Boys!* [*Do svidaniia, mal'chiki* Mikhail Kalik, 1964], *Colleagues* [Kollegi Aleksei Sakharov, 1962], *The Suit* [*Shik* Bakhtier Khudoinazarov, 2002]), of war (*Two Soldiers* [*Dva boitsa* Leonid Lukov, 1943], *Belorussian Station*, *Time of the Dancer* [*Vremia tantsora* Vadim Abdrashitov, 1997], *War*), or of personal tragedy (*Taxi Blues*, *Lover*, *Truth of the Shchelbs*), female buddies' have no common ground other than men. Significantly, not even *Sisters*, which would seem to suggest two girls' shared childhood gives the two protagonists any space outside of the criminal world: before they go into hiding, they despise each other and live in separate homes; after they are saved, the Dina moves abroad with her parents, while Sveta stays in Russia with her grandmother. The female buddies' encounters occur without exception due to men and, more specifically, result from female victimization within patriarchal and sexist social structures: the female buddies are forced into a criminal economy where they and their kin are held captive, thus becoming collateral and objects of exchange.

Pat O'Conner, writing on female friendships, suggests the potential subversive effect of women grouping together in social spaces. She claims that public displays of female friendship destabilize the ideology of heterosexual, romantic love by celebrating the fun women have without men. Moreover, they provide women the opportunity to usurp male control over the public (as opposed to domestic) domain (12). Unfortunately, the female protagonists of contemporary Russian buddy films are not given such power. Rather, they circulate within a

social structure reminiscent of the “hom(m)o-sexual patriarchy” described by Luce Irigaray, in which “wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men” (172). Irigaray engages in orthographic and homophonic play here. The parenthetical “m” orthographically recalls the French for man, *homme*. The patriarchal society she describes is one that is homogenously male.<sup>21</sup>

In “Restoring the Black Man’s Lethal Weapon,” Christopher Ames notes that American interracial buddy films of the 1980s “go to some pains to introduce significant female characters and then shuffle them off-screen”; “female characters exist as ciphers in these films in which the central emotional bonds are between men” (55). The obverse, however, is not true when our attention shifts to female buddy films. On the one hand, male characters have less screen time than the female protagonists. On the other, the presence of men—the threat of men—remains omnipresent even in their absence. The female buddies’ retreat into hiding, to sequester themselves away from the rest of world—defined in each instance as dangerous, criminal, and male—underscores the current refusal to represent a sexually-integrated society. Even when female characters are willing to join male society and play by its violent rules—as do Anna in *Caucasian Roulette* and Sveta in *Sisters*—the films ultimately revoke their ability to participate in it. The exiled existence of the female buddies of these films is visually represented by the cramped settings of train cars, closets, and the apartments where the protagonists take temporary shelter. In *Land of the Deaf* a world where women can live happily, safely, and as friends exists as a utopian fantasy. Both renderings suggest the expulsion of these female buddies from

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<sup>21</sup> It is also worth remembering that Irigaray’s critique of society’s exchange of women is a feminist revision of Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*.

general society and, furthermore, can function as a metaphor for the near expulsion of women from lead roles in contemporary Russian cinema. In these films, to be female, is to be cast out.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION: HOW TO TALK ABOUT WHAT'S NOT THERE or IS THIS A GENRE?

In his article on Valerii Todorovskii's 1998 film *Land of the Deaf* (*Strana glukhikh*), Mikhail Brashinskii attempts to construct an argument that distances the director from genre cinema. He writes: "Todorovskii is almost uninterested in genre [...]. He needs genre only to advance the story, as a framework, but genre in and of itself is not important" (18).<sup>22</sup> Brashinskii's argument depends on two main points. First, he argues that although the film consciously borrows from the American gangster genre, it does not contain the necessary attributes of the genre (e.g., gun shots and murdered corpses), and, therefore, cannot be considered a proper gangster flick. Second, he identifies "a vacuum," by which he means the film foregrounds the absence of guiding myths in the post-Soviet buddy society (22).<sup>23</sup> However, so uncomfortable with the possible absence of myths, Brashinskii locates this absence as the myth itself: "There is not a myth, truly there isn't, but this [absence] includes a new myth: the mythology of no-myths" (22).<sup>24</sup>

A similar line of reasoning can be teased out of Tat'iana Sekridova's article on Todorovskii's 2002 film *Lover* (*Liubovnik*). She quotes the director as saying that the plot of the film is not genre-driven—"The story is not generic (*zhanrovaia*)."<sup>25</sup> In Russian, the noun and adjectival forms of genre—*zhanr* and *zhanrovoi*—do not differ in meaning the way the English words genre and generic do. Therefore it might be more accurate to translate this phrase as, "It is

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<sup>22</sup> "Жанр почти совсем не интересует Тодоровского [...]. Жанр нужен ему только как задаток истории, как каркас, сам по себе не важный."

<sup>23</sup> "[В] фильм В. Тодоровского вакуум, похоже, начинает рассасываться."

<sup>24</sup> "Никакого мифа и вправду нет, но в этом-то и заключена новая мифология—мифология безмифия."

<sup>25</sup> "Сама история...[н]е жанровая."

not a genre story,” but in doing so the fortuitous double entendre, which allows the comment to mean both that the story is not genre-driven and it is not unoriginal, is lost. Moreover, the ambiguity is also in the Russian; the comment is meant not to discredit the film as an unoriginal genre. Remarkably similar to Brashinskii’s review of *Land of the Deaf*, Sekridova demonstrates the validity of distinguishing *Lover* from genre cinema by quoting the actor Oleg Iankovskii, who plays Dmitrii in the film, and who states that his character winds up in a difficult situation that generates “many questions that nobody can answer” (14).<sup>26</sup> For Brashinksii the absence of a guiding myth equals the absence of genre, in Serkridova’s article the series of quotations offers a similar syllogism—a narrative structure that does not provide ready-made answers necessarily does not qualify as genre.

Brashinskii and Sekridova correctly note that in the respective films that their articles review the characters are left to charter a world that does not offer any easy solutions, answers, or helpers. The two pairs of characters (Rita and Iaia in *Land of the Deaf* and Dmitrii and Ivan in *Lover*) are at sea in emptied-out urban spaces, in which they wander alone, find only each other, and suffer the same fears of loneliness, solitude, and jealousy. In both films, Todorovskii posits a kind of false love triangle: the duos or buddies of the films come together as a result of a spectral third party. Lena’s death, not Lena herself, brings Dmitrii and Ivan together in *Lover*. After Alesha, Rita’s gambling-addicted boyfriend in *Land of the Deaf*, abandons Rita at a nightclub, he remains off-screen for the vast remainder of the film; Rita and Iaia, however, dominant the film’s visual and narrative focus. Todorovskii, if not erases, then obscures the third-party presence to such a degree that it becomes only a device necessary to link the dominant character pair. The lack of the stabilizing device facilitates the films’ fruitless searches

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<sup>26</sup> “[М]ного вопросов, на которые никто не может ответить”

for nonexistent answers. Furthermore, both films end when the character pairs either literally or figuratively leave the worlds that offer them no solutions—Dmitrii disappears, Ivan dies, and Rita and Iaia grasp hands and run off screen toward their fantasy island, the Land of the Deaf.

Two ironies result from these attempts to define Todorovskii's films as distinct from genre cinema. First, these critics raise the issue of genre only to refute it. Significantly, they are not entering into an ongoing debate; they are not responding to other critics who have attempted to define the films according to genre. Rather as they search for the right way to describe these films, they do not simply deny genre as a possibility (i.e., "The story is not generic," "Todorovskii is almost uninterested in genre"), but are themselves in denial with regards to genre. By raising the issue, they reveal the necessity to contend with genre. If genre absolutely did not matter to the discussion of *Lover* or *Land of the Deaf*, Brashinskii and Serkidova would not have felt the need to polemicize with the concept of it.

Second, the feature identified by both Brashinskii and Sekridova as evidence that these two Todorovskii films sidestep generic models—the lack of an answer, the lack of a guiding myth—in fact is, in part, the definition of the contemporary Russian buddy film. Were it not for Pavel Lungin's *Taxi Blues* (*Taksi-bliuz* 1990) that also concludes with a sense of palpable despair after Shlykov seeks, but does not find, Lesha in a high-speed chase that results in an fiery accident; or Aleksei Muradova's *Truth of the Shchelps* (*Pravda o shchelpakh* 2002) that sends its characters on a wild goose chase for explanations that simply do not exist; or for Sasha's asking "for whom is war?" in Leonid Lukov's *Two Warriors* (*Dva boitsa* 1943), a question that is never answered, it might be possible to read Brashinskii's and Serdikova's articles as evidence of Todorovskii's unique directorial stamp. However, neither the lack of guiding myths nor the

use of characterological dyads and triads to raise this issue is unique to Todorovskii, or to Lungin, or Muradov.

Even with a list of films to point to, it seems that the question, “is this, in fact, a film genre” remains. If I notice a connection among these films, but the directors remain by and large unconscious of the narrative and visual model that I claim them to be following, does the Russian buddy film exist as a discrete category? Maria Liubakova’s first feature film, *Cruelty* (*Zhestokost’*), which debuted at the 2007 Kinotavr Film Festival in Sochi, Russia, helps to answer this question. The film charts an improbable friendship formed between Zoia (Renata Litvinova) and Vika (Anna Begunova) that begins with Vika’s attempt to blackmail Zoia: Vika has photographs of Zoia with her married lover that Zoia would prefer Vika did not expose. The two actresses differ from one another precisely as one would expect of a female buddy film. As in Sergei Bodrov Jr.’s *Sisters* (*Sestry* 2001) and Fedor Popov’s *Caucasian Roulette* (2002), the characters of Liubakova’s film are contrasted by their relative levels of femininity. Zoia, a professional woman in her thirties, is beautiful, and highly feminine, which the film constructs to mean naïve, meek, lacking in confidence, and generally incapable (i.e., she still confuses the gas and brake pedals). Vika, a young adult in her late teens, has an androgynous tomboy look and a brash attitude. Within critical responses to the film in both Russian film journals as well as reviews in the popular press three points, in particular, repeatedly circulate. First, the film’s resemblance to Ridley Scott’s *Thelma and Louise* (1991) owing to Liubakova’s use of two incompatible female characters, who are on the lam after retaliating against Zoia’s former lover.<sup>27</sup> Second, they point out that Pavel Lungin, whose first film *Taxi Blues* I and others (e.g., Mikhail Brashinskii, Andrew Horton, and Laura Olson) write about as a buddy film, produced

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<sup>27</sup> See I. Kulikov, L. Kuz'mina, I. Liubarskaia, and D. Novikov.

Liubakova's film.<sup>28</sup> And third, critics perceive the reason for Vika's insistence on cruelty (directly first toward the philandering male and then toward Zoia) to be the result of everything she lacks, which resonates with the critics cited above who write on Todorovskii's films. Film reviewer Ivan Kulikov defines the lack of a father figure in Vika's life as part of a general society-wide "family crisis"<sup>29</sup> and Lidiia Kuz'mina, writing in *Iskusstvo kino*, describes the teenager's cruelty as acts of "vengeance [taken out] against her fatherlessness, the squalor of existence [...], and against the unequal opportunities provided to her from the start."<sup>30</sup> Another reviewer, Ekaterina Barabash, asserts that film raises the question of whether there is any relationship between genders and morality, suggesting the film problematically avoids constructing any such thing.<sup>31</sup> The director, herself, describes her characters as suffering from profound loneliness, thus, yet again underscoring the lack of meaningful human relationships.

I refer to Liubakov's film and to the reviews of it, not to raise yet one more example of a buddy film, but to demonstrate that there is a veritable consensus with regard to what is important in this film. These three points that I reference, made repeatedly, are all significant to the definition of the film according to genre. Genres appear before directors are conscious of the frameworks which they are repeating, particularly when genres are not mandated from "above," as was the case in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. Even without the label "buddy film," the reviewers shared focus points to precisely those identifiable features that initiate the ability to define genre.

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<sup>28</sup> See E. Barabash, I. Kulikov, L. Kuz'mina, and I. Liubarskaia.

<sup>29</sup> "Кризис семьи."

<sup>30</sup> "Это месть за безотцовщину, за убогость существования, [...] за неравные возможности на старте."

<sup>31</sup> "Имеют ли мораль и нравственность половые признаки."

In 2004 the journal *Seans* polled a variety of personalities from the Russian cinema industry—i.e., film critics and directors—and asked which western genres could organically take root in Russian film. They printed the responses under the heading “Plots and Heroes: Western genres in Russian cinema” (“Siuzhety i geroi: zapadnye zhanry v rossiiskom kino”), which underscores the ongoing Russian perception of genre cinema as something fundamentally Western, or more precisely, American. Film critic Igor' Mantsov replied “No genres have taken root here because our society is uniform and has no genre consciousness.”<sup>32</sup> The strange reply suggests that a diverse selection of genre exists to accommodate a diverse audience. Vadim Abdrashitov takes a different point of view and responds that, “[a]ll genres can develop [here], because globalization transforms the domestic audience into a worldwide audience.”<sup>33</sup> The aging director Aleksandr Mitta (b. 1933) contends that genres are “inherently foreign to the Russian cultural tradition,”<sup>34</sup> whereas the young director Aleksei Sidorov (b. 1968) perceives cinema and genre to be inextricably linked: “Cinema can’t get anywhere without genre [...]. I cannot break from genre; I can try to experiment with it, but I nonetheless work within those parameters.”<sup>35</sup>

These opposite responses are hopeful and suggest, at the very least, that the Russian film industry is beginning to cast genre in a new light. As this dissertation has endeavored to demonstrate, the foregrounding of genre helps to forge a connection between films.

Demonstration of the films considered over the last five chapters relationship to the buddy film

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<sup>32</sup> “Никакие жанры не прижились, ибо общество однородно, и жанрового сознания нет.”

<sup>33</sup> “Все жанры могут развиваться, потому что глобализация превращает отечественного зрителя в зрителя общемирового.”

<sup>34</sup> “[Ж]анры [...] вообще органически чужды русской культурной традиции.”

<sup>35</sup> “Кино никуда не деться без жанра [...]. Я не могу нарушать жанр: я могу пытаться с ним экспериментировать, но я всё равно в этих рамках работаю.”

genre does not restrict or nullify the potential for these same films to be considered in relationship to other genre systems. By drawing out the films' relationship to the buddy film, the goal is not to limit the possibility of their meanings, quite the opposite. Consideration of such disparate films Aleksei Muradov's *Turth of the Shchelps* and Andrei Smirnov's *Belorussian Station*, and engaging in genre criticism, in general, is useful because it promotes new findings.

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